

LITERATURE AND THE NATION

Perspective of a GCI Alumnus

Delivered by

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Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I want to begin by thanking you all, and particularly the organisers, for the invitation to speak here today. I have to confess that I feel highly honoured. May the things we share continue to bring us joy and esteem, and never humiliation nor despair.

When I was asked to name a topic for this lecture, it did not take me too long to decide. For it is a subject that has been troubling my mind for quite a while, and one which I believe should interest us particularly as former students of the Government College, Ibadan. But what is this problem?

In this gathering today, I can take a bet, there must be few indeed who are not either authors already, or potential authors. I say this because almost everyone I know nowadays has a collection somewhere, of poems or short stories that he or she has written and longs to publish.

Almost every day and anywhere I go, there is always someone or the other running up to me with a sheaf of jealously guarded manuscripts, pleading that I take a look, and be generous enough to write a Preface.

And virtually every week, if you look at the newspapers, there is always some announcement at least about some new book about to be launched, brought out by some new and hitherto unknown publishing outfit, most probably founded and funded entirely by the author himself, or by some adventurous trader in the market of vanity books.

What this means then is that, everywhere in this country, there is a secret and growing horde of unpublished manuscripts waiting to unleash themselves on us. It is an amazing phenomenon - so much scribbling is going on, frantically, furtively; so much ambitious writing; so much determined effort of creativity; and so much eagerness and anxiety to get into print, and join the league of published authors one day! The printing houses are having a marvelous time of it; the importers of paper and ink and plates and other printing materials are smiling to the bank. So can any one be wrong, who draws the apparently logical conclusion from all this feverish activity, to affirm that the literary industry is flourishing in Nigeria, and that literature has a robust life? But unfortunately, as you and I know, nothing can be farther from the truth. In reality, all that surface ferment is a grandiose lie. The market of literature is not flourishing at all, because it has no readers. And however lush the supply, as economists inform us, no market can prosper without consumers.

Similarly, literature cannot bloom with authors alone, if it does not have its complement of readers. The stark reality is that, although millions are writing, and seeking publishers, those who read among us are only a small and fragile minority. And even this tiny fraction of the populace does not, in the majority, read what we call literature—that is, the works of imaginative scope and provenance. Rather, they consume religious tracts and business-oriented pamphlets—the first, in order to learn how to get to heaven or acquire a thriving parish; and the second kind, in order to find out how to escape from poverty rapidly, with the minimum effort and delay, and turn into a dashing millionaire overnight!

To put it simply, therefore, the books of literature proper do not sell, because most people do not read them. Those who publish poetry, or fiction, or drama do so mainly out of love or, perhaps, more accurately, self-love. Sooner or later, they discover that it is they themselves who constitute their own audience. They may take satisfaction in seeing their names on the titles—and for some, this is actually enough achievement in itself—but they will have to get accustomed to seeing the books gather dust in their libraries or warehouses, unless they start giving them out freely as gifts to their friends and acquaintances.

Our countrymen may be writing as I said, but they do not buy books, even when they are active members of ANA, the Association of Nigerian Authors. That is why writing is not yet a profitable business here and why none of us can survive as full-time professional writers. Even our most successful writers find that they still have to take on other jobs, such as teaching for instance, in order to sustain themselves. The nation and its literature are not exactly enemies; but those involved in the business of writing know that they are condemned for now to live like endangered specie.

All the same, you must be asking yourselves — why should this particular problem pre-occupy you today, when, as Old Boys of GCI, most of you have made your successful careers already in fields as diverse as medicine, engineering, agronomy, administration, academics, and so on, and left your footprints there? Since you do not produce literature or feed from it, why should you be concerned about its unhappy fate, instead of merely shrugging it off as an inevitable consequence of our present social and economic malaise? Of course you would be perfectly in order to pose these questions for, really, why it should matter to you at all, if people read or do not read? What is the value of literature after all, if it cannot solve any of our pressing, material needs—if a poem cannot help secure employment for your graduate child in some multinational company, or buy you shares on the stock exchange? Why read a novel, or watch a play, that will not help procure votes even for the minor post of a local government councillor?

