The aim of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) syllabus in Literature in English is to prepare the candidates for the Board’s examination. It is designed to test their achievement of the course objectives, which are to:

1. Stimulate and sustain their interest in Literature in English;
2. Create an awareness of the general principles and functions of language;
3. Appreciate literary works of all genres and across all cultures;
4. Apply the knowledge of Literature in English to the analysis of social, political and economic events in the society.

1. DRAMA
   a. Types:
      i. Tragedy
      ii. Comedy
      iii. Tragicomedy
      iv. Melodrama
      v. Farce
   b. Dramatic Techniques
      i. Characterisation
      ii. Dialogue
iii. Flashback
iv. Mime
v. Costume
vi. Music/Dance
vii. Décor
viii. Acts/Scenes
ix. Soliloquy/aside etc.

c. Interpretation of the Prescribed Texts
i. Theme

ii. Plot

iii. Socio-political context

Candidates should be able to:

i. identify the various types of drama;

ii. analyse the contents of the various types of drama;

iii. compare and contrast the features of different dramatic types;

iv. demonstrate adequate knowledge of dramatic techniques used in each prescribed text;

v. differentiate between styles of selected playwrights;

vi. determine the theme of any prescribed text;

vii. identify the plot of the play;

viii. apply the lessons of the play to everyday living.

2. PROSE

a. Types:

i. Fiction
   · Novel
   · Novella
   · Short story

ii. Non-fiction
   · Biography
   · Autobiography
   · Memoir

b. Narrative Techniques/Devices:

i. Point of view
   · Omniscient/Third Person
   · First Person

ii. Setting

   · Temporal
   · Spatial/Geographical
Candidates should be able to:

i. Characterisation
   - Round characters
   - Flat characters

iv. Language use

c. Textual Analysise
   i. Theme
   ii. Plot
   iii. Socio-political context

3. POETRY

a. Types:
   i. Sonnet
   ii. Ode
   iii. Lyrics
   iv. Elegy
   v. Ballad
   vi. Panegyric
   vii. Epic
   viii. Blank Verse

b. Poetic Devices
   i. Structure
   ii. Imagery
   iii. Rhyme/Rhythm

Candidates should be able to:

i. differentiate between types of prose;

ii. identify the category that each prescribed text belongs to;

iii. analyse the components of each type of prose;

iv. identify the narrative techniques used in each of the prescribed texts;

v. determine an author’s narrative style;

vi. distinguish between one type of character from another;

vii. determine the thematic pre-occupation of the author of the prescribed text;

viii. indicate the plot of the novel;

ix. relate the prescribed text to real life situations.

Candidates should be able to:

i. identify different types of poetry;

ii. compare and contrast the features of different poetic types:

iii. determine the devices used by various poets;

iv. show how poetic devices are used for aesthetic effect in each poem;
iv. Diction  
v. Persona  
c. Appreciation  
   i. Thematic preoccupation  
   ii. Socio-political relevance  

4. GENERAL LITERARY PRINCIPLES  
a. Literary terms:  
foreshadowing, suspense, theatre, monologue, dialogue, soliloquy, symbolism, protagonist, antagonist, figures of speech, satire, stream of consciousness etc,  
in addition to those listed above under the different genres.  
b. Relationship between literary terms and principles.  

5. LITERARY APPRECIATION  
Unseen passage/extracts from Drama, Prose and Poetry.  
v. deduce the poet’s preoccupation from the poem;  
vi. appraise poetry as an art with moral values;  
vi. apply the lessons from the poem to real life situations.  
Candidates should be able to:  
i. identify literary terms in drama, prose and poetry;  
ii. differentiate between literary terms and principles;  
iii. use literary terms appropriately.  
Candidates should be able to:  
i. determine literary devices used in a given passage/extract;  
ii. provide a meaningful interpretation of the given passage/extract;  
iii. relate the extract to true life experiences.  

A LIST OF SELECTED AFRICAN AND NON-AFRICAN PLAYS, NOVELS AND POEMS  
Drama: African:  
1. Femi Osofisan: Women of Owu  

Non African:  
1. William Shakespeare: The Tempest  

Prose: African:  
1. Asare Konadu: A woman in Her Prime  
2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Purple Hibiscus  

Non African:  
1. Ernest Hemingway: The Old Man and The Sea  

Poetry: African:  
1. Gbemisola Adeoti: Hard lines  
2. P.O.C. Umeh: Ambassadors of Poverty  
3. Shola Owonibi: Homeless not Hopeless
iv. Syl Cheney-Coker: Myopia
v. Jared Angira: Expelled
vi. Traditional: Serenade.

Non African:
i. John Donne: The Sun Rising
ii. Sir Walter Raleigh: The Soul’s Errand
iii. Langston Hughes: Negro Speaks of Rivers
iv. John Fletcher: Upon an Honest Man’s Fortune.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

1. ANTHOLOGIES


2. CRITICAL TEXTS

for Overseas Students, George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Pass at Once JAMB.
Talent fused with creativity last Saturday when a play, Once Upon An Elephant, written by Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan (PhD), a lecturer in the University of Lagos, was staged.

The play performance, handled by the first year students of English, Creative Arts and Education departments of the university as part of the Theatre Workshop course, revealed the dramatic potential of the young scholars.

Many of the audience comprising students, lecturers, art lovers and critics commended the efforts of the director, Saheed Bello, after watching the play satirising the sit-tight syndrome of African leaders. Ademilua-Afolayan has never left anyone in doubt of her ingenuity as a playwright. In 2012, her play, Look Back in Gratitude, a textual reference to John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger won inspiring reviews from critics who were impressed with its staging by a set of first year students.

Also, Once Upon An Elephant explores similar themes distillable in some play texts by celebrated playwrights such as Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan among others.

Through characters such as power-drunk King Olaniyonu a.k.a Ajanaku, the grey-haired Iya agba who is one of the wives of former king Akinjobi, mischief-personified Serubawon including other major characters, the playwright exceptionally deepened her preoccupation in a way that left the audience asking for more.

The university’s Art Theatre, venue of the performance, was gripped by suspense as the playwright artistically struck a denouement for the play resonating richness in drums, props, make-up, set design, costumes and lighting.

Ademilua-Afolayan said the play examined the issue of dictatorship of African leaders at different levels of governance.

She said, “It amuses me why a mortal would want to achieve immortality either by prolonging his or her stay in office or by wanting to play god in the lives of other men. This issue has begotten several plays by seasoned dramatists such as Soyinka’s A Play of Giants, Opera Wonyosi, Kongi’s Harvest and King Baabu, Osofisan’s Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest, Ahmed Yerima’s Ade Ire and Uncle Venyil and Hope Eghagha’s Onowawi Shall Rise Again.”

The lecturer added that the recurrence of the theme showed something was wrong with African politics.

“Such an aberration has also been culturally dealt with in Yoruba folklore from which this play derives its title. The play’s uniqueness rests on its use of suspense and irony. Above all, it highlights the role of women as cause and solution-provider in a story in which they may be complicit,” Ademilua-Afolayan stated.

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WE ARE STUNNED!...ALMOST 20,000 STUDENTS FROM WEST AFRICA HAVE VISITED OUR BLOG IN THE LAST 48 HRS TO READ NOTES ON “A WOMAN IN HER PRIME” AND “WOMEN OF OWU”!

WE PROVIDED THESE NOTES AS FAR BACK AS SEPTEMBER LAST YEAR!

