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Wale Ogunyemi
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- PUBLISHED PLAYS: Business Headache ([Oshogbo]: Theatre Express Sketches, 1966; reprinted in S. S. Bondy, The Suitcase, etc Nendeln: Klaus Reprint, 1973);
- "The Scheme," in Three Nigerian Plays, edited by Ulli Beier (London: Longman, 1967): pp.36--61;
- "Be Mighty, Be Mine," Nigeria Magazine, 97 (1968): 143--51;
- "Rare Akoḡun," Nigeria Magazine, 100 (1969): 404--14;
- Eshu Elegbara (Ibadan: Orisun, 1970);
- Ijaye War in the Nineteenth Century: a historic drama (Ibadan: Orisun, 1970);
- "Poor Little Bird," in The Study of Literature, edited by H.L.B. Moody (London: George Allen and Unwin): pp55--68;
- Obaluaye: a music drama (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 197[2]);
- "Sign of the Rainbow," in African Theatre, edited by Gwyneth Henderson (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973): pp131--47;
- Kiriji (Lagos: Pilgrim Books, 1976);
- The Divorce (Ibadan: Onitonoje, 1977);
- Langbodo (Lagos: Thomas Nelson, 1979);
- The Vow (London: Macmillan, 1985);
- Eniyan: a morality play (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1987);
- Partners in Business (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1991).

RECORDING: PLAY PRODUCTION Obaluaye Phonodisc Associated Recording Co. Nig. Ltd. 1974 (ARC 1101, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm, stereo) Ife University

Theatre production, directed by Akin Euba

ESSAY "The First Time I Saw Him," in Before Our Very Eyes: Tribute to Wole Soyinka, edited by Dapo Adelugba (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987): pp. 38-43.

LECTURE "Six Plays by Wale Ogunyemi: a brief insight by the Author." Unpublished lecture for the M.A. African Theatre Class, School of English Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds, England, 6 March 1989.

Olawole Ogunyemi was, from the mid-1960s onwards, one of the most prominent dramatists working in the Nigerian English-language theatre. Although critical writing on his work remained for many years quite sparse, and his output was little known outside his own country, Ogunyemi's example provided a significant stimulus for younger Nigerian dramatists who believed, with him, that English need not be regarded exclusively as the language of an elitist and academic theatre. In certain respects Ogunyemi's work was thematically conservative--in its "uncritical" reproduction, for example, of Yoruba myth--and younger dramatists qualified their admiration for his work in recognizing this. But Ogunyemi's mastery of stagecraft and, in particular, his preference for a "total" theatre, in which non-verbal elements played a crucial signifying role, ensured his work remained an important reference-point for other theatre practitioners. Ogunyemi was also one of the first Nigerian dramatists to work enthusiastically for television, a medium which provided significant outlets for

Nigerian theatre workers at a time when stage productions were infrequent. Amongst his works for the stage, the comedy The Divorce proved to be one of the most popular of all English-language plays with Nigerian audiences. Ogunyemi's conservative pessimism^{ist's} communicated in other plays, such as Langbodo, with great forcefulness.

Ogunyemi was born on 12 August 1939 in Igbajo, a town about 150 miles north-west of Lagos, in Nigeria's present-day Osun State. His father and mother, Adeosun and Madam Ajayi Ogunyemi, were, respectively, a farmer and trader. From early childhood Ogunyemi was intimately familiar with the tenets and practice of Yoruba religion, and these remained a major point of reference throughout his work as a playwright. As Dapo Adelugba reports in his essay "Three Dramatists in Search of a Language":

As a boy, Ogunyemi had an entrée into shrines and groves because he was already loved by his grandmother who was the Iyalode of Igbajo and a prestigious member of the local jury. He was taught about taboos, what to say and what not to say, and he witnessed a wide variety of rituals, ceremonies and masquerade performances. Indeed, Mr Ogunyemi had his own mask as a boy. Ogun and Sango are reverently worshipped in his family, even though his mother is a Christian.

Ogunyemi attended primary school in Oke-Ado, Ibadan, from 1949--54, after which he worked for a year as office-boy at the Ibadan Baptist Mission. From 1957--60 he read Secretarial Studies at the Oke-Ado Commercial Academy, then returned to the Baptist Mission to work as secretary to the Education Officer (until 1964).