Legitimate questions! But permit me to answer by saying that the questions should concern all of us, because this literature we are talking about is of immeasurable pertinence to the quality of our lives. For it can help determine whether we merely live and collect our wages; or whether, even without wealth, we achieve a fulfilled and felicitous life. Besides there is even a simpler argument.

You Old Boys, as even our enemies must concede, have chalked up a number of incommensurable achievements in myriad professions. But of all of these, none of us will disagree I hope, our most glittering moment so far has come in no other field than that of Literature! Or was it not our own Wole Soyinka, who left the school some fifty years ago, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, becoming not only the first Nigerian to do so, but indeed, the very first black man in the entire world! Up GCI!

Such feats, we all know, hardly ever arrive by fluke—Soyinka’s triumph was, arguably, as much the product of his own innate genius, as of the circumstances of his upbringing. And as far as this latter is concerned, our school, Government College Ibadan, can claim the credit for having always been a fecund nursery of budding talents.

The school’s environment in our time was especially congenial for learning and for creativity. Laboratories were well-equipped, and libraries generously stocked. Our daily schedule was judiciously patterned between sleep and study, work and recreation; and there were numerous sports to choose from. Significantly too for our topic today, certain prevailing regulations such as the unflinching insistence on the use of English at all moments, facilitated the mastery of the language — and hence, indirectly, promoted the general love of English literature by students across all disciplines.

But, even still more salient in this respect, was the presence of well trained teachers, both indigenous and expatriate, of which GCI always had an admittedly unfair supply from the Ministry of Education, when compared to other neighbouring schools. All these teachers were conferred with different nicknames, mostly farcical of course, since every teacher, as far as students are concerned, is a recruit either from *Aro*, or from some *alawada* company. However, among this general gallery of comic and eccentric types, some teachers usually stand out, and become inspiring models. These are the ones who in the end determine, sometimes consciously but most times unconsciously, the kind of career that the students will later pursue, and even the kind of people they will turn out to be in their adult life. One of such teachers, as far as literature is concerned, was the school principal who ruled over the school from 1959 to 1968, Mr. D.J. Bullock.

DJB, as we fondly called him, was Mr. Literature itself —or, more appropriately, Mr. Drama, with a capital ‘D’! Not only did he direct those very popular and unforgettable school productions every year, in which the neighbouring girls’ schools even participated to our great excitement, but DJB’s classes were veritable feasts of histrionic showmanship!

Oh, our Principal did not just leave us to read the prescribed texts ourselves, he himself read them out to us in class. And he did not just read, he interpreted each and every passage with lively performance, acting out the scenes, and fleshing out the juicy moments with captivating movement and gesture. Effortlessly - or so it looked to us - DJB impersonated all the characters in turn, made their voices real, recreated their mannerisms, mimicked their minutest inflections.

He made his classes on Literature a delectable experience of living theatre, filled us with visual and auditory delight.

That was how, as my classmates will testify, the English writers on the syllabus—among whom Shakespeare and Charles Dickens were the most conspicuous — came to become our intimate friends, as their characters leaped off the pages and, in spite of the distance of time and culture, grew into real presences before us, as vivid and palpable as any of our immediate neighbours!

Not surprising, therefore, because of DJB and teachers like him, these books and authors would have a profound effect on our lives. Shakespeare in particular would become a companion for life, even for those who did not offer literature as a final subject. At various moments in our struggle through life, we would suddenly find ourselves breaking into a quotation from the English bard, either to sum up the experience or simply describe a feeling we could not otherwise express in words. Easily you will hear us using such lines as:

“There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face”; or “Cowards die many times before their death”; or “The quality of mercy is not strained”; or the short, dramatic pieces, “*Et tu, Brute?*”, and Hamlet’s famous line: “To be, or not to be?” Who, among us, does not still remember Macbeth’s famous pain-soaked lament:

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

Or the following, even if we no longer recall who spoke them, in *As You Like It*:

*All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.*

Literature, in other words, has become a kind of prop, something to plunge into for wisdom and inspiration when we are lost for words and seeking for the best way to express our emotion, or to lean on for solace at difficult moments, or turn to for entertainment in our leisure hours.