“A WOMAN IN HER PRIME” BY ASADU KONARE

1. revision-notes-of-a-woman-in-her-prime-by-asare-konadu-for-waecneco-literature-exams-33/

2. additional-critiques-of-a-woman-in-her-prime-for-waecneco-exams-34/


“WOMEN OF OWU” BY FEMI OSOFISAN
BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS OF FEMI OSOFISAN AUTHOR “WOMEN OF OWU” (FOR READ ONLY, NOT ESSENTIAL FOR WAEC/NECO EXAMS) (62)

THIS SLIDESHOW FEATURES PICS FROM DIFFERENT MOVIES AND STAGE PLAYS OF TROJAN WOMEN OR WOMEN OF OWU

About the Author (2006 CITATION)

Femi Osofisan is a prolific Nigerian critic, poet, novelist, and playwright whose work attacks political corruption and injustice, was born in Erunwon village in the old Western Region of Nigeria and educated at the universities of Ibadan, Dakar, and Paris; he is a professor of drama at the University of Ibadan. Among the literary awards and commendations he has won are prizes from the...
Femi Osofisan is a critic, poet, novelist, essayist, lecturer, editor, publisher, culture activist, the most prolific, most performed and the most enthusiastically received playwright in Nigeria. He has written and produced over 40 plays. Numbered among them are Midnight Hotel, Morountodun, Who is Afraid of Solarin?, Birthdays are not for the Dying, and his latest play, Ajayi Crowther. His poems published under the pseudonym, Okinba Launko are Minted Coins and Dream Seeker on Diving Chain. His writing employs a range of literary devices such as humour, irony, song, dance folktale and fables. No doubt Osofisan says one of his favourite books is Toyin Falola’s A Mouth Sweeter than Salt. Reason being “the quality of its language, its extraordinary use of proverbs, its humor, its sense of history, and the robust and rippling picture it paints of the history and the politics of Ibadan at a time contemporaneous with my own life in the city.”

Femi Osofisan was born 60 years ago in Erunwon Village in the old western region of Nigeria. He was educated at the universities of Ibadan, Dakar and Paris. He has held several posts and won several awards, the most recent, the 2006 Fonlon-Nichols Award bestowed annually on an African writer for excellence in creative writing and for contributions to the struggles for human rights. Osofisan is stationed as the President of Pen Nigerian centre and was the immediate General Manager of the National Theatre, Lagos. He is married to Nike Osofisan, the first Nigerian PhD holder in Computer Science and they have four children.

BIOGRAPHY OF FEMI OSOFISAN (3RD CITATION-wikipedia)

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 Senegal in Dakar and later the University of Ibadan. He continued post-graduate studies at the University of Ibadan and went on to hold several posts and win several awards, the most recent, the 2006 Fonlon-Nichols Award bestowed annually on an African writer for excellence in creative writing and for contributions to the struggles for human rights. Osofisan is stationed as the President of Pen Nigerian centre and was the immediate General Manager of the National Theatre, Lagos. He is married to Nike Osofisan, the first Nigerian PhD holder in Computer Science and they have four children.
faculty positions at the University.

Works


Once upon Four Robbers. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1991


Books by Femi Osofisan

2. The Oriki of a Grasshopper, and Other Plays (1995)
5. Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen (1991)
6. Birthdays are Not for Dying and Other Plays (1990)
15. Excursions in drama and literature: Interviews with Femi Osofisan (1993)
16. Farewell to a Cannibal Rage (1986)
17. Midnight Hotel (1986)

Femi Osofisan (4TH CITATION)

b. 1946

Playwright, essayist, editor, and poet Femi Osofisan was born in Erunwon, Nigeria. He frequently published poetry under the pen name Okinba Launko, and his collections include Dream-seeker in Divining Chain (1993), Cordelia (1989), and Minted Coins (1987), which won the Association of Nigerian Authors’ Poetry Prize.


Books Written/Other Works (Another list)

Women of Owu
Major Plays 2.
African Theatre in Development:
African Theatre: Women
The Oriki of a Grasshopper and Other Plays
African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics
African Theatre 8: Diasporas
African Theatre 9: Histories 1850-1950
African Theatre: Soyinka: Blackout, Blowout and Beyond
African Theatre: Youth
The album of the midnight blackout
Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen (Heinemann Frontline)
Birthdays are Not for Dying and Other Plays (Malthouse African drama series)
The Chattering and the Song
The engagement: A play
Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels
Kolera Kolej (Opon Ifa Readers)
Literature and the Pressures of Freedom: Essays, Speeches and Songs
Morountodun and other plays
The Nostalgic Drum: Essays on Literature, Drama and Culture
Two One-act Plays: Oviki of a Grasshopper AND Altine’s Wrath
Who’s Afraid of Solarin?
African Theatre: Southern Africa
Major Plays 1 (bk. 1)
Once Upon Four Robbers (Heinemann Frontline)
Who’s Afraid of Solarin? A Play in Honour of Dr. Tai Solarin
Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest: A Parable for Our Times (Heinemann Frontline Series)
Excursions in drama and literature: Interviews with Femi Osofisan
Farewell to a cannibal rage
Midnight hotel
Another Raft (Malthouse literary series)
Beyond translation: (a comparatist look at tragic paradigms and the dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi) (Ife monographs on literature and criticism)
Kolera Kolej
Many Colors Make the Thunder-King
Once upon four robbers: [play]
Recent outings II: Two plays comprising Nkrumah-ni Africa-ni! and Reel, Rwanda!
Recent outings: Two plays comprising T.eg.onni, an African antigone and Many colours make the thunder-king
A restless run of locusts (African literature series)
Twingle-twangle: A twynnig tayle (Drumbeat drama)
Who’s afraid of solarin?

Femi Osofisan (At 60)

Ten years ago i played Digbaro in one of Osofisan’s plays Twingle Twangle a Twynnig tales. That

was ten years ago, and it was to commemorate his 50th birthday anniversary. Suprisingly,

Okinba launko is 60. How time flies ? I cant say much about him because so much has been said

already...about his literary ingenuity, his passion for humanity. Femi Osofisan is a combination of

the very good every human being aspires to be.

My short time of apprenticeship with him has seen a dramatic influence in my life.Thanks Elereko

for always giving us your pocket of generosity to steal from.Ase yi samodun o, Emi yin a se pupo

odun laye .Ase.
Femi Osofisan at 60

It was an exhilarating moment for me on the 13th of June as I organized The Celebration of a Literary Icon, Femi Osofisan at 60 at the Performing Arts department of the Redeemer’s University.

I was elated to have the likes of Biodun Jeyifo, Dr. and Mrs. Malomo, Nduka Otiono and others at the ceremony which witnessed readings of Femi Osofisan’s poems from Minted Coins and songs from Twingle Twangle…a play I acted so many minor roles as part of his 50th birthday ceremony when I was an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan. He is my father in the dramatic arts, my teacher, artistic director (Kakaun Sela Company) and my mentor whose record I secretly aspire to beat. And so I was glad when he honored my invitation making it the first time F.O would enter the Redemption camp.

As part of the celebration, F.O spoke on THE CREATIVE WRITER AS A CATALYST TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT and also inaugurated the Redeemer’s University’s Literary Circle (RLC)

Many Happy Returns, Ekun

Related articles

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“WOMEN OF OWU” IN BRITISH THEATRES (2)…REVIEWS/CRITIQUES (61)

CONTINUED FROM: “WOMEN OF OWU” (THE TROJAN WOMEN) IN BRITISH THEATRES (1)…REVIEWS/CRITIQUES (60)

REVIEW NO 6.