Ogunyemi began writing plays in the late 1950s, one of these early works being submitted to the drama competition mounted by the Nigerian

government to celebrate independence in 1960. Most of these early plays were written in Yoruba, a language Ogunyemi was to employ only rarely after 1960. From 1962 Ogunyemi worked as an actor with the (then three-year old) Western Nigerian Television Station (later to be incorporated under the nationwide National Television Authority).

The earliest of Ogunyemi's published plays is The Vow, written in 1962 (published 1985. In between, and in the process of much rewriting, the play had won the 1971 "African Arts" award of the University of California, Los Angeles). Set in the court of a Yoruba king in the (not very closely stipulated) present, the plot of The Vow turns on the king's opposition to the marriage of his son to an American girl. Here is a predicament that emerges again and again in Nigerian English-language drama: the tension between a traditional order of custom and expectation and the ideas of social organization introduced by the West. In the end, however,

the thematic importance of the intrusive impact of Western culture is less central to the play's energies than Ogunyemi's absorption in the crisis of authority endured by the king. Of the play's 7500 lines of dialogue, well over a third are allocated to this character: a mark of Ogunyemi's imaginative absorption in the role of leadership figures (a trait his work shared with that of his contemporary, Ola Rotimi). A sub-plot in The Uov opens the way for Ogunyemi to develop another of his major concerns, the necessity for political unity and--in times of dispute--for conciliation. At its weakest, this concern is developed for conservative ends, by way of an argument for the preservation of existing political hierarchies. At the same time, one should not underestimate the impact on Ogunyemi's thinking both of the damage done to Yoruba social organization during the nineteenth-century internecine wars, and (in the context of his later writing) of the fragmentation of the State during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967--70.

In 1965 Ogunyemi was involved, with Segun Sofowote and Wole Anele, in the founding of the group Theatre Express, following a joint suggestion by Ulli Beier and Segun Olusola that a mini-troupe be established to take theatre to venues such as market places and for commissioned performance at functions. Ogunyemi was involved for about a year with Theatre Express, during which time he wrote Business Headache, one of his very few works in Pidgin. (One character in the play speaks Yoruba, English being used only when a character needs to make a special point). Dealing with the relations between a rice-seller and an outstandingly tight-fisted contractor, Business Headache is a comedy of intrigue and counter-intrigue, cannily close in touch with its audience's all-too-deep awareness of the hassle and privations of street economics. The fact Ogunyemi used Pidgin and Yoruba so rarely after this early play is worth pondering: his concern to work in English reflects on his intentions for his drama, his assumptions about its status and field of reception. The degree of success he achieved in creating a style of English appropriate to his theatrical goals remained

an issue in dispute.

Still working as an actor for the Ibadan-based television authority, Ogunyemi was aware of the burgeoning activity of the Arts Theatre at the University of Ibadan. A meeting with Wole Soyinka led to his involvement as a founding member of the Orisun Theatre group which Soyinka started in 1964--an incident Ogunyemi recalled in his essay "The First Time I Saw Him" (He was involved also in another troupe of Soyinka's, The 1960 Masks). Ogunyemi's acting roles for Soyinka included the part of Dede in the film of Kongi's Harvest; he also took part in the 1965 satirical revue Before the Blackout and in the premieres of Madmen and Specialists (USA, 1970) and From Zia with Love (Italy, 1992). Over and above his long-standing working relationship with Soyinka, Ogunyemi was a highly esteemed actor, taking major roles in plays by writers as diverse as Beckett, Elroy Flecker, Ogunmola and Fugard.

In 1967 Ogunyemi enrolled for a year as a student at the School of Drama, University of Ibadan. Ogunyemi's lack of formal academic training in theatre arts distinguished him from virtually all the other major figures in Nigerian English-language drama during this period. It was a distinction Ogunyemi defended convincingly in a 1969 interview:

I believe strongly that you don't need qualifications and degrees for good drama. In fact some students who were at the School of Drama went to work with high organisations, television and so on, but they never bothered to organise a professional theatre, because of their insistence on high qualifications. If you do not insist

on these qualifications you will find many people coming in to do professional drama.

Ogunyemi was by now speaking as a very active theatre practitioner indeed. Much of his work at this time was for television: during Soyinka's imprisonment (1967 to 69, during the Civil War), Orisun Theatre was led by Dapo Adelugba, Soyinka's very close colleague and one of the most significant steering-forces behind the development of English-language drama ^{during} ^{period} ~~at this time~~. For Orisun ~~during this period~~ Ogunyemi wrote a whole succession of plays, at times as frequently as one every fortnight (he also wrote for the Armchair Theatre series). At the same time, he wrote

prolifically for the stage. Some of the stage plays were adaptations of his work for television, and vice versa: Ogunyemi was--a mark of his professionalism--a versatile reworker of his own material for specific media, specific occasions.

