



# **EIGHT OUTSTANDING NIGERIAN DRAMATISTS**

A Publication of the Society of Young Nigerian Writers

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## Wole Soyinka



**Akinwande Oluwole "Wole" Soyinka** (Yoruba: *Oluwoḽé Ṣóyinká*, pronounced "Shoyinka") (born 13 July 1934) is a Nigerian writer, notable especially as a playwright and poet; he was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first person in Africa to be so honoured.

Soyinka was born into a Yoruba family in Abeokuta. After study in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London. He went on to write plays that were produced in both countries, in theatres and on radio. He took an active role in Nigeria's political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. In 1965, he seized the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio and broadcast a demand for the cancellation of the Western Nigeria Regional Elections. In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, he was arrested by the federal government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for two years.<sup>[2]</sup>

Soyinka has strongly criticised many Nigerian military dictators, especially late General Sanni Abacha, as well as other political tyrannies, including the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. Much of his writing has been concerned with "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the colour of the foot that wears it". During the regime of General Sani Abacha (1993–98), Soyinka escaped from Nigeria via the "Nadeco Route" on a motorcycle. Living abroad, mainly in the United States, he was a professor

first at Cornell University and then at Emory University in Atlanta, where in 1996 he was appointed Robert W. Woodruff Professor of the Arts. Abacha proclaimed a death sentence against him "in absentia". With civilian rule restored to Nigeria in 1999, Soyinka returned to his nation. He has also taught at the universities of Oxford, Harvard and Yale.

From 1975 to 1999, he was a Professor of Comparative Literature at the Obafemi Awolowo University, then called the University of Ife. With civilian rule restored in 1999, he was made professor emeritus. Soyinka has been a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In the fall of 2007 he was appointed Professor in Residence at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, US.

## **Life and work**

### **Early life and education**

A descendant of a Remo family of Isara-Remo, Soyinka was born the second of six children, in the city of

Abẹokuta, Ogun State in Nigeria, at that time a British dominion. His father, Samuel Ayodele Soyinka (whom he called S.A. or "Essay"), was an Anglican minister and the headmaster of St. Peters School in Abẹokuta. Soyinka's mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka (whom he dubbed the "Wild Christian"), owned a shop in the nearby market. She was a political activist within the women's movement in the local community. She was also Anglican. As much of the community followed indigenous Yorùbá religious tradition, Soyinka grew up in an atmosphere of religious syncretism, with influences from both cultures. While he was raised in a religious family; attending church services and singing in the choir from an early age; Soyinka himself became an atheist. His father's position enabled him to get electricity and radio at home.

His mother was one of the most prominent members of the influential Ransome-Kuti family: she was the daughter of Rev. Canon J. J. Ransome-Kuti, and sister to Olusegun Azariah Ransome-Kuti, Oludotun Ransome-Kuti and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Among Soyinka's

cousins were the musician Fela Kuti, the human rights activist Beko Ransome-Kuti, politician Olikoye Ransome-Kuti and activist Yemisi Ransome-Kuti.<sup>[8]</sup>

In 1940, after attending St. Peters Primary School in Abeokuta, Soyinka went to Abeokuta Grammar School, where he won several prizes for literary composition. In 1946 he was accepted by Government College in Ibadan, at that time one of Nigeria's elite secondary schools.

After finishing his course at Government College in 1952, he began studies at University College in Ibadan (1952–54), affiliated with the University of London. He studied English literature, Greek, and Western history. In the year 1953–54, his second and last at University College, Ibadan, Soyinka began work on "Keffi's Birthday Threat," a short radio play for Nigerian Broadcasting Service. It was broadcast in July 1954. While at university, Soyinka and six others founded the Pyrates Confraternity, an anti-corruption and justice-seeking student organisation, the first confraternity in

Nigeria. Soyinka gives a detailed account of his early life in his memoir *Aké: The Years of Childhood*.

Later in 1954, Soyinka relocated to England, where he continued his studies in English literature, under the supervision of his mentor Wilson Knight at the University of Leeds (1954–57). He met numerous young, gifted British writers. Before defending his B.A., Soyinka began publishing and worked as an editor for the satirical magazine *The Eagle*. He wrote a column on academic life, often criticising his university peers.

### **Early career**

After graduating, he remained in Leeds with the intention of earning an M.A. Soyinka intended to write new work combining European theatrical traditions with those of his Yorùbá cultural heritage. His first major play, *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958), was followed a year later by *The Lion and the Jewel*, a comedy that attracted interest from several members of London's Royal Court Theatre. Encouraged, Soyinka moved to London, where he worked as a play reader for the Royal Court Theatre.

During the same period, both of his plays were performed in Ibadan. They dealt with the uneasy relationship between progress and tradition in Nigeria.

In 1957 his play *The Invention* was the first of his works to be produced at the Royal Court Theatre. At that time his only published works were poems such as "The Immigrant" and "My Next Door Neighbour", which were published in the Nigerian magazine *Black Orpheus*. This was founded in 1957 by the German scholar Ulli Beier, who had been teaching at the University of Ibadan since 1950.

Soyinka received a Rockefeller Research Fellowship from University College in Ibadan, his alma mater, for research on African theatre, and he returned to Nigeria. He produced his new satire, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. His work *A Dance of The Forest* (1960), a biting criticism of Nigeria's political elites, won a contest that year as the official play for Nigerian Independence Day. On 1 October 1960, it premiered in Lagos as Nigeria celebrated its sovereignty. The play satirizes the



fledgling nation by showing that the present is no more a golden age than was the past. Also in 1960, Soyinka established the "Nineteen-Sixty Masks", an amateur acting ensemble to which he devoted considerable time over the next few years.

Soyinka wrote the first full-length play produced on Nigerian television. The Play, titled *My Father's Burden*, directed by Segun Olusola was featured on the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) on 6 August 1960. Soyinka published works satirising the "Emergency" in the Western Region of Nigeria, as his Yorùbá homeland was increasingly occupied and controlled by the federal government. The political tensions arising from recent post-colonial independence eventually led to a military coup and civil war (1967–70).

With the Rockefeller grant, Soyinka bought a Land Rover. He began travelling throughout the country as a researcher with the Department of English Language of the University College in Ibadan. In an essay of the time, he criticised Leopold Senghor's Négritude movement as

a nostalgic and indiscriminate glorification of the black African past that ignores the potential benefits of modernisation. "A tiger does not shout its tigritude," he declared, "it acts." In *In Death and the King Horsemen* he states: "The elephant trails no tethering-rope; that king is not yet crowned who will peg an elephant."