REVIEW BASED ON BRITISH TOUR

THIS SLIDESHOW FEATURES PICS FROM DIFFERENT MOVIES AND STAGE PLAYS OF TROJAN WOMEN OR WOMEN OF OWU
Abstract

Femi Osofisan’s Women of Owu—paraphrase in performance. (Critical essay)

Research in African Literatures By Gotrick, Kacke

ABSTRACT

Femi Osofisan’s play Women of Owu is a “re-reading” of Euripides’s Women of Troy. Although the play was commissioned for a British production, Osofisan communicates with his compatriots as well. In order to reach both categories of spectators he works with two different semiotic systems. The systems function separately, but for spectators conversant with both systems, they enhance each other. The essay analyzes the 2004 London production and discusses the perception of some hypothetical groups of spectators and the skill with which Osofisan—and the director Chuck Mike—guided the interpretative strategies and so made it possible for the spectators, in spite of their different competences, to see the production as lashing out against mankind’s habits of solving conflicts by means of war, be it in the European Athens of antiquity, in the nineteenth-century Yoruba Kingdom of Owu, or in present-day conflicts around the world.

**********

For many years Femi Osofisan has been extremely active in the theater, as a playwright and director as well as a scholar and teacher. He has created more than fifty plays; he continuously contributes to the scholarly debate; and he is a consistent critic of his society and his time. Only occasionally does the West have a chance to see his art on the stage. One such example is Osofisan’s rewriting of Euripides’s Women of Troy, or The Trojan Women, a rewriting that resulted in the production Women of Owu in London, in February 2004.

Osofisan had rewritten or reworked other dramas before, and he is careful to state clearly that he has done so. (1) Obviously, it is important to him that his message be perceived in relation to an already existing drama. In most cases the aim of Osofisan’s intertextuality is to oppose the rewritten drama, but there are also cases where he intensifies the message of the original drama. The London production likewise emphasizes intertextuality. Already the front page of the program announces “An African Interpretation of Euripides Trojan Women,” where “Trojan Women” is written in larger letters than “Women of Owu,” which is the title of the production. (2) In other words, it is emphasized that the work is a paraphrase and that one’s understanding of it ought to be informed by Euripides’s text.

Perceiving a performance as a paraphrase, however, presupposes access to the work being paraphrased, in this case Euripides’s The Trojan Women. It is through similarities and differences to this play that Osofisan’s own message is conveyed. It is assumed that spectators will be able to compare the performance and the paraphrased text during the performance itself. This is asking a lot of the audience! Irrespective of where a production takes place, only a few spectators have sufficient knowledge about Euripides’s play The Trojan Women to be able to compare the two plays during the unfolding of a performance. Osofisan actually demands even more of his audience, since he also paraphrases a part of Wole Soyinka’s play Death and the King’s Horseman. The program does not mention this intertextuality, perhaps because even far fewer spectators are able to perceive it.

But does that really mean that the London production addressed only an audience who could perceive it as a paraphrase? It does not seem probable that Osofisan would wish to exclude a majority of a potential audience. At the 2004 London production, a British audience was, of course, expected to come, and a British audience represents a variety of backgrounds. Not everyone can catch the allusions to Euripides and/or his The Trojan Women. Furthermore, Women of Owu is most likely to be produced in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, too. In Nigeria, plays like Osofisan’s are usually produced at university theaters, but not even all of the academic spectators can be expected to have Euripides’s text (or Soyinka’s, for that matter) present in mind. So the audience addressed is likely to be heterogeneous.

With the London production as a point of departure, this article will analyze the perception of some hypothetical groups of spectators. What messages are different groups of spectators likely to perceive? Did Osofisan and Chuck Mike, the director, try to make possible similar interpretations for all groups of spectators in spite of their different competences? (3) The spectators, irrespective of being British or Nigerian nationals, will inevitably fall into two groups, one group being capable of seeing the performance as a paraphrase, and the other group being unable to do so. Some spectators belonging to the former group might be specialists not only in Euripides and his plays but also in the context in which he worked and in which his plays were originally staged. Other spectators might only have seen a performance of The Trojan Women and/or might have prepared their visit to the London performance of Women of Owu by reading The Trojan Women. In the following discussion, however, I refer to them as “Euripides-competent spectators” and “spectators with classical competence.” Another group of spectators has knowledge of Nigerian—and
influences how the rest of the play will be perceived. Spectators with Yoruba competence are informed by
Therefore, they see the horrors of war from a general perspective. This difference in spectator perspectives
spectators with classical competence alone are likely to miss this, and so, to them, Owu is fictional.
competent spectators to find important references to a political reality of Owu in the recent past. But
audience aware of the horrors of the Peloponnesian Wars, Osofisan’s rewriting makes it easy for Yoruba-
women frequently refer to their future as slaves in a foreign country. Where Euripides tried to make his
interpretation, both plays show the horrors of war. Cities become ruins. Even infants are killed. The surviving
and then sacked, their citizens scattered or were taken as prisoners of war. On an easily accessible level of
autonomous city-states forced to give up their sovereignty when, having been under siege for a long time
kingdoms devastated, and as a result colonialism was established.

At the first performance I saw, my immediate impression was that Femi Osofisan and Chuck Mike had made a
very thorough Yorubanization. For a spectator knowing nothing about Euripides’s drama it was easy to
think that the play had its roots in Nigerian theater only. And for spectators conversant with Euripides’s The
Trojan Women and its historical background, an important dimension was added to Osofisan’s play.
Furthermore, it appeared quite evidently important to Osofisan and Mike that the audience perceive the
production with Euripides’s text as the background.

The year is 1821, according to the program. The stage shows a sand-colored landscape with a ruined wall in
the middle. At times the ruins can also be seen as tents. A tree without leaves stands in the back, and close
to it a shrine can be seen. Here, a musician dressed as a soldier sits most of the time. Music is played
throughout most of the performance. Two standing drums—a dundun drum on one occasion—sekere, a gong,
and a rattle are the instruments used to create an atmosphere, to help change the tempo and to accentuate
the action. Mostly the front stage is used as acting area.

A conversation between an elderly man, dressed in flowing blue gown of aso oke, and two women reveals
the events of the previous day, when the city of Owu was sacked by a besieging army. The enemy set the
thatched roofs on fire, killed the fleeing men, entered the town, and went from house to house killing all male
children, raping and killing or taking all women as prisoners. The elderly man reveals himself as the god
Anlugbua, Owu’s foremost protector. Anlugbua has repeatedly been called upon in the past to protect his
own town, but he has heard nothing.

The surviving women, all dressed in traditional blue adire, now dirty, lament their dead husbands and
children and fear their own future as slaves. As signs of their grief, their hair is cut and their bare shoulders
are made gray by ashes. Among the women is Erelu Afin, the queen. She considers herself to have lost
more than the others, since she has led a better life. The priestess Orisaye vows to avenge the atrocities by
murdering the victor who has demanded her in marriage.

The god Anlugbua, now in purple with white triangles as a sign of his ancestral position, meets his mother,
the goddess Lawumi, who admits to having started the war, because Owu has gone into the slave trade.
Now she wants to punish the soldiers she sent there before, among other reasons because they have
desecrated her own priestess. Erelu is made to watch her grandchild being taken away to be killed. Iyunloye,
her daughter-in-law, is said to be the reason for the war, yet she is pardoned by the husband she left to come
to Owu. Just before the final departure, the queen goes into a funerary ritual, but dies when she is overtaken
by the forces called forth. The other women lament her death and the final collapse of the kingdom.
Anlugbua condemns them all, since they have not learnt from history.