Amongst the stage plays that date from the late 1960s and early 1970s are several in which Ogunyemi drew on his knowledge of Yoruba religious belief and observance. Some of these plays--including The Scheme, The Challenge of Death, Poor Little Bird and Eniyar--deal with the working out of religious precepts in people's daily lives, others--such as Be Mighty, Be Mine, Obaluwaye and Eshu Elegbara--deal with the history of the pantheon of Yoruba gods.

The plot of The Scheme (first performed 1968) centres on intrigue on the part of a priestess of the god Esile, offended by the actions of the village chief: the play emphasizes in uncompromising terms the need for mankind to honour the gods to the letter of their law. The closing speech, given by the Oba (chief) Aro, insists:

The power Esile bestows

is a sacred trust

not to be used at will in private interest.

A point made by Adeluqba in his "Three Dramatists" essay is pertinent here--and to virtually all of Ogunyemi's output: the play's success in the theatre depends not only on attention to the verbal text, but to music and movement, which play an integral role, woven through the dialogue, and to the impact of properties and costume. Ogunyemi's is a theatre which depends very much on the deep significance of the musical text and on visual signifiers. Adeluqba comments: "amateur productions that have been negligent in some aspects of the mise en scène have left audiences unsatisfied."

Like The Scheme, The Challenge of Death (a television play, first broadcast 1968) deals with an ill-advised attempt by an individual to

manipulate divine law and its dictated custom. Here a rich weaver, on the advice of a babalawo (priest-diviner), tries to avert Death, sent to summon him on account of a murder he has committed. Another play to deal with the theme of proper observance of religious precepts is the one-acter Poor Little Bird (first performed 1968). Here it is a Christian schoolteacher who offends the gods, when he collaborates with a museum curator, stealing a statue of the god Esu (Ojorongbe, the curator, explains he collects such objects not to worship but to preserve them). Poor Little Bird is theatrically effective, even if thematically slight (it is far less richly powerful a play than Soyinka's The Strong Breed, which it resembles). Two points are worth making, since they reflect on much of Ogunyemi's work. First, the script in its final form was the product of a collaborative effort at rehearsals, with director and actors actively involved in fashioning the material. Second, music plays an integral role in the thematic and narrative development of the play. (In an unpublished interview recorded in 1990, Ogunyemi commented on his preference for having music manifest throughout his drama, much as it might be during the daily activities of a traditional Yoruba court).

In Eniyan, once again, Ogunyemi turned to the question of proper observance; here, though, taking an existing text, the medieval morality play Everyman, as his starting-point and producing a play that considers broadly the question of the balanced and considerate life. First performed in 1969, Eniyan is one of a number of Nigerian adaptations of Everyman (either the original medieval play or the Hofmannsthal version): the most significant of these is Eda, Duro Ladipo's Yoruba opera--a vital, grimly powerful work produced by Ladipo in part as a commentary on Nigeria's corrupt political class in the mid-1960s. Ogunyemi's play differs from Ladipo's in that--following the medieval text rather than Hofmannsthal--it strives for a greater degree of abstraction: in place of Everyman's friends, mistress, daughter, here we find the personified characteristics

of Eniyan (Character, Strength, and so on). Also notable here is the cruelty of the object-lesson Ogunyemi devises: the taunting of Poverty and the Beggar are much harsher than anything in Eda or in Obotunde Ijimere (Ulli Beier)'s Everyman (a play closely associated with the Ladipo). So, too, is the long episode in which Eniyan tries to persuade his qualities not to desert him: here there is a harshness that recurs in other plays of Ogunyemi's that dramatize judgment and retribution, such as Langbodo, Aare Akoqun and Ijaye War.

Amongst Ogunyemi's plays on the Yoruba pantheon, Be Mighty, Be Mine (first performed 1968) is a short piece in verse, dramatizing the seduction by the god Sango of the goddess Oya, wife of Ogun. The play's effectiveness derives from its manipulation of suspense--will Oya submit to Sango and (when she does) how will Ogun react?--and from its brilliant counterpointing of two types of music, ijala, associated with Ogun, and bata, associated with Sango. Be Mighty is a domestic drama, with a definite comic edge--and so closer than it might at first seem to Ogunyemi's comedy on marital conflict, The Divorce. Its emphasis on proper authority and the need to preserve unity is central to Ogunyemi's work. As in The Divorce, there is an acknowledgment of the need for measure and equability in domestic relations; an understanding of the ideological orientation of Ogunyemi's work needs to address how this latter emphasis is located in relation to his drama's promotion of established hierarchy (civil, divine, patriarchal: quantities that are closely identified one with another).

