

SOCIETY OF YOUNG NIGERIAN WRITERS

ARTICLES, ESSAYS AND E-BOOKS ON DANIEL OLORUNFEMI FAGUNWA



YORUBA WRITER D.O. FAGUNWA'S GREAT NOVEL "OGBOJU ODE NINU IGBO IRUNMOLE" ON STAGE IN ENGLISH MAKES A COME BACK!-FROM PUNCH NEWSPAPER,NIGERIA SEPT.2008

At the maiden show of *The Adventure in the Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, an adaptation of D.O. Fagunwa's novel, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, the audience have a taste of magical realism.

With the magnificent structures dotting its vast edifying ambience, you can hardly mistake the MUSON Centre, Lagos for any other entertainment arena. So it was for members of the public that trooped into the complex on Saturday to watch *The Adventures of a Thousand Demons*, Femi Osofisan's theatrical adaptation of D. O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*.

But on hitting the entrance of the Shell Hall, which was the venue of the performance, the story changed. A colony of trees on your right, an empire of stones on the left, you were spontaneously transported into a wild forest. It was this forest that ushered you into the expansive hall that also wore the garment of an unfathomable wilderness – dripping with bitter laughter and sweet tears of supernatural spirits.

On the sprawling stage lying ahead of you was a sacred foot path winding meandering through a network of sacred woods. On the roof, and entirely covering the walls of the hall, were ewele mats, which reminded learned members of the audience of the type that Egberé, one of Fagunwa's spirit characters wield in the novel. More important, however, was the fact that the eerie stage would soon become the battle ground for the die-hard principalities and brave men on excursion to Oke Langbodo, the ultimate destination of the Fagunwa's seven hunters in the mother script. As if you were no more at the MUSON, lions roared, elephants boomed just as wild, wild birds shrieked intermittently to warn the uninitiated of the dangers ahead.

But because the transformation was a make-believe, drums also roared. Tongues wagged in penetrating songs just as practised legs rolled in dance, invoking applause from the audience who were once again jolted back into the beauty of stage plays.

Such were the spectacles that the much publicised play invoked. It was the English version of the script commissioned by Chams Plc, which announced its arrival in the world of theatre promotion and development recently. Simultaneously, revered scholar and writer, Professor Akinwumi Ishola, was asked to write a Yoruba adaptation of the novel, with Tunde Awosanmi and Kola Oyewo directing respectively.

Coming in two parts, Osofisan's *Adventures into the Forest of a Thousand Daemons* captures the trials and triumphs of Akaraogun (Toyin Osinaike) and his hunting colleagues who go in search of a metaphoric Langbodo, for the sake of their fatherland for which they are out to attract resources that will invoke progress.

Since no good thing comes easy – and that is one basic lesson that both Fagunwa and Osofisan teach in the work – they encounter stiff adversity on their way. They have to wrestle with many daemons in the forest. But they too are very much prepared. Apart from physical strength, each of the adventurers has a special natural trait that proves very useful each time the chips are down. For instance, while Kako's invincible club can knock even an elephant, Olohun Iyo's sweet-singing voice can lure the most dreadful cobra to sleep. Imodoye, a name derived from knowledge and wisdom, is in the team to think and reason intelligently each time his people are in trouble. Very cleverly, Osofisan not only retains such values that Fagunwa wants the reader to pay attention to in human and societal development, he also develops the character of Akaraogun in such a way that he is a symbol of quality leadership – demonstrating determination, perseverance, and sowing no seed of hatred among the hunters he leads.

Among others, the battle with Agbako is hell hot. But for the helping spirit played by Ify Agwu, none of the adventurers would have survived his punch.

Apart from Osinaike, a thoroughbred actor, in the cast were tested hands such as Gogo Ombo Ombo (Elegbede Ode), Taiwo Ibikunle (Olohun Iyo), Martins Iwuagwu (Kako), Simileoluwa Hassan (Efoye) and Afolabi Dipeolu (Imodoye).

Also in action were Tunde Adeyemo (Oba), and actress and poet, Ify Agwu, (Iranlowo), who inspiringly carried the helper spirit that saw the hunters through the promise land.

Although Osofisan is that loyal to the spirit of the novel, he asserts freedom in certain significant areas. For instance, he introduces a lot of songs and dances. Besides, he brings in folklores that he employs to ventilate the structure of the play, while also using such to teach morality. But where he seems to have been extremely creative – or is it the director that should claim the kudos – is the point he introduces the ritual poetry, Iremoje, which hunters use to celebrate a dead colleague.

As fate would have it, the hunters lost three of their members, among who is Kako, whose hot temper remains his insatiable albatross. Now, on returning to their town after about 20 months of search for Langbodo, the hunters burst into Iremoje, and the attempt is very close to the way Yoruba hunters perform the ritual poetry in real life.

Osofisan's radical approach can also be seen in his interpretation of Oke Langbodo itself. Speaking through Akaraogun and Iranlowo, the playwright's message to the audience is that Langbodo is not a place. It is a moment of revelation, wisdom, knowledge and understanding of what brings peace and progress for the individual and society.

Altogether, *The Adventures in the Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is a successful exercise in attempting to revitalise live theatre in Nigeria.

Perhaps, the play can be tightened a bit, and this can be achieved by reducing the number of dramatised folklores. Besides, a fat person should have been made to play the role of the elephant.

On the part of Chams, theatre lovers can only hope that it will be able to sustain the project.

According to the company's Managing Director, Chief Demola Aladekomo, who led the company's workers dressed in dazzling green uniform traditional dresses to the show, it decided to rally the practitioners to the stage because of the roles that drama plays in the society.