In December 1962, his essay "Towards a True Theater" was published. He began teaching with the Department of English Language at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife. Soyinka discussed current affairs with "négrophiles," and on several occasions openly condemned government censorship. At the end of 1963, his first feature-length movie, *Culture in Transition*, was released. In April 1964 *The Interpreters*, "a complex but also vividly documentary novel", was published in London.

That December, together with scientists and men of theatre, Soyinka founded the Drama Association of Nigeria. In 1964 he also resigned his university post, as a protest against imposed pro-government behaviour by authorities. A few months later, he was arrested for the

first time, accused of underlying tapes during reproduction of recorded speech of the winner of Nigerian elections.<sup>1</sup> He was released after a few months of confinement, as a result of protests by the international community of writers. This same year he wrote two more dramatic pieces: *Before the Blackout* and the comedy *Kongi's Harvest*. He also wrote *The Detainee*, a radio play for the BBC in London. His play *The Road* premiered in London at the Commonwealth Arts Festival, opening on 14 September 1965 at the Theatre Royal. At the end of the year, he was promoted to headmaster and senior lecturer in the Department of English Language at University of Lagos.

Soyinka's political speeches at that time criticised the cult of personality and government corruption in African dictatorships. In April 1966 his play *Kongi's Harvest* was produced in revival at the World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. *The Road* was awarded the Grand Prix. In June 1965, Soyinka produced his play *The Lion and The Jewel* for Hampstead Theatre Club in London.

## **Civil war and imprisonment**

After becoming chief of the Cathedral of Drama at the University of Ibadan, Soyinka became more politically active. Following the military coup of January 1966, he secretly and unofficially met with the military governor Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in the Southeastern town of Enugu (August 1967), to try to avert civil war. As a result, he had to go into hiding.

He was imprisoned for 22 months as civil war ensued between the federal government and the Biafrans. Though refused materials such as books, pens, and paper, he still wrote a significant body of poems and notes criticising the Nigerian government.

Despite his imprisonment, in September 1967, his play *The Lion and The Jewel* was produced in Accra. In November *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Strong Breed* were produced in the Greenwich Mews Theatre in New York. He also published a collection of his poetry, *Idanre and Other Poems*. It was inspired by Soyinka's visit to the sanctuary of the Yorùbá deity Ogun, whom

he regards as his "companion" deity, kindred spirit, and protector.

In 1968, the Negro Ensemble Company in New York produced *Kongi's Harvest*. While still imprisoned, Soyinka translated from Yoruba a fantastical novel by his compatriot D. O. Fagunwa, called *The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga*.

### **Release and literary production**

In October 1969, when the civil war came to an end, amnesty was proclaimed, and Soyinka and other political prisoners were freed. For the first few months after his release, Soyinka stayed at a friend's farm in southern France, where he sought solitude. He wrote *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1969), a reworking of the Pentheus myth. He soon published in London a book of poetry, *Poems from Prison*. At the end of the year, he returned to his office as Headmaster of Cathedral of Drama in Ibadan, and cooperated in the founding of the literary periodical *Black Orpheus* (likely named after the 1959 film directed

by Marcel Camus and set in the favela of Rio de Janeiro.)

In 1970 he produced the play *Kongi's Harvest*, while simultaneously adapting it as a film by the same title. In June 1970, he finished another play, called *Madman and Specialists*. Together with the group of fifteen actors of Ibadan University Theatre Art Company, he went on a trip to the United States, to the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut, where his latest play premiered. It gave them all experience with theatrical production in another English-speaking country.

In 1971, his poetry collection *A Shuttle in the Crypt* was published. *Madmen and Specialists* was produced in Ibadan that year. Soyinka travelled to Paris to take the lead role as Patrice Lumumba, the murdered first Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo, in the production of his *Murderous Angels*. His powerful autobiographical work *The Man Died* (1971), a collection of notes from prison, was also published.

In April 1971, concerned about the political situation in Nigeria, Soyinka resigned from his duties at the University in Ibadan, and began years of voluntary exile. In July in Paris, excerpts from his well-known play *The Dance of The Forests* were performed.

In 1972, he was awarded an Honoris Causa doctorate by the University of Leeds. Soon thereafter, his novel *Season of Anomy* (1972) and his *Collected Plays* (1972) were both published by Oxford University Press. In 1973 the National Theatre, London, commissioned and premiered the play *The Bacchae of Euripides*. In 1973 his plays *Camwood on the Leaves* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* were first published. From 1973 to 1975, Soyinka spent time on scientific studies.<sup>1</sup> He spent a year as a visiting fellow at Churchill College Cambridge University<sup>1</sup>1973-74 and wrote *Death and the King's Horseman*, which had its first reading at Churchill College (which Dapo Ladimeji and Skip Gates attended), and gave a series of lectures at a number of European universities.

In 1974 his *Collected Plays, Volume II* was issued by Oxford University Press. In 1975 Soyinka was promoted to the position of editor for *Transition*, a magazine based in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, where he moved for some time. He used his columns in *Transition* to criticise the "negrophiles" (for instance, his article "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition") and military regimes. He protested against the military junta of Idi Amin in Uganda. After the political turnover in Nigeria and the subversion of Gowon's military regime in 1975, Soyinka returned to his homeland and resumed his position at the Cathedral of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife.

In 1976 he published his poetry collection *Ogun Abibiman*, as well as a collection of essays entitled *Myth, Literature and the African World*. In these, Soyinka explores the genesis of mysticism in African theatre and, using examples from both European and African literature, compares and contrasts the cultures. He delivered a series of guest lectures at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana in Legon. In



October, the French version of *The Dance of The Forests* was performed in Dakar, while in Ife, his *Death and The King's Horseman* premiered.

In 1977 *Opera Wonyosi*, his adaptation of Bertold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, was staged in Ibadan. In 1979 he both directed and acted in Jon Blair and Norman Fenton's drama *The Biko Inquest*, a work based on the life of Steve Biko, a South African student and human rights activist who was beaten to death by apartheid police forces. In 1981 Soyinka published his autobiographical work *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, which won a 1983 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award.

Soyinka founded another theatrical group called the Guerrilla Unit. Its goal was to work with local communities in analyzing their problems and to express some of their grievances in dramatic sketches. In 1983 his play *Requiem for a Futurologist* had its first performance at the University of Ife. In July, one of Soyinka's musical projects, the Unlimited Liability Company, issued a long-playing record entitled *I Love*

*My Country*, on which several prominent Nigerian musicians played songs composed by Soyinka. In 1984, he directed the film *Blues for a Prodigal*; his new play *A Play of Giants* was produced the same year.