In the same year as Be Mighty, Be Mine, Ogunyemi wrote a short television play entitled Obaluaye. Written in English, this was later expanded and rewritten in Yoruba: the published text (with English translation) derives from the 1971 production (Ori Olokun Players, directed by the producer / composer Akin Euba). A music drama, Obaluaye begins with the gods lamenting the failure of mankind to observe divine law and custom: this powerful scene comprises a highly charged, highly energetic

outpouring of praise-song and anathema. When the spirit of Egungun joins the gods, it becomes clear the concern is historical as much as ~~to do with~~ "universals": recent events have been as much a cause for anger for the ancestors as for the gods (the reading of history and the reading of religious observance are for Ogunyemi inextricable). After the intense, venomous opening scene the bulk of the play depicts the predicament of a Baale (town leader) discovering he has no power to ward off a smallpox epidemic (Obaluaye, or Soponna, is the god who inflicts that disease); the disaster of the town is attributed unequivocally to the Baale's adoption of Christianity. The final scene--taking up a quarter of the text--builds up into a large-scale, multi-component, ritual propitiation by the Baale of the gods. Obaluaye carries first and foremost a tremendous sense of retributory power: it is a play set--or sunk?--in myth, a play very far away from those by Nigerian dramatists such as Femi Osofisan, who attempted to reread Yoruba religious principles in a dialectical relationship with their response to contemporary conditions, their drama providing, consequently, a critical reshaping of myth.

Another play on the pantheon, Eshu Elegbara, dates from 1970, when it was produced--in a controversially "alienating" reading, given a comic slant--by Wole Soyinka. Divided into four "parts" in the published script, the action falls essentially into two quite distinct sequences. The first (parts 1--3 of the script) deals with the attempt by the god Esu to challenge the authority of the paramount divinity, Obatala, and the eventual realization by the entire pantheon of Esu's volatile and mischievous nature. The remainder of the play demonstrates Esu's dealings with individual human beings: ^{he} challenges ^{es} and ^d confounds ^s their plans and actions--Esu being the deity who is often named (though the term is too playful) the "trickster" god. This part of the play has been performed separately, as a one-acter. In Eshu Elegbara, more perhaps than in his other plays, Ogunyemi confronts the problematic nature of members of the Yoruba pantheon. There is no

attempt, however, to resolve mankind's dilemma in searching for a proper relationship with these gods. The nature of Esu, especially, remains elusive: malicious mischief-maker, or critical (and therefore corrective) satirist?

To try too categorically to demarcate Ogunyemi's plays on Yoruba gods and religious precepts from his historical plays would be a mistake, a secularization of history that Ogunyemi would himself reject. It is legitimate, though, to note amongst individual plays differing degrees of preoccupation--differing levels of emphasis on divine intervention, on the mechanisms of human governance, on the ordering of the State and the chronology of events in Yoruba and, later, Nigerian history (a chronology that encouraged Ogunyemi to imply parallels between the country's experience in the nineteenth century and its development in the twentieth).

Aare Akogun, first produced in 1968, is a version of Macbeth--a version that condenses Shakespeare's plot into about an hour's stage action. Here supernatural forces--the witches, the wizard Osowole--are prominent; at the same time, Ogunyemi's focus is firmly on the moral health of the State, as the newly appointed Aare is compelled by his wife, Olawumi, and the witches to murder his Oba. The play oscillates between Yoruba and English. While some of the English dialogue is flaccid, the switching between languages results in a kind of feverish intensity. At the end of the play there is a different emphasis from Shakespeare's focusing on the restitution of moral order and a stable power structure: while the Aare is killed and a new political order announced, the play ends with the whole cast cowering back from the wizard Osowole, the witches and the corpse of Olawumi, center stage. The Aare's condition has been dramatized throughout as a kind of supernatural possession, the passages in which chants, proverbs, incantations are hurled at him having a ritualistic intensity. There is here the sense of a world that has lost the assurance of a system of ethics that would have the act of murder condemned: however one might view Ogunyemi's insistence

on the supernatural engineering of the carnage, Aare Akogun has to be read as a commentary on its times. Produced at the outset of the Nigerian Civil War, it stands in between Ogunyemi's plays on religious observance and two other plays--large-scale treatments of Yoruba nineteenth-century history--that he produced during the Biafra crisis, Ijaye War and Kiriji.