As we see, Osofisan keeps very close to Euripides’s drama. Although when writing his Trojan Women,
Euripides had the real Peloponnesian wars in mind, he concealed his critique of the brutal treatment of
prisoners of war by making the story take place in a mythical past. But in Osofisan’s rewriting the story takes
place in the historically existing Kingdom of Owu in what today is Nigeria. Spectators with a good knowledge
of Nigerian history know that Owu was one of the oldest and most important Yoruba city-states, perhaps
already founded in the twelfth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century, slave trade and control of
the trade routes to the British trade markets on the coast yielded great profits. The Owu War, 1814-1820, to
which Women of Owu refers, is seen as the start of a series of wars between Yoruba kingdoms with the
foremost purpose being to take prisoners to sell as slaves to the British. Populations were scattered and
kings devastated, and as a result colonialism was established.

There are several similarities between Euripides’s mythical Troy and Osofisan’s historical Owu: both were
autonomous city-states forced to give up their sovereignty when, having been under siege for a long time
and then sacked, their citizens scattered or were taken as prisoners of war. On an easily accessible level of
interpretation, both plays show the horrors of war. Cities become ruins. Even infants are killed. The surviving
women frequently refer to their future as slaves in a foreign country. Where Euripides tried to make his
audience aware of the horrors of the Peloponnesian Wars, Osofisan’s rewriting makes it easy for Yoruba-
competent spectators to find important references to a political reality of Owu in the recent past. But
spectators with classical competence alone are likely to miss this, and so, to them, Owu is fictional.
Therefore, they see the horrors of war from a general perspective. This difference in spectator perspectives
influences how the rest of the play will be perceived. Spectators with Yoruba competence are informed by
Ososfisan's references to Owu and may quickly develop an interpretative strategy leading them to see the action in relation to a specific, actual history, including its economic background and effects. Spectators without Yoruba competence cannot use these references, of course, but see the rest of the performance either against a Greek background or as pure fiction, depicting war in general. These two competence groups thus have different predispositions to interpret the rest of the performance, although both groups have the theme of “horrors of war” in common.

In Euripides’s drama, the war is started for a flimsy reason: the beautiful Helen. In the London production of Women of Owu, Iyunloye–Helens counterpart–is not only beautiful but also clearly influenced by the West: her dress is Western in colors and style; even her body is Western with cosmetics, an enormous, colored hairdo, bleached skin, and Western body language. She becomes a symbol of the West. And she is not in mourning. To Yoruba-competent spectators it is obvious that the two men fighting over Iyunloye show how they are enchanted and overpowered by the treacherous West. Iyunloye succeeds in turning the head of her husband whom she has voluntarily left so as to enjoy the luxury of Owu rather than living in “the small and wretched hamlet of life.” She is not only accepted and pardoned by him; she also becomes the supreme victor. Only Iyunloye does not lose anything but can, unruflfed, conquer one man after the other, although the defeated women as well as the victorious soldiers see through her double-dealing. To them the war is about the favors of a fallen female, “the queen of lust” in Erelu’s words, and the warring men do not see her as she really is. But she can pit them against each other and so win over both of them.

Spectators who know Owu history and who see Iyunloye as a symbol of the West can read her strategy as the old well-known tactic of divide-and-rule, a Western strategy also at work in the historical Owu War. These spectators are warned against powers moved by similar motives and forces. To them, the war means horrors to victors and defeated alike. Only the West remains unharmed by wars caused by struggles about Western values. While Ososfisan was rewriting the play, the US invasion of Iraq took place, and the dialogue makes clear references to it, for instance, when the women keep referring to the soldiers as “allied forces,” and when they satirize the invaders’ motives as being “lofty ideas, like freedom or human rights,” rather than market profit. One woman accuses the invaders: “Liars! You came you said, to help free our people from a wicked king. Now, after your liberation, here we are with our spirits broken and our faces swollen.” (7)

To spectators with a good knowledge of Yoruba history, the connection with the real Owu War is very pronounced. For them, slave trade as a result of greed may become a new explanation of the causes behind the actual Owu Wars, which devastated the area and facilitated British colonization. Such an interpretation makes the reason behind the colonization more complex and points not only to an external enemy, but also to an internal one. Internal objectives instigated the trade and made colonization easier. War and colonization are parts of internal Yoruba history, and responsibility must be demanded also of their own leaders, who satisfied their own wishes rather than considering the needs of the majority.

Spectators with only classical competence are likely to interpret Iyunloye as a flimsy cause of war, so they may see a hidden agenda of egotistic and irrational reasons behind wars in general. In order to emphasize the evil of wars in general, Ososfisan reinforces some lines by Euripides, turning them into a kind of leitmotif by repeating “it is the law of war,” “it is the law of conquest,” “it is the law of combat, the law of defeat” and similar phrases throughout the dialogue. (8) The phrases also convey the victors’ attempt to evade responsibility by presenting evil as a law of nature. This is refuted at the end, however, when the god Anlugbu expresses his view that as long as humans do not learn from history they have wasted their life. By adding these variations of the leitmotif to Euripides’s play, Ososfisan makes it possible for all spectators to reach the interpretation that the play warns against war in general. If Euripides voiced his warnings 2, 400 years ago, and humans have learnt nothing since then, what chance is there that they will learn within the near future?!

The gods play an important part in Euripides’s play: they open the drama; they direct and even play with the human beings; they are repeatedly referred to by the mortals. The gods and the whole mythology around them were well known to Euripides’s contemporaries. The classical education of our time, regardless of whether it is taught in Great Britain or Nigeria, contains a part of this knowledge. But to spectators lacking classical competence, the gods in The Trojan Women are taken to be fictitious characters on a par with all the other characters of the fictional drama. The same goes for Ososfisan’s Women of Owu: spectators lacking Yoruba competence see the gods as purely fictitious dramatis personae. The Yoruba pantheon and the Greek pantheon alike are characterized as being very human. The numerous gods behave like human beings, being subject to many failings and follies. In their quarrels they often use human beings as their instruments. In Euripides’s drama, Poseidon and Athena, appearing in a prologue, take prominent positions. Classically competent spectators know Poseidon as the son of Chronus, the god of creation. Poseidon is taken to be the god of the sea, although he originally was the god of waters in general. These spectators probably also know that Athena, together with Hera and Artemis, once initiated and participated in a kind of beauty contest. When asked to be their judge, Paris chose Artemis—and so made Athena and Hera his enemies. When Artemis then kept her promise to give him the most beautiful woman, Helen, as his reward, Hera and Athena used this as a reason for revenge and consequently instigated the Trojan War. A modern audience is likely to see their revenge as the losers’ egotistical reaction to the result of the contest.