During the years 1975–84, Soyinka was also more politically active. At the University of Ife, his administrative duties included the security of public roads. He criticized the corruption in the government of the democratically elected President Shehu Shagari. When he was replaced by the general Muhammadu Buhari, Soyinka was often at odds with the military. In 1984, a Nigerian court banned his 1971 book *The Man Died*. In 1985, his play *Requiem for a Futurologist* was published in London.

### **Since 1986**

Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, becoming the first African laureate. He was described as one "who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence". Reed Way Dasenbrock writes that the award of the

Nobel Prize in Literature to Soyinka is "likely to prove quite controversial and thoroughly deserved." He also notes that "it is the first Nobel Prize awarded to an African writer or to any writer from the 'new literatures' in English that have emerged in the former colonies of the British Empire." His Nobel acceptance speech, "This Past Must Address Its Present", was devoted to South African freedom-fighter Nelson Mandela. Soyinka's speech was an outspoken criticism of apartheid and the politics of racial segregation imposed on the majority by the Nationalist South African government. In 1986, he received the Agip Prize for Literature.

In 1988, his collection of poems *Mandela's Earth, and Other Poems* was published, while in Nigeria another collection of essays entitled *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* appeared. In the same year, Soyinka accepted the position of Professor of African Studies and Theatre at Cornell University. In 1990, the second portion of his memoir *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay* appeared. In July 1991 the BBC African Service transmitted his radio play *A Scourge of*

*Hyacinths*, and the next year (1992) in Sienna (Italy), his play *From Zia with Love* had its premiere. Both works are very bitter political parodies, based on events that took place in Nigeria in the 1980s. In 1993 Soyinka was awarded an honorary doctorate from Harvard University. The next year another part of his autobiography appeared: *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years (A Memoir: 1946–1965)*. The following year his play *The Beatification of Area Boy* was published. In October 1994, he was appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the Promotion of African culture, human rights, freedom of expression, media and communication.

In November 1994, Soyinka fled from Nigeria through the border with Benin and then to the United States. In 1996 his book *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* was first published. In 1997 he was charged with treason by the government of General Sani Abacha. The International Parliament of Writers (IPW) was established in 1993 to provide support for writers victimized by persecution. Soyinka

became the organization's second president from 1997 to 2000. In 1999 a new volume of poems by Soyinka, entitled *Outsiders*, was released. His play *King Baabu*, premiered in Lagos in 2001, a political satire on the theme of African dictatorship. In 2002 a collection of his poems, *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*, was published by Methuen. In April 2006, his memoir *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* was published by Random House. In 2006 he cancelled his keynote speech for the annual S.E.A. Write Awards Ceremony in Bangkok to protest the Thai military's successful coup against the government.

In April 2007 Soyinka called for the cancellation of the Nigerian presidential elections held two weeks earlier, beset by widespread fraud and violence. In the wake of the Christmas Day (2009) bombing attempt on a flight to the US by a Nigerian student who had become radicalised in Britain, Soyinka questioned the United Kingdom's social logic that allows every religion to openly proselytise their faith, asserting that it is being abused by religious fundamentalists thereby turning

England into a cesspit for the breeding of extremism. He supported the freedom of worship but warned against the consequence of the illogic of allowing religions to preach apocalyptic violence.

### **Legacy and honours**

- In 2011, the African Heritage Research Library and Cultural Centre built a writers' enclave in his honour. It is located in Adeyipo Village, Lagelu Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The enclave includes a Writer-in-Residence Programme that enables writers to stay for a period of two, three or six months, engaging in serious creative writing.
- 1973: Honorary PhD, University of Leeds
- 1973–74: Overseas Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge
- 1983: Elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature
- 1983: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, United States.

- 1986: Nobel Prize for Literature
- 1986 Agip Prize for Literature
- 1986 Commander of the Federal Republic, CFR.
- 1990: Benson Medal from Royal Society of Literature
- 1993: Honorary doctorate, Harvard University
- 2005: Honorary doctorate degree, Princeton University.
- 2005: Conferred with the chieftaincy title of the Akinlatun of Egbaland by the Oba Alake of the Egba clan of Yorubaland. He was made a tribal aristocrat with the right to use the Yoruba title **Oloye**.
- 2009: Academy of Achievement Golden Plate Award
- 2013, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Lifetime Achievement, United States.

## **Works**

### Plays

- *The Invention* (1957)

- *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958)
- *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959)
- *The Trials of Brother Jero*
- *A Dance of the Forests* (1960)
- *My Father's Burden* (1960)
- *The Strong Breed* (1964)
- *Before the Blackout* (1964)
- *Kongi's Harvest* (1964)
- *The Road* (1965)
- *Madmen and Specialists* (1970)
- *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973)
- *Camwood on the Leaves* (1973)
- *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973)
- *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975)
- *Opera Wonyosi* (1977)
- *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1983)
- *Sixty Six* (short piece) (1984)
- *A Play of Giants* (1984)
- *From Zia with Love* (1992)
- *The Detainee* (radio play)
- *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (radio play)
- *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996)



- *King Baabu* (2001)
- *Etiki Revu Wetin*

## Novels

- *The Interpreters (novel)* (1964)
- *Season of Anomy* (1972)

## Short stories

- *A Tale of Two* (1958)
- *Egbe's Sworn enemy* (1960)
- *Madame Etienne's Establishment* (1960)

## Memoirs

- *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1971)
- *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981)
- *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: a memoir 1946-65* (1989)
- *Isara: A Voyage around Essay* (1990)
- *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006)

## Poetry collections

- *Idanre and other poems* (1967)
- *A Big Airplane Crashed Into The Earth* (original title *Poems from Prison*) (1969)
- *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1971)
- *Ogun Abibiman* (1976)
- *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976)
- *Mandela's Earth and other poems* (1988)
- *Early Poems* (1997)
- *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002)

## Essays

- *Towards a True Theater* (1962)
- *Culture in Transition* (1963)
- *Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition*
- *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (1988)
- *From Drama and the African World View* (1976)
- *The Credo of Being and Nothingness* (1991)

- *The Burden of Memory – The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999)
- *A Climate of Fear* (originally held as the BBC Reid Lectures 2004, audio and transcripts)

## Movies

- *Kongi's Harvest*
- *Culture in Transition*
- *Blues for a Prodigal*

## Translations

- *Forest of a Thousand Daemons. [a translation of D O Fagunwa's OGBOJU ODE NINU IGBO IRUNMALE]*
- *In the Forest of Olodumare. [a translation of D O Fagunwa's IGBO OLODUMARE]*

## Ola Rotimi



**Olawale Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi**, best known as **Ola Rotimi** (13 April 1938 – 18 August 2000), was one of Nigeria's leading playwrights and theatre directors. He has been called "a complete man of the theatre - an actor, director, choreographer and designer - who created performance spaces, influenced by traditional architectural forms."<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Biography**

### **Early life**

Rotimi was the son of Samuel Gladstone Enitan Rotimi a Yoruba steam-launch engineer (a successful director and producer of amateur theatricals) and Dorcas Adolae Oruene Addo an Ijaw drama enthusiast. He was born in Sapele, Nigeria; cultural diversity was a recurring theme in his work. He attended St. Cyprian's School in Port Harcourt from 1945 to 1949, St Jude's School, Lagos, from 1951 to 1952 and the Methodist Boys High School in Lagos, before traveling to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University, where he obtained a BA in fine arts. In 1965, he married Hazel Mae Guadreau, originally from Gloucester; Hazel also studied at Boston University, where she majored in opera, voice and music education. In 1966 he obtained an MA from Yale School of Drama, where he earned the distinction of being a Rockefeller Foundation scholar in playwriting and dramatic literature.