Speaking personally I can say that, without being aware of it at the time, it was there, in DJB's classes and on his stage, that the seeds of my writing life were nourished. And I have found that Dickens' preoccupation with the plight of the poor and the deprived is one I myself deeply share; that like Robert Bolt's hero in *A Man For All Seasons*, or Brecht's Galileo - all authors and works that I first came to know through DJB - some of the characters in my own works also have to confront the problems of loyalty and sin, and of the true nature of heroism in a troubled age. Now, it is an axiom that creativity in whatever field is superbly contagious. The disease of reading in particular, as many specialists have told us, tends to spawn further writing, to generate new books. In other words, an author will, sooner or later, reproduce himself in his reader.

Therefore it should be no surprise that, under the seduction of these books, some of us too would later attempt in our turn to produce our own creations; or that for some others still, this impulse to create literature should turn into a professional vocation, and a life-long career choice. Hence you will find that the most prominent figures among our nation's first crop of writers were those who came from the elite government or missionary schools, where libraries were well-provisioned, teachers were among the best trained, and the speaking of English was an enforced necessity.

Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, Elechi Amadi, and Chinua Achebe all went to the Government College in Umuahia, John-Pepper Clark to the one in Ughelli, Flora Nwapa to the CMS Girls School in Enugu and of course you know where T.M. Aluko, Wole Soyinka, and Bode Sowande came from - our own incomparable GCI. This bug of literature, secreted and nurtured in these elite schools, was, however, an ambiguous legacy as we would later discover. Just as the students were fascinated by what they read, so were they brought, in the end, to begin to question them, and painfully, turn away from it.

It became apparent, gradually and slowly as we grew more mature, that Shakespeare, Shaw, Dickens and others might be masters but they were not, and could not be, our true literary ancestors. They had such power of language and metaphor as to make us identify spontaneously and uncritically with their stories and the characters they brought to life. But that was only at first sight. Upon a second and closer reading, especially later in life, it became obvious that those stories were not really ours; that the characters they paraded, as colourful as they were, were markedly different from the people we knew in our own families and on our streets. Not only did they speak a language that our own people did not speak, but their traditions and beliefs, and the cultural background that authorised them, were also patently different from ours in many instances.

Our writers had started out by trying to emulate these European models, but soon they came to realise that their imitations were absurd and unnatural, and that if they were to become credible at all, then they must wean themselves of that European influence, and speak in their own authentic voices. It was a startling revelation, this discovery, that those literary masterpieces not only did not represent our world, but even frequently *misrepresented* it! Needless to say, this came to pose formidable challenges, but the situation was no different really from the kind that all ex-colonials have had to face in the process of liberating themselves. The problem however was that, that in our own case, language itself, the very vehicle of articulation, had become a barrier.

Some of you undoubtedly know the story. Most people, on regaining their freedom from an imperial power which has imposed its own language on them, return at once to their own indigenous tongue. Simultaneously with political independence always come linguistic re-possession, that is, the restoration of the people's own cultural traditions *in their own language*. Sadly however, as you all know, that kind of linguistic reclamation was no longer a practical option for us in Nigeria, given our multi-ethnic configuration. True, a few writers like Fagunwa, Pita Nwana, or Abubakar Imam, produced works in their own mother tongues of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. But these authors were seen more or less as tribal champions, speaking to their own ethnic communities alone, but not to the rest of the nation.

What our new nationalists needed by then was an innovative approach, a totally new and imaginative handling of the English language. Many different experimentations therefore followed, such as Tutuola's so-called "half-English" (*The Palmwine Drinkard*), and Okara's poetic transliterations from Ijo (*The Voice*). But in the end, the solutions that endured, and became the accepted paradigms for other writers, were the hybrid, syncretic solutions of Achebe and Soyinka. In very similar, and at the same time dissimilar ways, both of these authors succeeded in domesticating the inherited English language, and became role models for succeeding writers. That's why they are rightly referred to nowadays as the fathers of modern Nigerian literature.