As he explained to Wole Adamolekun in a 1976 interview, Ogunyemi researched Ijaye War in historical accounts such as J. F. Ajayi and Robert Smith's Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century and in the Yoruba newspaper Iwe Irohin Yoruba ati Egba. Based on an internecine conflict of the 1860s, Ijaye War (first performed in 1968) dramatizes the same history as Ola Rotimi's better-known play Kurunmi.

Perhaps more conspicuously than with Rotimi (whose play was first performed in 1971), Ogunyemi believed there were crucial parallels between the Ijaye conflict and the Nigerian Civil War: in his Introduction he refers to the former as "a war against one's own blood relations, for Ibadans and Ijaiyes were kinsmen, wearing the same tribal marks and doing everything in common." Unlike Rotimi, who opens his play with a demonstration of Kurunmi's (disastrous) vitality, the warlord expressing his contempt for the enemy, Ibadan, Ogunyemi opens with a retrospective scene, a Peace Meeting in Ibadan, during which exhaustion with the war and a yearning for peace are stressed. Throughout the play, it is true, Ogunyemi depicts Kurunmi's pride and vitality, as does Rotimi (though Ogunyemi does this with nothing of the kinesthetic impact of the language Rotimi devises for the warlord). But Ogunyemi is less concerned than is Rotimi with the dilemmas of leadership (a subject Rotimi revels in). In an unpublished 1990 interview Ogunyemi stated: "Historically Kurunmi was just an actor in the war--even though a very striking one. But I felt there are things in the other camp we should learn from--we should look at the larger picture." This is indeed what Ijaye War attempts: while the tragic-hero motif is exploited by Ogunyemi (in, for example, Kurunmi's suicide scene), the picture Ijaye War portrays

is a broad one. The play, for example, extends beyond the death of Kurunmi, focusing on the continuing impact of the latter stages of the war. It touches on a wide range of issues associated with the dispute: the question of succession to the Oyo throne, for instance, and the Egba people's fear of domination from Ibadan and from Dahomey. Most of all, though, Ogunyemi is concerned to dramatize the processes leading to full-scale war, and the cruelty of what follows. In an early scene (no. 4) he depicts the taunting, then torture of prisoners^S of-war (in this scene there is an excellent example of Ogunyemi's use of the thematically significant gestus: while Kurunmi's son, Arawole, takes no part in abusing the prisoners, when he appears on the scene it is with Kurunmi's hand on his shoulder; Arawole's eventual death on the battle-field--a famous historical incident--will be anticipated by the audience at this point). Scene 8 of the play demonstrates the build-up from crisis to full-scale war (an affective parallel for the audience with the run-up to the Biafra crisis), as a human sacrifice is made, the decision taken that war is inevitable and that Oyo will join with Ibadan. A little later ~~and~~ Kurunmi's war chiefs complain of being treated with contempt, one of them accusing the warlord, "You, in your stupid way, forced our men into war without first consulting us, thinking war is a one-man affair." Here again audiences will draw a parallel with the Biafra crisis, though it is questionable whether the insights the Ogunyemi play offers enable a very firm purchase on the political and economic background to the later war. Generally, Ogunyemi's play suffers from its dependence on explicatory dialogue, on passages of debate: even while recognizing that Ogunyemi is attempting to recreate formal methods of speech, a critic such as Martin Banham is bound to admit much of the language is stilted. With a broader perspective (here) than Rotimi's, Ogunyemi still stops short of a close, analytical treatment of the causes of war. But his emphasis on the war process must have had considerable impact on the Nigerian audience of

1968: one example, his characterization of the Ibadan leader, Ogunmola, as ruthless and brutal (in the killing of Arawole, the torture of a prisoner, the bullying of the British representative, Roper) carries the point ^{that} the war was destructive and cruel far beyond the effects of the individual arrogance of Kurunmi.