### **Theatrical career**

Rotimi often examined Nigeria's history and local traditions in his works. His first plays, *To Stir the God of Iron* (produced 1963) and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (produced 1966; published 1977), were staged at the drama schools of Boston University and Yale, respectively.

### **Later years**

Upon returning to Nigeria in the 1960s, Rotimi taught at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), where he founded the Ori Olokun Acting Company, and Port Harcourt. Owing, in part, to political conditions in Nigeria, Rotimi spent much of the 1990s living in the Caribbean and the United States, where he taught at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2000 he returned to Ile-Ife, joining the faculty of Obafemi Awolowo University where he lectured till his demise. Hazel (his wife) died in May 2000, only a couple of months before Rotimi's death.

His later dramas include *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (produced 1968; published 1971), a retelling of

Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in imaginative verse; *Kurunmi and the Prodigal* (produced 1969; published as *Kurunmi*, 1971), written for the second Ife Festival of Arts; *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (produced 1971; published 1974), about the last ruler of the Benin empire; and *Holding Talks* (1979).

Later plays, such as *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988), premiered at the University of Port Harcourt and was a common play in OAU Drama Department. The radio play *Everyone His/Her Own Problem*, was broadcast in 1987. His book *African Dramatic Literature: To Be or to Become?* was published in 1991.

Rotimi, a patriot who shunned the attraction of the West and Europe and returned home to contribute his own quota to nation building, was a rare breed. Diminutive in size but a giant in drama in Africa, he was one of the best things that could have happened to the literary community.

His dream of directing a play of 5000 cast members materialized at the Amphi Africa Theater when he was being put to rest as the crowd was drawn to a manuscript of the day's program outline. People made dramatic entry and exit to the stage around his casket with the man turning his casket.

Rotimi spent the second half of his last creative decade reworking two of his plays - *Man Talk*, *Woman Talk* and also *Tororo, Tororo, Roro* - and the result, unpublished at the time of his death in 2002, have now been published under the title *The Epilogue*. The two plays were probably meant as an epilogue to both Rotimi's theatrical and comic careers, which span the entire spectrum of his career.

It is comical and the language used is a version of "Nigerian English" (for example: "Se you get?" "I called God on him").

The works are also a social satire and this publication will spur renewed interest in his satires. Rotimi is sure to be remembered as a model in the literary genre whose



views have shaped the conduct of the theater and whose plays have demonstrated the power of drama to shape the thinking of the society and attempted to solve some of the problems encountered in everyday living.

## **Plays**

- (1963) *To Stir the God of Iron*
- (1966) *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*—depicts the cocoa farmer and businessman Lejoka-Brown as a self-seeking, opportunistic leader who could make better contributions to his country outside of the political arena.
- (1968) *The Gods Are Not To Blame*—an adaptation of the Greek classic *Oedipus Rex*; the main character gets trapped by pride, ignorance and the caprices of the divinities.
- (1969) *Kurunmi*
- (1970) *Holding Talks*
- (1971) *Ovonramven Nogbaisi*—the title character simply luxuriates in the grandeur of his office. Although he is a custodian of culture who

inspires people, he does not actively participate in their struggles.

- (1973) *Grip Am*
- (1973) *Invitation Into Madness*
- (1977) *Akassa Youmi\**
- (1979) *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled*—in *If*, the young firebrand Hamidu is nowhere to be found when a real commitment is required.
- (1985) *Hopes of The Living Dead*—Rotimi here depicts a different kind of leader: a selfless, result-oriented, committed leadership complemented by a followership that believes in the good of the generality of its members through the application of itself to the cause that is beneficial.
- *When the Criminals Become Judges*

*The Epilogue: Two unpublished plays of Ola Rotimi*

- *Man Talk, Woman Talk*

*Man Talk, Woman Talk* is humorous, as quintessential comedies from the author can be. He makes use of wry

humour to seek a level playing ground for resolution of the biases men and women nurse about one another and which affect mutual co-existence of the two. The scene is a court though devoid of the usual technicalities of court rooms. Instead of legal jargon, there is humor, arguments and counter arguments. What the author arrives at is not to prove which gender is superior but to show the complementary roles of men and women. There is a great deal of wit in the work and the setting here is the university environment where the youthful contenders are idealistic.

- *Tororo, Tororo, Roro*

*Tororo, Tororo, Roro* is a coincidental meeting of two fellows from *Man Talk*, *Woman Talk*, Tunji Oginni and Philomena James. Both run Hotel Kilimanjaro with different motives and a chance meeting between them elicits lessons as both share each other's problems.

## **Performances**

First performed in Nigeria in 1968, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* was produced at the Arcola Theatre in Hackney, London, in 2005. Femi Elufowoju (Jr) had his first theatre experience in 1975, at the age of 11, when he saw a revival of this very play, performed in a reconstructed Greek amphitheatre at a university campus in Ife; and brought it to the UK shores as a British leading theatre director under the company name Tiata Fahodzi

His last production was a staging of *Man Talk, Woman Talk* at the French Institute in Lagos, Nigeria. He also produced *Tororo Tororo roro*, a play of the Absurd, as a convocation play.

### **Textual sources**

### **Style**

For *Man Talk, Woman Talk*, directorial approach must have fluidity which will allow for creativity of the actors. The technicalities of the stage should be carefully applied in such a way that they will kill expected boredom associated with court scenes for if not done, the

whole dramatic in the act will be flattened out. It might do the play a favor if it is given the kind of approach Ola Rotimi himself used in the directing of the premiere of the play. It is the technique that allows a kind of participatory interaction; the one that accommodates the audience contribution.

## **Awards**

Rotimi was awarded two Fulbright Scholarships.

## **List of works**

Books that contain his significant contributions (see notes for more information) are marked with a percentage(%); Conference publications are marked with an asterisk (\*); thesis or disectations are marked with a dagger (†) below.