The opening dialogue between Poseidon and Athena reveals that Athena, because of her enmity towards Troy, has started the war, making the Athenians her tools. However, when the Athenians did not respect the divine temples in Troy, she changed her mind and decided to punish those soldiers who had just carried out her revenge. Their journey home is to be made as difficult as possible. So already the prologue makes it quite clear that the war as well as its consequences are initiated by the gods, although the very basic reason for them to do so remains unclear. On the surface of things, then, it is the interrelations between the gods
A modern audience might apprehend Euripides’s drama as a critique of the fickleness of the gods, maybe even as a critique of religion. Such a reading should suit Osofisan very well, since he has done something similar in some earlier plays. (10) In his paraphrase, he has not only utilized this possibility but also strengthened the impression given by Euripides’s drama. In Women of Owu, Athena’s counterpart is Lawumi. In Yoruba mythology she was the first-born daughter to Odudua, the god of creation, who sent her together with other gods to Earth. She married an earthly man and gave birth to a son, Anlugbua, who built the town of Owu (Johnson 7 ff.; Ajayi and Smith 1). Osofisan’s paraphrase follows Euripides’s original very closely, when Lawumi demonstrates her fickleness by turning from supporting the war on Owu by the Ijebu-Ife allies to punishing the allies. Her reason is that the allied soldiers did not respect her priestesses, and other gods are said to have reacted in the same way. Fickleness and lust for revenge are, then, Lawumi’s obvious characteristics. Anlugbua is Osofisan’s counterpart to Poseidon. According to Akin L. Mabogunje and J. D. Omer-Cooper, he was a great general who founded the Owu kingdom and was deified upon his death. He promised to return from the dead, if his people needed him and called him. Osofisan makes Anlugbua the god of the elements, which to some extent corresponds to Poseidon’s position in Euripides’s drama.

Not even spectators with general knowledge of the Yoruba pantheon can be expected to have a good knowledge of Lawumi and Anlugbua, since the literature hardly mentions Lawumi, and Anlugbua is part of the history of the Kingdom of Owu only. (11) To spectators lacking Yoruba competence, the gods Lawumi and Anlugbua remain fictitious characters. But to give all spectators a chance to understand, Osofisan, in the dialogue between Lawumi and Anlugbua, makes it clear what the gods stand for and what relationship they have. The production, however, has transferred the dialogue from its original place as a prologue to the third act 12 The change affects the audience reception rather drastically. Euripides informs his audience at the beginning that the gods are playing with the mortals, and the drama is likely to be seen and interpreted from that perspective. The London production is certainly opened by Anlugbua, but the audience perception is guided by Anlugbua’s obvious ignorance of the situation. He has not been part of the creation of the war and keeps repeating to himself, “I was too late” and “Why didn’t they call me?” Why, indeed?!

The opening of the performance arouses the spectators’ curiosity about why Anlugbua did not come earlier, since the women “never ceased to worship and pour libation.” This has no equivalent in Euripides’s play, where the strategy of the prologue is to direct the audience’s attentiveness to the effects of the war rather than to its cause. In the London production, Lawumi, in a dialogue in the middle of the play, reveals to Anlugbua that she instigated the war because his Owu people, arrogant and “drunk with prosperity,” violated a law saying that “no Yoruba should sell another Yoruba.” Thus it is because of the slave trade that she has decided to punish Owu: “human beings learn only from suffering and pain,” and Ijebu-Ife alliance is her tool, an alliance with an actual historical background (see Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper). The drama also clearly states that the British used a strategy of divide-and-rule so as to increase the slave trade. The dialogue refers to the fact that one of the allies, Ijebu, got firearms from the British, and that Anlugbua did not help Owu find means of counteraction; the women accuse him: “Where were you?!” Thus Owu remains with nothing but “blades and incantations” for their defense. Here Osofisan follows historical facts. And here we also glimpse the reason Anlugbua was kept ignorant of the war: being the protector of Owu, he would not be likely to join Lawumi’s campaign.

The links between gods and humans are the priests, in Greek and Yoruba religion alike. Cassandra in The Trojan Women is such a priest. To Euripides’s audience, Cassandra was already known as a woman who had declined the advances of the god Apollo, and whom he therefore punished by giving the gift of prophecy, which was taken as madness. A classically competent modern audience is likely to know her, too, at least as a woman driven by frenzy. The Trojan Women also offers information about Cassandra—even if it is brief. (14) Thanks to her gift of prophecy from Apollo, she knows that her mother, Hecuba, will soon die. Euripides’s audience knew that Cassandra’s prophecies would come true, but the dramatis personae took
her pronouncements as madness. Cassandra exhibits an uncontrolled craving for revenge, which confirms her madness to the other characters. Euripides’s drama does not, however, show that her prophecies come true. (15)

In Ososifan’s paraphrase, Cassandra’s counterpart is Orisaye. Ososifan follows Euripides’s play rather closely, and Orisaye’s frenzy, too, is seen by the other characters as madness. In particular, her own mother, Erelu Afin, points out that she has “lost her senses” as a result of the violent war. She herself says: “Not madness. It is something called fear” that is her driving force, that is, the fear not to be able to kill the general now claiming her as his co-wife. In another respect, the paraphrase differs considerably from the original. Orisaye is a priestess to the god Obatala, (16) who stands for balance and patience, among other things, in the Yoruba religion. She is therefore dressed in white. (17) When Orisaye embarks upon her mission of revenge, it is not at all in accordance with Obatala’s principles. (18) When seeing herself as a “death-avenging spirit,” Orisaye gives priority to revenge rather than to balance and patience. Orisaye’s revenge is her own and not that of Obatala. Thus Ososifan blames the people and not the gods. But this is again an interpretation available only to Yoruba-competent spectators. Only they can read into her vindictiveness a kind of fundamentalism governing human passions rather than divine wisdom. These spectators can apprehend a warning against an elite who set basic principles aside to allow personal needs to rule while claiming to be the only true interpreters of the will of some god.

Locating vindictiveness, including its devastating effects on mankind, in the world of the gods, Euripides could make his audience become critical against the actions of the gods. Ososifan, however, locates vindictiveness in Orisaye, that is, in the human world, as opposed to the god she is to serve, and so Ososifan’s drama differs considerably from Euripides’s. Again, this device is visible and open to interpretation only by spectators who know that vindictiveness is incompatible with Obatala. Ososifan’s mortals threaten to punish the gods by extinction, which would be possible for them to do, because, as Anlugbua puts it in the first scene, “without a shrine, without worshippers, what are the gods?” When the last male Owu citizen, a child, is killed, a woman states, “They [the gods] too will die without worshippers.” The argument, that gods cease to exist when human beings stop worshipping them, is an echo from earlier dramas, such as No More the Wasted Breed and Another Raft. Euripides’s text only states that the mortals have no power over the gods, which is another way of expressing their hopelessness.

Classically competent spectators lacking Yoruba competence may see such strong similarities with Euripides’s Cassandra that they take Orisaye to be a close correspondence. Such an interpretation is underpinned by Women of Owu, showing that Orisaye not only prophesies, but also that her prophecies come true. (19) Choosing to demonstrate it on stage, although no counterpart is to be found in Euripides’s play, Ososifan gives all spectators interpretative possibilities similar to those of Euripides’s spectators. (20) When interpreting Orisaye’s revenge, different competence groups reach very different results. Yoruba-competent spectators may see a priest completely contradicting her own god, possibly because the violence of the war has made her mad. Other spectators certainly see that the violence of the war has made the priest mad, but they cannot grasp the implication that the priest can no longer receive instructions from her god. This latter group of spectators cannot detect a reference to fundamentalism in the East and West of our own time, a fundamentalism often caused by war. Orisaye’s prophecy that Erelu is to die in Owu comes true in the last act, an act partly without a counterpart in the original drama, but Ososifan builds his additions on elements found there. At the end of Euripides’s play, the Trojan women are forced to leave Troy, although they have not been able to bury their dead. In despair they try to summon the attention of their dead husbands. But as the gods have heard nothing before, now the dead also hear nothing. Finally, the women walk away to slavery with no hope.
Accompanied by sekere, a gong, and drums in the wings, and by the choir singing “We dance for those who fell for greed of power,” Erelu goes into a ritual that calls upon the ancestors. Whereas nobody answers the call of the Trojan women, Anlugbua makes his presence noticed in Women of Owu. Anlugbua is the foremost ancestor of the Owus, since he was the creator of the city. On stage the contact is created when the women call him (“Mabo, Anlugbua!” “Come, Anlugbua”), while Erelu is dancing herself into trance. The lights go down. The women lose their balance when they feel his presence, and a strong light is focused on Erelu. The answers of the gods are heard as a voice-over. In the end he becomes visible to the spectators at the moment Erelu dies.