Three years after the first performance of Ijaye War, Ogunyemi produced another large-scale play dealing with the nineteenth-century Yoruba conflicts, Kiriji. This was given its first performance, in Ibadan, as part of the All-Nigeria Festival of the Arts. Written for a huge cast, Kiriji is typical of Ogunyemi's drama in its exploitation of total theatre, with as much emphasis placed on music, gestus, dance, as on the verbal text. A valuable record of the production techniques used for the premiere of this work--which gives insights into Ogunyemi's conception of theatre in practice--is Dapo Adelugba's "Kiriji: The Concept of Theatre as Exploration."

Kiriji depicts the last of the major Yoruba wars, the rebellion of the Ekitiparapo, a confederation of Ekiti and Ijesha towns, against the heavy-handed authoritarianism of Ibadan. This war, which lasted from 1877 to 1886, was fought in Ogunyemi's home region, and so had a particularly poignant significance for him. Early scenes in the play demonstrate the brutality of Ibadan's intrusion on the Ekiti lands: internecine conflict is shown as being deeply repugnant here, as it is in Ijaye War. Though the plot ranges widely over its historical material--covering the forming of the Ekiti alliance, the attempt by Ibadan to marshal support to quell the rebellion--a central sequence of episodes in the first part covers the rape of the wife of an Ekiti warrior, Fabunmi, and the latter's energetic (almost frenetic) efforts to ensure war is pursued. Between the first and second acts there is a striking lacuna: the second begins with a dramatization of the peace talks led by the British colonial administrator, the Reverend J. B. Wood. These negotiations fail and conflict breaks out again;

the remainder of the play traces the faltering steps that led to final peace.

In a 1989 lecture to postgraduate students at the University of Leeds, Ogunyemi stated his intention ^{that} the play should reflect on Nigeria's contemporary political climate:

Flip through the pages of our daily newspapers, tune your radio or turn to your tv sets, and what are you confronted with? Terrorism, disasters and chaos everywhere which really is a sad reminder of our tragic past and a glimpse into a bleak future.

For this reason, Ogunyemi deliberately closes the play "on a pessimistic note." At the end of the play a quarrel breaks out between the signallers of the two opposing camps, who up to this point have been friends. When they are eventually reconciled, one of them states: "This war, which broke out many years ago, I cannot see what advantage it had been to anyone, but bloodshed, separation and neglected land". His friend replies "there will always be wars, my friend, until the day when the cat and mouse learn to live together as brothers. But I am afraid that day will never come". (In 1990, in the Institute of African Studies, where he was based, Ogunyemi had pinned to his office wall a photograph of a cat and mouse drinking milk from the same saucer).

Kiriji is a long play, in fourteen scenes, with a loose, wide-ranging narrative structuring. Only a few characters appear throughout the play or even for the bulk of it--for the most part the action moves from one group of characters to another, with new characters brought in and familiar ones dropped (a rough coding of this pattern would read: a b a b c a d c a e c f e a f g). A sceptical appraisal of Ogunyemi's writing here would see it limited by its refusal to undertake an analytical

approach of historical events. Akanji Nasiru has said (on Ogunyemi's theatre, in general): "he fails . . . because his plays are so diffused that the important points they attempt to make are not amplified enough. A lot of energy is dissipated in an attempt to cover a wide area." Nasiru's point ^{raises} ~~certainly needs applying~~ to the question ^{of} how effectively ~~can~~ ^{can} a play like Kiriji stand as a critique of current divisions, current species of authoritarianism, in Nigeria (how, in 1971, did it "speak to" the recently concluded Civil War?) But Ogunyemi's approach does enable him to deflect attention from the exceptional individual, to reflect on a whole range of social and political structures, social relations, in the context of war. The treatment of Fabunmi is significant here: glamorous, the "handsome boy", at the beginning of the play, he appears a pitiless

warmonger by the end (while the Ekiti will state, convincingly, "We do not fight without a cause"), Ogunyemi surely wishes the audience to recoil from Fabunmi's demand of his warriors a few moments later: "Just go on taking orders / Slaves do not argue"). But with his fellow Nigerian dramatists and critics, Ogunyemi's approach was increasingly bound to appear controversial. The clearest instance of this has to do with the representation of the supernatural. With an increasing emphasis placed by some prominent Nigerian writers on the reconceptualization--even the deconstruction--of myth, Ogunyemi's direct representation as part of the fabric of everyday life of witches, of effective charms and of curses, placed his work in a critically vulnerable position, however acceptable that element appeared to a large part of his audience. Kiriji is a case in point here, with its dramatization of the intervention of witches in the war.