Plays and literature

- *Kurunmi*
- *The Gods Are Not To Blame*
- *Ovṛramwṛn Nṛgbaisi*

- *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*
- *Holding Talks*
- *If: A Tragedy of the ruled*
- *Understanding "The Gods Are Not to Blame"*
- *Hopes of the Living Dead*
- *Viandanti della storia*
- *African Dramatic Literature*
- *Playwriting and Directing in Nigeria*
- *The Epilogue*

Books, essays and political commentary

Books

- *A Dictionary of Nigerian Pidgin English: with an introductory survey of the history, linguistics and socio-literary functions*
- *Introduction to Nigerian literature*
- *The Living Culture of Nigeria*
- *A translation of the play "The Gods Are Not to Blame" into Setswana†*
- *Statement towards August '83-*
- *The Masquerade in Nigerian history and culture*

- *An interview (1975) with Ola Rotimi, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ife, Ile Ife*
- *Diversity of Creativity in Nigeria\**
- *African Theatre in Performance%*
- *Akassa you mi*
- *Issues in African Theatre*

#### Articles

- "Conversation with Ola Rotimi"
- "How the kingfisher learned fear"
- "Review of: *Kiabàrà: Journal of the Humanities* 1" (June 1978)
- "Through whom the spirits breathe"
- "The trials of African literature"
- "Everyone his/her own problem"
- "No direction home"

#### Archival material and ebooks

#### Archival material

- *Papers\**
- *African Papers, 1963, 1968-1989*
- *Gbe'ku De:pièce en 1 acte*

#### ebooks

- *Initiation into Madness*
- *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*
- *If*
- *Holding Talks*
- *Hopes of the Living Dead*
- *Grip Am*
- *Akassa you mi*
- *Kurunmi*
- *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*



## **Zulu Sofola**

'**Zulu Sofola** (22 June 1935 - 5 September 1995) was the first published female Nigerian playwright and dramatist. Sofola was also a university teacher and became the first female Professor of Theater Arts in Africa.

### **Biography**

Nwazuluwa Onuekwuke Sofola was born in Bendel State to parents who were Igbo from Issele-Uku in Delta State. Spending her adolescence and early womanhood in the USA, she studied at Southern Baptist Seminary, earned a BA in English at Virginia Union University and an MA in drama (1965) from The Catholic University of America. She returned to Nigeria in 1966, and was a lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, where she obtained a PhD.

She also taught Drama at the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria where she was appointed, Head of

Department for the Performing Arts. Sofola was a singer, dancer, as well as a prolific playwright. She wrote and directed many plays for stage and television, including her own work, such as *King Emene*. Her plays "range from historical tragedy to domestic comedy and use both traditional and modern African setting". She uses "elements of magic, myth and ritual to examine conflicts between traditionalism and modernism in which male supremacy persists." She was considered one of the most distinguished women in Nigerian literature.

Sofola's most frequently performed plays are *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and *The Sweet Trap* (1977), She died in 1995 at the age of 60.

### **Selected works**

- *The Deer Hunter and The Hunter's Pearl* (1969), London: Evans Brothers
- *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (1971), Ibadan: Daystar Press
- *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), Ibadan: Evans
- *The Operators*, Ibadan: Ibadan University, 1973

- *King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion* (1974), Heinemann Educational Books. ISBN 0-435-92860-0
- *The Wizard of Law* (1975), Evans Bros. ISBN 0-237-49951-7
- *The Sweet Trap* (1977); Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-575386-X
- *Old Wines Are Tasty* (1981), Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-154-499-6
- *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986), Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- *Queen Omu-ako of Oligbo*, Buffalo: Paul Robeson Theatre, 1989
- *Eclipso and the Fantasia*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1990
- *The Showers*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1991
- *Song of a Maiden: A Play*, Illorin, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1992.
- *Lost Dreams and Other Plays*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1992.

## **J. P. Clark**

### **Life**

Born in Kiagbodo, Nigeria, to Ijaw parents, Clark received his early education at the Native Administration School and the prestigious Government College in Ughelli, and his BA degree in English at the University of Ibadan, where he edited various magazines, including the *Beacon* and *The Horn*. Upon graduation from Ibadan in 1960, he worked as an information officer in the Ministry of Information, in the old Western Region of Nigeria, as features editor of the *Daily Express*, and as a research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. He served for several years as a professor of English at the University of Lagos, a position from which he retired in 1980. While at the University of Lagos he was co-editor of the literary magazine *Black Orpheus*.

In 1982, along with his wife Ebun Odutola (a professor and former director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at

the University of Lagos), he founded the PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos.

A widely travelled man, Clark has, since his retirement, held visiting professorial appointments at several institutions of higher learning, including Yale and Wesleyan University in the United States.

## **Poetry**

Clark is most noted for his poetry, including:

- *Poems* (Mbari, 1961), a group of forty lyrics that treat heterogeneous themes;
- *A Reed in the Tide* (Longmans, 1965), occasional poems that focus on the Clark's indigenous African background and his travel experience in America and other places;
- *Casualties: Poems 1966-68* (USA: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), which illustrate the horrendous events of the Nigeria-Biafra war;
- *A Decade of Tongues* (Longmans, Drumbeat series, 1981), a collection of seventy-four poems,

all of which apart from "Epilogue to Casualties" (dedicated to Michael Echeruo) were previously published in earlier volumes;

- *State of the Union* (1981), which highlights his apprehension concerning the sociopolitical events in Nigeria as a developing nation;
- *Mandela and Other Poems* (1988), which deals with the perennial problem of aging and death.

Critics have noted three main stages in Clark's poetic career: the apprenticeship stage of trial and experimentation, exemplified by such juvenilia as "Darkness and Light" and "Iddo Bridge"; the imitative stage, in which he appropriates such Western poetic conventions as the couplet measure and the sonnet sequence, exemplified in such lyrics as "To a Fallen Soldier" and "Of Faith"; and the individualized stage, in which he attains the maturity and originality of form of such poems as "Night Rain", "Out of the Tower", and "Song".

Throughout his work, certain themes recur:

- Violence and protest, as in *Casualties*;
- Institutional corruption, as in *State of the Union*;
- The beauty of nature and the landscape, as in *A Reed in the Tide*;
- European colonialism as in, for example, "Ivbie" in the *Poems* collection;
- The inhumanity of the human race as in *Mandela and Other Poems*.

Clark frequently dealt with these themes through a complex interweaving of indigenous African imagery and that of the Western literary tradition.