When performing the ritual, Erelu is attacked by forces stronger than herself, and she dies, which is made manifest in her dance and in the chorus sung by the women. The trance dance and the accompanying songs, however, communicate differently with the different competence groups. Spectators with Yoruba competence see Anlugbua as a kind of messenger between gods and men, a messenger carrying characteristics of the god Esu as well as of the wise ancestors. It is through Erelu’s sacrifice that the survivors receive a message from the ancestors and gods, that is, knowledge necessary to create a better world, knowledge perhaps emanating from Orunmila, the oracle god of wisdom. But these references are not available to spectators without Yoruba competence.

Through Erelu’s mouth, Anlugbua informs the women that their misery depends on themselves: “You chose to waste it [your life] in a senseless quarrel over a woman—and now you have to pay.” A few moments later he adds: “If only you read your history right” they would realize that “each of us [ancestors were] demolished by war.” (23) Finally he delivers Lawumi’s decision: the surviving women have to endure “slavery as a penalty for your wasted lives.” Anlugbua has no help to offer, but since he and the other gods have a lot to lose—no worshippers, no gods—he hopes that slavery will teach them to understand and to keep together.

In his last line, spoken by himself and similar to an epilogue, Anlugbua again refers to the devastating effects of wars—“It is war that destroys you as it destroys gods’—and condemns human beings because of their “ceaseless volution for bloodshed” and their being “eager to devour one another.” (24) Yet he leaves some hope when predicting that new Owus will come into existence, where the women are going. In actual history, new Owus did come into existence, where the refugees created their own enclaves in other Yoruba territories. In the play, Anlugbua gives the women yet another chance to learn from history. But Yoruba-competent spectators are urged to answer questions like “What did we do with that knowledge?” “Do we understand the impact of the Owu wars?”; and “Did we learn at all?” Considering the internecine wars that followed, the answers are not likely to be very optimistic.

The London production does give a tiny spark of hope for the future. Spectators who have read the program know that one aim of the production is to illustrate the vulnerable situation of women. (25) So the audience is asked to see Erelu as a woman capable of growing when confronted with new and demanding tasks. In the beginning of the drama, she submits to the cruel situation, accepted or even created by the gods. (26) Erelu’s conclusion, however, only goes to stress her own individual loss; once Owu’s first lady, she is now a slave. However, when having learnt more about the atrocities committed by the allies, she concludes that the gods do not help: “We have always been alone, women, we just did not know it,” (27) and when having performed the burial ritual for her killed grandson, she expresses a new view of the gods: “The gods are not worth much / […] / Did we not pray enough, did we not / […] / sacrifice enough?” Since Erelu does succeed in being informed of the ancestral knowledge, the play clearly demonstrates to all competence groups that tasks usually given to some men, such as the responsibility for the welfare of future generations, could equally well be allotted to women and other groups of society. This also means indicating a solution to many societal problems, namely, to widen the group of decision makers.

There is a decisive difference in tone between the ends of the two plays. Euripides shows the women left with no help. This hopelessness might have been Euripides’s means to arouse his audience’s sympathy for the slave women and prisoners of war in general, but in the drama proper no relief is to be seen; the gods do not care, and the mortals see no solution. The gods, merely playing with the human beings, remain unaffected. Ososifan’s drama, however, indicates a possibility for change and improvement, that is, when people learn from history how to avoid war. He ends his play with a tiny ray of hope in the prevailing gloom, a sign that is also underpinned by the women remaining on stage to sing a dirge until the final blackout. Additionally, this element does not convey such complete hopelessness as is found in Euripides’s ending, where the women probably leave the stage to walk to their destined slavery.

When Ososifan stops paraphrasing Euripides’s play and adds a new ending, it is likely to have interpretative consequences for spectators with Euripides competence only. Up to that point, they could rely on their knowledge about The Trojan Women to understand the paraphrase. But when the paraphrase stops, these
spectators are left without their guide, while at the same time the signs on stage become increasingly difficult for them to interpret. (28) They are not likely to fully grasp the importance of Erelu’s achievement for the killed men, the surviving women, and also for those not yet born. Although the Yorubanizing devices make comprehension more difficult, this is compensated for by the detailed dialogue. Thanks to Anlugbua’s lines, everybody, on the stage as well as in the auditorium, can understand that Iyunloye is not the cause of the war; what crime the citizens of Owu have committed; and how the life of future generations can be improved. It becomes very obvious that Osofisan has mankind in mind rather than a particular colonial power.

The very transition from paraphrase to additional creation also means privileging the Yoruba competent spectators because of an increase in Yorubanizing. These spectators can perceive and understand much more of Erelu’s trance dance and Anlugbua’s return than others can. They can fully appreciate the implications of Erelu’s decision to sacrifice herself. They also understand that the message is directed to the Yoruba people (and by extension also to other Nigerians and Africans) rather than primarily to the West (29) The trance dance in the London production also has a reference to Wole Soyinka’s play Death and the King’s Horseman, since Erelu’s dance can be taken as a paraphrase of Elesin’s dance. In the London production, Erelu’s dance was very similar to Elesin’s dance in the 1987 New York production, directed by Soyinka himself. (30) Of course, this reference can only be perceived by spectators with a good knowledge of Death and the King’s Horseman. Those who also remember that Osofisan uses the device of play-within-a-play in many of his dramas might find here a kind of parallel, a rewriting-in-the-rewriting. Both devices serve to foreground theatricality. (31)

Soyinka’s drama is about Elesin, who has lived a privileged life waiting to fulfill his one task in life, that is, being a pathfinder to his dead king on his way to the ancestors. The play shows Elesin confidently starting the trance dance that is to lead to his suicide. The British District Officer, however, orders the dance stopped and Elesin put in prison. Elesin’s son fulfills the father’s duty, which means that the father has lived a worthless life. At the end, Elesin commits suicide in the prison. The play has been interpreted in many ways. The interruption of the trance dance, for instance, has been seen as an example of destructive consequences for those colonized by the West, an interpretation that Soyinka repudiates in the “Author’s Note” of the play. In “Rituality and Liminality in Soyinka’s Plays,” I argue that Elesin would have been able to conclude his “dance,” his suicide, had he really wanted to. My interpretation is that Elesin enjoys the pleasure of this world too much to be able to part from it and sees the DO’s intervention as a rescue. His obligation to the world of the ancestors becomes a means to enrich his earthly life, but when it comes to fulfilling his duty, he is eager to escape.