Perhaps I should pause here to give you an idea of Achebe's accomplishment, by quoting the example that he himself once offered. In *Arrow of God*, his third novel published in 1964, the priest *Ezeulu* is talking to his son, and this is how his speech would have been rendered in standard English: I am sending you as my representative among those people - just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight. But here is how Achebe eventually puts it, in what has now come to be known as Nigerian English, based as it is on the patterns and eccentricities of the indigenous Igbo language:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it, you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.

Soyinka did the same thing too in his plays, although his own dialogues tended to be more complex, less direct, obviously the language of a poet. Furthermore he was also very concerned about reinstating our gods and our traditional dramas, following the precedence of those Christian priests of the early 20th century, such as Rev. E.M. Lijadu, and Rev. J.H. Samuel (who became Rev. Adegboyega Edun), or David B. Vincent (who became the famous Mojola Agbebi). Thus, through the impact of Soyinka's works, we learn about Ogun, Obatala, Orunmila, Esu, Osun, Yemoja, and so on, all the traditional divinities of Yorubaland, and come to understand their roles not only in the Yoruba, but indeed, the universal pantheon. We also recover other aspects of our culture that had been distorted by years of Christian and Moslem evangelism, such as the traditional marital conventions and our folk songs. It is this recovered knowledge that would open the way for later playwrights like Wale Ogunyemi, Ola Rotimi and, of course, my humble self.

From this preliminary engagement with cultural retrieval, our literature quickly moved on to what has since become its most dominant concern — the preoccupation with politics.

Writers, we must not forget, are first and foremost citizens like others, whatever the depth of their genius. They cannot therefore but be equally implicated, like other citizens, in the social and political life of the country. Further still, because they are not just citizens, but enlightened ones with the benefit of education and the gift of visionary powers, they will inevitably be vocal about the events unfolding around them.

Once therefore the political life of the post-Independent nation began to unravel tragically, the writers turned their talents both to chronicling the situation, and criticising it, as well as offering suggestions about how to achieve the ideal life we all desire. Thus the target of literature became the corrupt political elite, as our writers highlighted the spreading poverty and desperation in the land, and warned of the looming threat of chaos. Hence, when the first coup occurred in 1966, it came as no surprise to the writing community — for it had all been predicted already in works like *A Man of the People*, and in Okigbo's poems.

But as you all remember, the coup only heralded even more bitter times. A horrendous genocide followed in its wake, detailed later in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, together with brutal reprisal killings in the north. The Igbos fled homewards to the east, and soon proclaimed a breakaway Republic of Biafra. Of course, predictably, this attempt at secession could not last, and it soon collapsed, after months of a sorry fratricidal war and a terrible price in human life. You all know what followed. After that war, the military ensconced themselves in power, and things rapidly grew worse for the common people just as ironically, oil began to flow in the Delta area, bringing a spectacular revenue into the government coffers. The soldiers who seized the reins of government ostensibly to end corruption, became even more grossly corrupted in their turn, and launched out on a reckless spending spree. Armed and arrogant, they began to do their own looting with unprecedented level of brutality and greed.

And again the writers were among the first to expose this betrayal of our people and mount the barricades. In novel after novel, play after play, in poems, interviews and essays, writers denounced the looting, and many of them were made to pay the price for their daring through censorship, detention or exile. Soyinka's personal sacrifice and suffering in this story of resistance was an inspiration for the rest of us. Either covertly or overtly, we did not relent. It was in those years of military interregnum, for instance, that I developed the concept of "surreptitious insurrection" and wrote such plays as *The Chattering and the Song*, *Once Upon Four Robbers*, and *Aringindin and the Night watchmen*.