## **Drama**

Clark's dramatic work includes *Song of a Goat* (1961), a tragedy cast in the Greek classical mode in which the impotence of Zifa, the protagonist, causes his wife Ebiere and his brother Tonye to indulge in an illicit love relationship that results in suicide. This was followed by a sequel, *The Masquerade* (1964), in which Dibiri's rage culminates in the death of his suitor Tufa. Other works include:

- *The Raft* (1964), in which four men drift helplessly down the Niger aboard a log raft;
- *Ozidi* (1966), an epic drama rooted in Ijaw saga;
- *The Boat* (1981), a prose drama that documents Ngbilebiri history.

Although his plays have been criticized for leaning too much on the Greek classical mode (especially the early ones), for their thinness of structure and for unrealistic stage devices (such as the disintegration of the raft on the stage in *The Raft*), his defenders argue that they challenge and engage the audience with their poetic quality and their uniting of the foreign and the local through graphic imagery.

### **Other work**

Clark's contribution to other genres includes his translation of the *Ozidi Saga* (1977), an oral literary epic of the Ijaw that in its local setting would normally take seven days to perform, his critical study *The Example of Shakespeare* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), in which he articulates his aesthetic views about



poetry and drama and his journalistic essays in the *Daily Express*, *Daily Times*, and other newspapers. He is also the author of the controversial *America, Their America* (Deutsch, 1964; Heinemann African Writers Series No. 50, 1969), a travelogue in which he criticizes American society and its values. While the furor generated by this book arguably catapulted him into the international literary limelight, the damage it and *Casualties* have done to his reputation seems permanent; in both works he infuriated and alienated a large audience and some influential critics. In his defence, Clark has maintained that he merely portrayed events as he saw them.

As one of Africa's pre-eminent and distinguished authors, he has, since his retirement, continued to play an active role in literary affairs, a role for which he is increasingly gaining international recognition. In 1991, for example, he received the Nigerian National Merit Award for literary excellence and saw publication, by Howard University, of his two definitive volumes, *The Ozidi Saga* and *Collected Plays and Poems 1958-1988*.

On 6 December 2011, to honour the life and career of Professor John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, a celebration was held at Lagos Motor Boat Club, Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, for the publication of *J. P. Clark: A Voyage, The definitive biography of the main animating force of African poetry*, written by playwright Femi Osofisan. The launch was attended by "what could be described as the who is who in the literary community", including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka.

## **Hubert Ogunde**

Oloye **Hubert Adedeji Ogunde** (31 May 1916 – 4 April 1990) was a Nigerian actor, playwright, theatre manager, and musician who founded the Ogunde Concert Party in (1945), the first professional theatrical company in Nigeria. He has been described as "the father of Nigerian theatre, or the father of contemporary Yoruba theatre".

Ogunde starred in *Mister Johnson*, the 1990 motion picture that also featured Pierce Brosnan. The movie was shot on location in Toro near Bauchi, Nigeria.

### **Background**

Ogunde was born in Ososa, near Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria. He worked as a teacher before joining the Nigerian police force. Like many of his theatre contemporaries, such as A. B. David, P. A. Dawodu, Layeni and G. T. Onimole, his theatre career began under the patronage of the Church. In 1944, he produced his first folk opera, *The Garden of Eden and The Throne of God*, commissioned by the Lagos-based Church of the

Lord, a sect of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society. The performance was in aid of the Church building fund. The huge success of the production spurred Ogunde on to writing more operas until he decided to leave his amateur status as an artist and turn professional. He founded Ogunde Theatre — the first contemporary professional company in Nigeria. By this act Ogunde began the rise of modern professional theatre in Nigeria, a movement in which he remains the supreme artist and father figure.

He is regarded as the doyen of traditional Nigerian drama.

### **Professional theatre work**

The first play featured at Ogunde Theatre was entitled *Tiger's Empire*. Premiered on 4 March 1946, *Tiger's Empire* was produced by The African Music Research Party and featured Ogunde, Beatrice Oyede and Abike Taiwo. The advertisement for the play was the result of Ogunde's call for "paid actresses". It marked the first time in Yoruba theatre that women were billed to appear

in a play as professional artists in *Light* in their own right. *Tiger's Empire* was an attack on colonial rule. It was followed by *Darkness and Light*, although Ogunde does not remember writing it. This is the only play that has escaped his memory. A public outcry had been going on for a year over the growth of a "social evil" that was entering into Lagos society and corroding it. This evil was popularly known as the "Aso Ebi Craze", which required both men and women to buy the most expensive materials for social gatherings.

The rule was that: "When someone wants to celebrate a marriage or a funeral obsequies (sic) she chooses a piece of cloth to wear on the occasion and approaches relatives and friends to buy the same stuff to wear with her as uniform on the day. The number of people to wear the uniform with her will depend on her popularity and social connections.

"The custom has lent itself to much abuse in that the occasions for celebrating marriages or funerals occur so often that one may be asked by friends to buy 'Aso Ebi'

more than ten times a year.” This craze of course bred intense competition with celebrants trying to outshine one another. It was a competition that delighted textile traders but which often ruined marriages, as women were known to leave husbands who could not afford to robe them, for lovers who could. Ogunde decided to make his first social satirical comment by writing a play designed to expose the vulgarity and ostentatiousness of the craze. He called the play *Human Parasites*, a tragedy in two acts, commenting that Aso Ebi is a social evil....

Aduke who kissed and keyed a thousand lovers for the sake of Aso Ebi... what happened when boys refused to be keyed is better seen than described”

He also produced two important plays: *Yoruba Ronu* and *Otitokoro* which refer to the political events in the western Nigeria and which led to the declaration of the state of emergency in 1963. He was the most prominent of the dramatist of the folk opera. He composed over 40 operas in Yoruba. His play *Yoruba Ronu* (Yoruba Think) was a satirical account of the strife that plagued Yorubas

in the 1960s. It was banned in western Nigeria for sometime but was produced with great success in other parts of the country.

His other plays include *Darkness and Light* and *Mr. Devil's Money*. He utilized the commercial repertoire of Yoruba theatre, frequently featuring both European instrument and drums in his plays, and he married *all* the actresses in order to keep the group together. Because of his various tours, his theatre became Alarinjo, a travelling theatre.

### **Personal life and legacy**

Clementina Oguntimirin later married Chief Ogunde and became Adesewa Ogunde or *Mama Eko* (Lagos Mama), as she was popularly known by her fans in the 1960s, after taking the leading part in the popular play of that name. She had five children for him. The two senior girls, Tokunbo and Tope, are now leading members of the company. Ogunde became the leading producer of Yoruba celluloid movies, with *J'ayesinmi* (Let the world rest) and *Aiye* (Life!) blazing the trail.