Compared to Elesin’s personal development, the development of Erelu in Women of Owu takes another direction. In the beginning of the drama she is shown as being rather self-centered, like Elesin. The suffering of the others makes her see things differently, however, and she matures into a person who does not want to be “a coward,” but who of her own free will takes on a social duty much more far-reaching than ever before. Both dancers, Elesin and Erelu, embark upon a mission to find the way to the ancestors. This is Elesin’s one duty in life, and although he is specially trained to complete it, he fails. It is Erelu’s new awareness of the importance of coherence that propels her to perform the ritual. And she succeeds. It is through Erelu’s sacrifice that the reason for the god’s punishment is communicated to the surviving Owu citizens, as is the remedy to improve their conditions.

Spectators who are able to see a performance as a Euripides paraphrase, and who also know Death and the King’s Horseman, may see Erelu’s trance dance as a rapid change from Euripides to Soyinka, a change also including a transition from Europe to Africa. When switching from one paraphrase to the other, Osofisan brings the play home, as it were. Euripides is exchanged for Soyinka; the classical Greek heritage of the West is replaced by modern intellectual achievements of Nigeria. (32) The addressee clearly becomes Nigeria rather than the West. The small group of spectators who can perceive the final scene as a Soyinka paraphrase may recognize the ongoing dialogue between the two playwrights. Both of them point to the importance of acknowledging endemic problems and failures rather than blaming others. But where Soyinka’s Elesin does not succeed in achieving communication with the ancestors, Osofisan’s Erelu does. When Elesin finally acts, it is too late. Erelu willingly acts on behalf of the others. Euripides and Soyinka alike skilfully depict the ailments of society, but while they do not indicate any positive solution, Osofisan does.

(33)

Yoruba-competent spectators may recognize Osofisan’s critique against Wole Soyinka that he too seldom indicates solutions to the social and political problems of Nigeria, or, when he does, that these solutions are too conservative. In his article “Ritual and Revolutionary Ethos,” Osofisan criticizes Soyinka’s use of rituals: they either depict real rituals so closely that they seem to defend the old worldview, or, when the rituals are changed, they do not indicate or promote solutions to problems emanating from the clash between the traditional and Western worldviews.

Osofisan goes on to explain that a “wedding of ritual form and revolutionary ethos should be possible” in the theatre, given that the divine powers are understood as metaphors. In Women of Owu, he amply demonstrates that it is possible, and the London production makes sure that all spectators perceive the gods and the ritual as fictional and as metaphors.

Osofisan’s addition to Euripides is a great interpretative advantage for Yoruba-competent spectators. The change of addressee, however, is also a clear signal to the Euripides competent spectators to become aware that the paraphrase goes beyond merely commenting on the original play by translating it into another cultural context. Femi Osofisan has thus been able to create a drama where it is not necessary, after all, to read it as a paraphrase in order to understand the message. By elucidation, inversion, doubling, and
addition, Osofisan helps spectators with very different competences to reach interpretations which are astonishingly similar, at least as regards the basic messages, that is, condemnation of war and its horrors, condemnation of the exploitation of one’s fellow human, and addressing humankind.

Spectators without classical competence but with Yoruba competence experience a performance marked by references to actual Yoruba facts in history, religion, politics, and theater. Always, they see only Yorubaland. Where Euripides locates the raison d’être for the war entirely in the world of the gods, Osofisan locates it in the world of human beings. The people are punished because of their own misdeeds. Osofisan also takes the problem above the level where one state besieges another state because of an unfaithful woman, and he elegantly connects the two levels. The dialogue of the gods has revealed the slave trade as the true reason for the war. And to the Yoruba-competent spectators he has made Iyunloye a symbol of the West. Of her own free will, Iyunloye has left one husband for another, just because the latter is richer, and it is the same striving for richness that has made the Yoruba kingdoms start wars with one another, a richness emanating from the slave trade with the West. The Yorubanization has made it very easy for these spectators to see the play and interpret it, although they have not been able to see—and admire—the intricate way in which Osofisan has translated Euripides’s Greece into Yorubaland. But they are still able to see references pointing beyond the Yoruba borders, and therefore they hear mankind being addressed rather than the Yoruba population alone.

Spectators without classical as well as Yoruba competence see a performance as a piece of fiction with no particular references to actual history and no intertextuality. To them, the play conveys a strong warning against war and all its horrors, and a warning not to allow those in power to exploit their citizens so as to achieve their own ends. These spectators too understand that the phenomenon is universal and that humankind is addressed.

The most complex and rich experience, no doubt, belongs to spectators with Yoruba as well as classical competence. They can admire how close Osofisan’s paraphrase is to Euripides’s original, and how extremely well he has transposed the Greek play into a Yoruba context. They see his technique to strengthen Euripides’s play as well as to deviate from it, and how these devices are applied to highlight what Osofisan and Euripides have in common. They see that Osofisan also avoids the hopelessness in the ending of the original by adding his own ending with an indication of how to solve the problems in the future. Osofisan puts human destiny into the hands of humans rather than into the hands of the gods. These spectators alone can perceive when the London production ceases paraphrasing Euripides and at the same moment cuts across to paraphrasing Soyinka. They alone can admire the enormous skill in transferring between the two originals and thus contrasting one playwright with another and, not least, only they can admire the transfer from the classical European cultural heritage to the achievements of modern Nigeria, the transfer from the colonial center to the Nigerian center. These spectators can perceive how Femi Osofisan foregrounds the theatricality, by using the devices of paraphrase and rewriting-within-a-rewriting. These spectators see obvious references not only to their own historical background with its elite, but also to those in power in general. To these spectators a performance becomes immensely rich, allowing them to perceive a work of art of the highest quality.

WORKS CITED


NOTES

(1.) For example, No More the Wasted Breed is an answer to Wole Soyinka’s The Strong Breed; Another Raft is a paraphrase of J. P Clark’s The Raft; and Tegonni: An African Antigone is a rewriting of Sophocles’s Antigone.

(2.) Euripides and his drama are given a whole page of presentation in the program.

(3.) On the front page of the program the names Euripides, Femi Osofisan, and Chuck Mike are written in letters of the same size, indicating that these three have contributed equally to the production. In an interview generously granted me on the busy evening of 4 March 2004, Assistant Director Patricia Davenport maintained that Osofisan had kept very close to Euripides’s text, actually closer than the production. But both of them have allowed themselves some liberties, although Euripides’s drama is easily recognizable in the reworkings.

(4.) My analysis is made on the basis of three performances I saw at the Oval House in London: one performance on 3 March, and two performances on 4 March 2004. Basically, I follow my notes jotted down during the performances and more thorough notes written after each performance. But from time to time I add observations made on reading the published text, which appeared only when my manuscript for this article was nearly finished. Femi Osofisan generously gave me a copy fresh from the printers. There are many differences between the production text and the published text, and some of them, such as changes of scenes, have great consequences. The language of the London production is simpler, less colored by Yoruba, than the published text. But since the London production is my material, I do not discuss the differences. Nor can I rely on the book for quotations, since Osofisan’s final text does not always coincide with the previous performance text. As a result, few direct quotations are given here, since time did not permit me to take extensive notes and I have not had access to any written production text.

(5.) For the following description I rely on Toyin Falola and G. O. Oguntomisin’s Yoruba Warlords of the 19th Century. They in turn rely on Akin Mabogunje and J. D. Omer-Cooper’s Owu in Yoruba History. See also J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith’s Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century and Samuel Johnson’s The History of the Yorubas.

(6.) The Kingdom of Owu was involved in several wars, all referred to as the Owu Wars.