By the time Kiriji was first performed Ogunyemi had been working for some years at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. He joined the Institute first in 1967, as Research Assistant / Transcriber. In 1969 his duties shifted to those of Senior Clerk / Transcriber, and in 1970 he was appointed as Senior Assistant Artist. Other redesignations followed: by the 1990s Ogunyemi's duties at the Institute were entirely in research and writing.

While Ogunyemi's work remained very much centred^e in Ibadan, he did travel outside Nigeria: there were visits to the United States, and from 1973 to 1974 he spent a year on study attachment to the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds, England. Annual productions of his plays in the 1990s--originally conceived for an exchange program^g between the University of Ibadan and the University of Pennsylvania--were carried out under the auspices of his own company, Wale-n-Son. Married, with five children by this time (four boys and a girl), Ogunyemi was honoured by the Nigerian State in 1981, when he was made a Member of the Order of the Niger (MON). A year

later he was made a Justice of the Peace. Ogunyemi also held a chieftaincy title, being the Majeobaje of Okuku.

1974 saw the first production of Ogunyemi's Langbodo, a play that over the next decade became his best-known work, at least outside of Nigeria. Based on the celebrated novel by D. O. Fagunwa, Ogboju Ode Rinu Igbo Irunmale Irunmale (1938: a work known to non-Yoruba readers through Soyinka's translation, The Forest of a Thousand Demons), Langbodo is a quest tale, dealing with the adventures of a group of hunters who are sent by their king to bring treasure from Mount Langbodo, treasure that will spare their home country the disease, war and famine that have plagued it for centuries. Both Fagunwa's hunters and Ogunyemi's experience a series of hazards and adventures, encountering fantastic beasts in a loosely-knit sequence similar (all differences acknowledged) to the episodic adventures undergone by the heroes of Amos Tutuola's novels. Both the episodic nature of the story and the range of beasts, birds and demons characterized here pose great challenges for stage designer and producer, though the play has been mounted with considerable success.

The play unambiguously identifies the hunters' quest with Nigeria's search for national identity--more, its search for a coherent form of national political and moral development. In Delo Layiwola's words, Langbodo "reflects the tendency of a communal aspiration towards a goal." Layiwola contrasts this play with Eriyan--a morality tale that "projects the inklings and misapplication of an individual psyche [in its questing] towards self-accomplishment." There is, however, a strong continuity between the two plays, in that Eriyan's failings are characteristic of Nigeria's socio-political climate: the projection of moral failure here takes on a national dimension.

Ogunyemi points the quest's relevance to contemporary Nigeria in speeches contemptuously derisive of that country's political and economic ordering. As Ostrich proclaims, the hunters' land is "[a] country of filth where human life is of no value . . . [a] country where the rich become richer and the poor, poorer; where respect for people's opinion is a thing forgotten." Ogunyemi goes so far as to introduce to Fagunwa's original two Mediums, who argue whether the journey should succeed or not, the First pouring scorn on the idea of saving a country full of dishonest people. The leader of the hunters' group, Akara ^{Ogun,} ~~Ogun,~~ is characterized as retaining throughout the quest the ideal of service to his country. Ogunyemi expands upon the idea ^{that} the other hunters are less reliable, in order to emphasize the importance of self-control, of proper conduct: the last part of the play is Ogunyemi's invention--a denouement considerably more pessimistic

than in the original and one that registered a powerful impact on an audience familiar with the novel. Eventually the responsibility for establishing a humane and just civil society is identified with the individual good conscience, as the First Medium insists "Mount Langbodo is in your home, your street, your town, your village, your country" (a line whose antecedents include Luke ²(17: 20--1): "The kingdom of God does not come by looking for it . . . for the kingdom of god is in your midst" ^{J.F.})

In his note to the play Ogunyemi points out: .

I wrote this play drawing much from the diverse cultures of Nigeria Therefore, producers should ^{feel} free to relate the play to the contemporary event and adapt the songs and sequences to reflect and embrace the cultures of the Country in mounting the production.

Ogunyemi had some fears for his security when the 1974 production was taken from the University of Ibadan to Lagos. Lines on freedom of expression and on corrupt leadership seemed likely to offend the authorities in a country under the military regime of General Gowon. In a 1990 interview Ogunyemi described how he and the cast were approached at a Lagos night-club by security men who had been recording the play; in an interview with Dapo Adelugba, producer Bayo Oduneye discusses the controversy the play caused and the changes that had to be made to the script. When the play was revived for FESTAC in 1977, in a lavish production under Dapo Adelugba, the original script was used (this being under the more tolerant regime of General Obasanjo). A further production (1984--85) was seen both in Nigeria and in London. Adelugba's discussion of these later productions in his article "Langbodo: The Concept of Theatre as Exploration" is especially interesting in describing the process by which the play was realized as an exploration of the state of the nation. Employing for the 1977 production a huge team of 250, with three separate casts, Adelugba and his assistants drew upon dance, music and theatre ^{the} repertoires from all over Nigeria, intending to

create through the production "a ritual of national self-recognition."