Oguntimirin died in a road accident on September 1970 en route to a scheduled performance in Ilesha. The following year, Ogunde wrote a play in her memory entitled *Ayanmo*. Her death was mourned throughout the country and press and mass-media coverage of her death and funeral was extensive. Ogunde died on 4 April 1990 at London's Cromwell Hospital following a brief illness. A portrait of Ogunde hangs in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos.



## **Femi Osofisan**

**Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan** (born June 1946 in Erunwon, Ogun State) is a Nigerian writer known for his critique of societal problems and his use of African traditional performances and surrealism in some of his novels. A frequent theme his novels explore is the conflict between good and evil. He is in fact a didactic writer whose works seek to correct his decadent society.

### **Education**

Osofisan attended primary school at Ife and secondary school at Government College, Ibadan. After secondary school, he attended the University of Ibadan. He did his post-graduate studies at the Sorbonne, Paris before holding faculty positions at the University of Ibadan, where he retired as full professor in 2011.

### **Works**

- Kolera Kolej. New Horn, 1975.

- The Chattering and the Song. Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1977.
- Morountodun and Other Plays. Lagos: Longman, 1982.
- Minted Coins (poetry), Heinemann, 1987.
- Another Raft. Lagos: Malthouse, 1988. [End Page 153]
- Once upon Four Robbers. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1991
- Twingle-Twangle A-Twynning Tayle. Longman, 1992.
- Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest: A Parable for Our Times, Heinemann Educational, Nigeria, 1993.
- The Album of the Midnight Blackout, University Press, Nigeria, 1994.
- Tegonni: An African Antigone. Tegonni, an African Antigone. Ibadan: Opon Ifa, 1999.
- Theater and the Rites of 'Post-Negritude' Remembering. Research in African Literatures 30.1 (1999): 1–11.



## **Bode Sowande**

**Bode Sowande** (born 2nd May 1948) is a Nigerian writer and dramatist, known for the theatric aesthetic of his plays about humanism and social change. He comes from a breed of writers in Nigeria that favors a post-traditional social and political landscape where the individual is the creator and maker of his own history not just the subject of norms and tradition. Sowande is a member of the so-called second generation of Nigerian playwrights, who favor a much more political tone in their writing and seek to promote an alliance or acquiescence to a change in the status quo and fate of the common man and farmers who constitute the majority of the Nigerian society. Some members of this groups includes: Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan and Festus Iyayi. Bode Sowande in May 2010 ,launched a tarot website.

He runs the Drama group ODU THEMES, established in 1972, and BODE SOWANDE THEATRE ACADEMY, an internship programme for dramatists. He is married , with children.

## Works

- The Night Before Babylon, 1972
- A Farewell to Babylon and Other Plays, 1978
- Flamingo and other plays, 1980
- Without A Home , novel ,1982
- Our Man The President, novel, 1983
- The Missing Bridesmaid, novelette, 1984
- Tornadoes Full of Dreams , drama, 1990
- Arede Owo, [Yoruba adaptation of Moliere's L'Avare], drama,1990.
- Ajantala-Pinocchio,drama, 1997
- Super Leaf, drama , 2004
- Just For The Fun Of It [ An anecdotal history of Odu Themes Theatre],2008, memoirs.
- Long Story, drama [on last days of Abacha and M.K.O Abiola], 2010

Six Radio plays broadcast on BBC African drama programmes; [1975-1996]

Bar Beach Prelude,

Get a Pigeon from Trafalgar Square,

Beggars Choice,  
A Dream from the sun,  
Alarm on Lagoon Street,  
Regina's Golden Goal.

Odu Themes weekly Television programmes , Western  
Nigeria Television [ now NTA, Ibadan.]1973- 1978.  
Television drama series, 'Acada Campus', NIGERIA  
TELEVISION AUTHORITY [network ], 1981,1982.

FLAMINGO, 13 part television serial, , Oyo State  
Broadcasting Service,1983

WITHOUT A HOME, TV 13 episode serial, Oyo State  
Broadcasting Service, 1984

TarotWithPrayers

## **Biyi Bandele**



**Biyi Bandele-Thomas** (born 1967) is a Nigerian novelist and playwright generally known as Biyi Bandele. Bandele is one of the most versatile and prolific of the U.K.-based Nigerian writers, having turned his hand to theater, journalism, television, film, and radio, as well as the fiction with which he made his name. Acclaimed as both a prolific playwright and a versatile novelist, his 1997 adaptation of fellow Nigerian Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for the British stage

confirmed his place as an important voice on the post-colonial stage. He currently resides in London.

### **Nigeria to London**

Biyi Bandele was born to Yoruba parents in Kafanchan, northern Nigeria, in 1967. His father was a veteran of the Burma Campaign while Nigeria was still part of the British Empire. Bandele spent the first eighteen years of his life in the northern part of the country being most at home in the Hausa cultural tradition. Later on, he moved to Lagos then studied drama at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and finally left for London in 1990. A precocious and intuitive playwright, his talent was recognised early on and he won the International Student Playscript competition of 1989 with an unpublished play, before claiming the 1990 British Council Lagos Award for an unpublished collection of poems.

### **Playwright**

As a playwright, Bandele has worked with the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well



as writing radio drama and screenplays for television. His plays are: *Rain*; *Marching for Fausa* (1993); *Resurrections in the Season of the Longest Drought* (1994); *Two Horsemen* (1994), selected as Best New Play at the 1994 London New Plays Festival; *Death Catches the Hunter and Me and the Boys* (published in one volume, 1995); and *Oroonoko*, an adaptation of Aphra Behn's seventeenth-century novel of the same name. *Brixton Stories*, Bandele's stage adaptation of his own novel *The Street* (1999), premiered in 2001 and was published in one volume with his play, *Happy Birthday Mister Deka*, which premiered in 1999.

He was the Judith E. Wilson Fellow at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, in 2000-2001. He also acted as Royal Literary Fund Resident Playwright at the Bush Theatre from 2002 to 2003.

Bandele has written of the profound impact on him made by the first drama he ever saw, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, which he saw on a hire-purchase television set in a railway town in northern Nigeria:

And so although I had yet to set foot outside Kafanchan, although I knew nothing about postwar British society, or the Angry Young Men, or anything about Osborne when I met Jimmy Porter on the screen... there was no need for introductions: I had known Jimmy all my life.

I sometimes ask myself these days why that strange play made such a big impression on me that night over 20 years ago. I think it's because *Look Back in Anger* derives its power to startle or to repel, and its universality, not from the literal-realism of its narrative but from the sheer verve of Osborne's pathology of the human, his bloody-minded reverse-humanism. The veracity of the world he has created is poetic, not literal; he deals not in road signs but in symbols.