(7.) The quotation is from the program (p. 2). Not only the London production chose to give topical references to Iraq, but also the published book has words and phrases that are easily taken to refer to the Iraq invasion. One example comes already on p. 2: “They said our Oba / Was a despot, that they came to free us / From his cruel yoke!” Another comes on p. 8: “WOMAN: Nowadays, / When the strong fight the weak, it’s called / A Liberation War / To free the weak from oppression. WOMAN: Nowadays, in the new world order, it is suicide to be weak.” Still another example comes on p.13: “All they [the allied forces] care for, all of them, is our freedom!” Some of these accusations do not go well with the real history of Owu, but on the other hand, once the Iraq invasion is ended, they are still valid as references to the horrors of war in general.

(8.) Cassandra says, for instance, that “whom the war god took never saw their children again” (1. 377), and a war leader says: “You are conquered” (1. 731).

(9.) See also Edith Hall’s introduction to Morwood’s translation.

(10.) For instance, in No More the Wasted Breed a goddess of the inland waters brings flooding to a village as a revenge for the inhabitants’ neglect of worshipping and bringing her sacrifices. When criticized, she even kills a man. However, her husband, the god of the ocean, finds her actions far too rash and exaggerated and so revives the man—and kills her. In Another Raft, too, a neglected sacrifice results in an attempt to avert a crisis by sending priests and a sacrificial victim on a journey, during which the selfishness
and corruption of the clergymen are exposed. Sea sprites label themselves “figments of the mind.”

(11.) In spite of the fact that the Owu kingdom was one of the oldest and most prestigious Yoruba kingdoms, since it was founded by the son of Oduduwa’s first-born child, it is now looked upon as somewhat peripheral to Yoruba history.

(12.) Patricia Davenport said that the production changed the position to the middle of the drama in order to achieve a better balance and to give the audience an opportunity for relief. This change of presentation is just one of many. Another example is a curse in The Trojan Women just before the herald brings the killed child back (69), a curse that comes already at the end of scene four in Osofisan’s book, whereas the London production shows it even earlier, in the second scene. Compared to Euripides, Osofisan and the production have strengthened the curse, when the women, lined up along the front of the stage, bare their breasts while saying, “We curse you all!” It also means that the women are far from docile but offer resistance to the soldiers.

(13.) The published text (15) reads: “The lesson is clear. It’s us, not the gods, / Who create war. It’s us, we human beings, who can kill it.”

(14.) Poseidon indicates her background: “the virgin Cassandra whom lord Apollo left mad” (11. 41-42). Later Hecuba says that Apollon also “gave as her gift a life free from marriage” (1. 255).

(15.) From other dramas it becomes clear that Hecuba committed suicide on board the ship taking her to slavery, and that many ships never reached their destiny. Odysseus’s ship roved the seas for many years.

(16.) The program of the London production did not inform its audience about this, whereas the published play does. The London audience got to learn about it through the dialogue.

(17.) When later the goddess Lawumi wears a white dress very similar to Orisaye’s, it becomes confusing, because the border line between Obatala and Lawumi is blurred. On the other hand, it indicates that Orisaye is to carry out Lawumi’s revenge.

(18.) According to the mythology, Obatala was once unjustly accused and imprisoned but waited patiently until the god Shango, whose rashness caused the affliction, realized his mistake.

(19.) Osofisan demonstrates this in several ways. Orisaye prophesies that Erelu is going to die in Owu, and that is exactly what happens in the final act. Orisaye also prophesies that strangers are going to invade the homes of the victorious soldiers, just as the soldiers have invaded Owu, and at the end of the play the herald announces that this has happened.

(20.) Osofisan presents this information to his audience only at the end of the play, whereas Euripides’s audience is informed already from the beginning or even in the prologue.

(21.) The published text (p. 65) says that Anlugbua is to appear in person and to speak through Erelu’s mouth.

(22.) Esu is the Yoruba trickster god, carrying messages between the gods and between gods and ancestors and human beings. Esu can put things right as well as create confusion and chaos, depending on whether or not he has been given his due of sacrifices. He is, then, a symbol of the unexpected, human beings’ inability to control everything. Esu appears in some of Osofisan’s dramas, for instance, in Once upon Four Robbers and Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels.

(23.) The published drama (p. 66) reads: “If only you had read your history right, the lessons / Left behind by the ancestors! Each of us, how else did we go / Except by the wrath of war? Each of us, / Demolished through violence and contentions! Not so?”

(24.) The published text (p. 67) says “volition for self-destruction.” Anlugbua’s words are almost an echo of Poseidon’s last words in the prologue to The Trojan Women: “The mortal who sacks cities and temples and tombs, the holy places of the dead, is a fool. Having given them to desolation, he himself meets destruction in time to come” (11.94-97).

(25.) The front page of the program describes Women of Owu as a “tale of women as the spoils of war,” and the Director’s Notes also speak of the vulnerable situation of women. Another article in the program stresses that “Euripides in his Hecuba approached the victimizing of Trojan women as a consequence of men’s quarrels.” No similar information is given in the published drama, though.

(26.) In the published play (p.16) she says: “It is the law of combat. The law of defeat.” Here she echoes Anlugbua’s attempt in the opening of the play (7) to withdraw from responsibility when introducing a variation of the leitmotif: “It is the law of victory, the law / Of defeat.”

(27.) Euripides: “O you gods! And yet why do I call upon the gods? They did not hear me in the past when I called to them” (11. 1280-81).

(28.) Their bewilderment is further underlined by the fact that Erelu’s death means a breach of genre. One of the rules of the classical Greek tragedy is that violence and death are not to be shown on stage.
(29.) Wumi Raji has demonstrated that Osofisan’s drama Tegonni has a similar dual addressee with the aim to "write back to the British colonizers" as well as to have "an engagement of the question of military dictatorship in Africa" (145). The last aim is achieved by emphasizing the critique manifest in Sophocles’s play.

(30.) When I pointed this out to Assistant Director Patricia Davenport, she confirmed that the production had had Elesin in mind, but added that such a dance is likely to be performed in a similar way in any production. Since this paper deals with Osofisan’s paraphrase of Euripides’s play, I do not go into details of the dialogue between Osofisan and Soyinka.

(31.) Rewriting within-a-rewriting may be another device, added to such devices as play-within-the-play, story-telling, framing, songs and dances, which Osofisan uses to foreground theatricality so as to achieve a mode where the spectators’ critical faculty is called upon.

(32.) Wumi Raji points out that in Tegonni, too, Osofisan inserts a reference to a modern author, when one of the dramatis personae quotes a poem by P. B. Shelley (148). But here the reference is made to stress the message of Sophocles’s Antigone.

(33.) The fact that Osofisan shows a ritual on stage, and that the ritual results in the appearance of a god at that, is a comment on Soyinka. Much criticism has been devoted to Soyinka’s interrupted rituals. Where Soyinka can be taken to respect traditional rituals to the degree that he avoids imitating them on stage, because the link with the extrahuman world is necessary in order to solve problems among human beings, Osofisan argues that problems are solved by human beings alone. So Osofisan has everything to win in showing that the rituals on stage are fictional as opposed to interrupted real rituals. In “Gudomlig kommunikation i Femi Ososifans Women of Owu–verklighet eller fiktion?” (Divine communication in Femi Osofisan’s Women of Owu-reality or fiction?), I discuss the intentional fictionality of Erelu’s trance dance and death as opposed to any attempt at staging a "real" ritual.

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