After Langbodo the next major play of Ogunyemi's to be premiered was The Divorce, written during his year at Leeds and given its first performances in Ibadan in 1975. The two plays could not be further apart (except perhaps in their inherent conservatism): after the epic quest narrative of Langbodo, in The Divorce Ogunyemi turned to a treatment of marital strife amongst the Lagos élites, with a play that shifts from farce to serious domestic drama (and from there to a wish-fulfilment^g ending).

The Preface to the play notes, somewhat muddily, "The Divorce attacks half-measures in both prestigious social commitments and the matrimonial homes." The plot circles around businessman Sanmi's belief that his wife, Tayo, is conducting an affair with the young man Michael. Though this is not the case--and the discovery at the end of the play that Michael is Tayo's brother dissolves any residue of suspicion the plot may have left standing--the play's dialogue leaves no doubt that it is Tayo's responsibility to win her husband's confidence, to make the marriage work. Cleverly plotted (though the ending strains credibility), The Divorce is probably most successful when it shifts into farcical comedy: for example, in the scene in which Tayo tries to persuade a slow-witted policeman there is a burglar in her bedroom. Nigerian audiences took special pleasure in the characterization of the houseboy, Patrick (a Pidgin role): by 1990 one actor, Ikem Emodi, had played the part over a hundred times. With The Lion and the Jewel and The Trials of Brother Jero (both by Soyinka), The Divorce was probably the most^g frequently performed English-language drama in Nigeria during the 1970s and 80s.

During the 1990s Ogunyemi continued to work both for broadcast media and for the stage. In an earlier play, Sign of the Rainbow (BBC broadcast, 1972), he had demonstrated his mastery of the medium of radio. A tightly^g plotted piece, concise and expertly paced, this play is a straightforward dramatization of the "mammy water" myth. The Fish Bone (unpublished;

BBC broadcast, 1990) is quite different: a somewhat subdued comedy, the plot of which turns on the financial obligations imposed by the extended family system. The stage play Partners in Business (published 1991) is a domestic melodrama set, like The Divorce, in a bourgeois home. Here Ogunyemi shows a typically astute sense of pacing and control of the plot's mounting tension; as elsewhere, though, the orientation of the play is highly conservative. Again as in The Divorce it is the wife's culpability that generates the action: having had an adulterous liaison with a trading partner--who is then executed for his assumed part in a robbery--Rayisatu finds her lover coming back to haunt her and the illegitimate son she bore him. In this play's heightened-realistic mise-en-scène Ogunyemi's literal presentation of the supernatural has more transparently conservative implications than it does in the pantheon plays.

Ogunyemi was almost from the outset an exceptionally prolific writer. Apart from the seventeen plays discussed above, there were dozens of works that remained unpublished. These included The Night of the Oro Cult (1969); the historical drama Aole; Obatala and Ojiya (both produced in 1972, at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee); We Can Always Create; The Dirge (1990), and many plays written for television (for Orisun Theatre and Armchair Theatre in the 1960s and later for series such as For Better for Worse and Bello's Way). Critical reservations about Ogunyemi's achievement focused on his conservatism--his non-dynamic vision of historical processes, for example, and an admittedly highly representative chauvinism--and on the question whether the English dialogue of his plays was as vital as other aspects of his stagecraft merited. Tejumola Olaniyan made a valid point, writing in the 1980s, asking "why the apparently "undeserved" critical silence on Ogunyemi's works", and then going on to suggest the problem lay in the very diversity of his output, that he was yet to carve out "a distinctive form" for his vision, that he "[seemed] to have a

superior in virtually every aspect of his art." As against this, one has to note the fact ^{that} Ogunyemi's work commanded enthusiastic audiences and that even the large-scale works, very demanding to stage, enjoyed regular revivals. It is in assessing his audiences' response to his theatre ^{that} the scope and nature--and limitations--of Ogunyemi's achievement ~~could~~ ^{can} best be understood.

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