...Jimmy Porter no longer impresses me in fiction or in life, but the lesson I learned watching *Look Back in Anger* has stayed with me. Great theatre is the telling of a truthful lie, defined by the degree to which facts of the mind are made manifest in a fiction of matter. It derives its universality not from catering to the lowest common

denominator but by being specific and local. In the universe of the imagination to which we all belong, we may not always know where we are going, but we require no visas to go there and we need not worry about packing. The name of the place is home.

### **Novelist**

Biyi Bandele's novels, which include *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* (1991) and *The Street* (1999), are rewarding reading, capable of wild surrealism and wit as well as political engagement. His 2007 novel, *Burma Boy*, has been described as "a fine achievement" and is lauded for providing a voice for previously unheard Africans.

### **Bibliography**

- *The Man Who Came In From the Back of Beyond*, Bellew, 1991
- *The Sympathetic Undertaker: and Other Dreams*, Bellew, 1991
- *Marching for Fausa*, Amber Lane Press, 1993

- *Resurrections in the Season of the Longest Drought*, Amber Lane Press, 1994
- *Two Horsemen*, Amber Lane Press, 1994
- *Death Catches the Hunter/Me and the Boys*, Amber Lane Press, 1995
- Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (adaptation), 1999
- Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (adaptation), Amber Lane Press, 1999
- *The Street*, Picador, 1999
- *Brixton Stories/Happy Birthday, Mister Deka*, Methuen, 2001
- *Burma Boy*, Jonathan Cape, 2007

## **Awards**

- 1989 – International Student Playscript Competition - *Rain*
- 1994 – London New Play Festival - *Two Horsemen*
- 1995 – Wingate Scholarship Award
- 1998 – Peggy Ramsay Award

- 2000 – EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Play - *Oroonoko*

## **Film**

His directorial debut film *Half of a Yellow Sun* was selected to be screened in the Special Presentation section at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, and received a "rapturous reception".

## Osonye Tess Onwueme

**Osonye Tess Onwueme** (born September 8, 1955) is a Nigerian playwright, scholar and poet, who rose to prominence writing plays with themes of social justice, culture, and the environment. In 2010, she became the University Professor of Global Letters, following her exceptional service as Distinguished Professor of Cultural Diversity and English at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She has won several international awards, including: the prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award (2009), the Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for outstanding black writers (2008), the Martin Luther King, Jr./Caesar Chavez Distinguished Writers Award (1989/90), the Distinguished Authors Award (1988), and the Association of Nigerian Authors Drama Prize which she has won several times with plays like *The Desert Encroaches* (1985), *Tell It To Women* (1995), *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen* (2001), *Then She Said it* (2003), among numerous honors and international productions of her drama. Through her plays, she is able to use the theater as a medium to showcase historically silenced

views such as African Women, and shedding more light on African life. She sustains her advocacy for the global poor and youth, along with the experiences and concerns of the (African) Diaspora in her creative work. In 2007, the US State Department appointed her to the Public Diplomacy Speaker Program for North, East, and West India. The *2009 Tess International Conference: Staging Women, Youth, Globalization, and Eco-Literature*, which was exclusively devoted to the author's work was successfully held by international scholars in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, following the Fonlon-Nichols award to the dramatist. She is regarded as one of the band of more important African authors.

### **Early life and education**

She was born **Osonye Tess Akeake** in *Ogwashi-Uku*, present-day Delta state, to the family of barrister Chief Akaeke and Maria Eziashr. Osonye was educated at the *Mary Mount Secondary School*: it was while at the school that she first dabbled in writing. After secondary education, she married an agronomist, I. C. Onwueme,

and bore five children, during the time she attended the University of Ife, for her bachelor's degree in education (1979) and master's in literature (1982). She obtained her PhD at the University of Benin, studying African Drama. In 1998 she married Obika Gray, a Jamaican political scientist.

## **Works**

- *A Hen Too Soon*. 1983.
- *Broken Calabash*. 1984.
- *The Desert Encroaches* (1985)
- *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988)
- *Ban Empty Barn and other plays* (1986)
- *Legacies* (1989)
- *Three Plays: an anthology of plays by Tess Onwueme* (1993)
- *Tell It To Women: an epic drama* (1995).
- *Riot In Heaven: drama for the voices of color* (1996; 2006).
- *The Missing Face, a play* (1997; 2000).



- *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen: a play* (2000; 2006).
- *Then She Said It: a play* (2003)
- *What Mama Said, an epic drama* (2004).
- *No Vacancy* (2005)

## **Femi Euba**

**Femi Euba** (born April 1942) is a Nigerian actor and dramatist. Among the topics of his plays is Yoruba culture.

### **Education and career**

Euba could be called a man of many parts as a theatre practitioner (acting, playwriting, directing). A Lagosian by birth, he studied acting at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama, earning a diploma in 1965, after which he appeared in many shows on the London Stage, including the Royal Court Theatre production of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with the late Sir Alec Guinness as Macbeth and the late Simone Signoret as Lady Macbeth.

Euba left London in 1970 to study Playwriting and Dramatic Literature at the Yale School of Drama, where he received an MFA in 1973. In 1980-82 he went back to Yale to study, receiving an MA in Afro-American Studies. He then returned to Nigeria, where he worked

for some years, and earned a PhD in Literature-in-English at the University of Ife, Nigeria (now Obafemi Awolowo University), in 1986.

Over the years, Euba has taught at different colleges and universities, in Nigeria and the US, including the College of William & Mary in Virginia. Currently the Louise and Kenneth Kinney Professor at the Louisiana State University, he has continued to teach playwriting, and dramatic literature, mostly concentrating on the drama and theatre of Africa and of the African diaspora. He is also a consultant in Black Theatre. Among the many plays he has directed variously are Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*; Edouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint*; August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*; Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Molière's *The Learned Ladies*; and Euripides' *Alceste*. His favorite saying for his students, whether in acting, playwriting or directing is: "You need to get down to brass tacks."

## **Works**

- "Akibu: a play for television in two parts" in *Five African Plays*; ed. Cismo Pieterse. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.
- *A Riddle of the Palms and Crocodiles* (plays), Negro Ensemble Company, 1973.
- *Archetypes, Imprecators and Victims of Fate: Origins and Developments of Satire in Black Drama*, Greenwood Press, 1989.
- *The Gulf*, Longman, 1991.
- "The Eye of Gabriel" (play), in *Black Drama*, Alexander Street Press, 2002.
- "Dionysus of the Holocaust" (play), in *Black Drama*, Alexander Street Press, 2002.
- *Poetics of the Creative Process: An Organic Practicum to Playwriting*, University Press of America, 2005.
- *Camwood at Crossroads* (novel), Xlibris, 2007.