Similarly, Bode Sowande, who was my junior at GCI wrote his *Farewell to Babylon, and Circus of the Freedom Square*; while Kole Omotosho produced his *Golden Cage* and, most famously, *Just Before Dawn*. There were others: Festus Iyayi, from Benin, came out with *Violence*, and then *Heroes*; Odia Ofeimun, railing against what he perceived as unacceptable complacency on the part of some of the educated elite published the vitriolic *The Poet Lied*; and of course Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide, both rapidly developing into the nation's major poets, came out with such works as Osundare's *Songs of the Market Place*, *The Eye of the Earth*, and *Horses of Memory* and so on, and Ojaide's *Invoking the Warrior Spirit*, *The Blood of Peace*, and *Delta Blues*.

It is not possible here to give a full catalogue of all the literature of the post civil war years. Two areas of particular grievance, which were impeding our nation's progress, and creating disaffection, were first, that of our continued brutal and primitive treatment of women, and second, of the blatant injustice being done to the people of the oil-bearing areas.

On these two issues, as you all can bear witness, our writers have been among the most outspoken. Similarly on the gender front, our female writers are no longer willing to remain subservient and mute, and have fought their way into greater prominence, creating a vocal lineage starting from Flora Nwapa through to Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye and Tess Onwueme, to Akachi Ezeigbo and Ogochukwu Promise, and right up to Bina Nengillagha, Chimamanda Adichie and Sefi Atta.

As for the badly exploited Niger Delta region, several poets, novelists, and playwrights have sprung up to speak out for their people, against the callous multinational oil companies and our colluding governments. Among them, apart from the ones already mentioned, are names like Okome Onookome, Fred Agbeyegbe, Hope Eghagha, Chiedu Ezeana, Ogaga Ifowodo, Nnimmo Bassey, Ahmed Yerima and especially, Ken Saro Wiwa. You all know what happened to him in the end in the hands of Abacha!

What I am trying to say, my dear friends, is that literature has always lived close to the pulse of national life, chronicling our individual and collective adventures and misadventures, recording our failures and triumphs. And it has done this not passively, or abstractly but with passionate bias for equity and good governance, for justice and fairness, and against exploitation.

Consistently it has held up a mirror for us to look at ourselves, and also to judge ourselves. Our writers have sought with great courage to warn us from dangers ahead of us, of pits that we have dug with our own hands now threatening to engulf us and, even in the face of personal menace, stuck out their necks in the quest for justice and freedom. Would one say then that this is the kind of service to the community that should be ignored, or allowed to atrophy, simply because it does not bring material gain?

I will answer the question, but before then, let me quickly disabuse your minds however from thinking that this is all we do, that all our literature is a catalogue of ceaseless whining and wailing. Far to the contrary: our literature is not always morbid, nor even always political in that polemical sense that is commonly attached to the word. Our writers also celebrate the positive aspects of life, and particularly those useful aspects of the culture that we have lost, or are in danger of losing. They sing of the past and present heroes of the people in their brave struggle for survival, this struggle that is always aborted by our leaders. Writers celebrate nature in its richness and diversity: the lands and the forests in which we live, the seas which surround us, the sky above our heads; trees and flowers, birds and butterflies, animals and fishes; the changing seasons. All the beauty and the wonder of our world. Above all, our writers sing also of the passions we share and make us human — of grief and happiness, cruelty and compassion, of moments of pain or pleasure, and of the possibilities and the ecstasies of love.

Literature is all these and more, a wonderful enclave of pain as of enchantment, disjunction as well as self-discovery. But the irony however, as I began to say earlier, is that nowadays this literature is tragically on the wane. These writings in which our nation's life has been so richly encoded, and on whose fertilising roots the stems of our youth were laid—this literature through which our GCI has won such laurels, is no longer of current appeal.

Literature has lost its attraction for a public only anxious to make money now, or safeguard its place in heaven. Writers, unless they are on the political or ecumenical bandwagon, attract little or no regard. All that our people seem to wish to read now, when they are not playing golf or pursuing some frivolity, are the practical guides to instant material ease, or to the methods of capturing a spouse, to mindless sex, or bagging a lucrative appointment; and very few among us care for the old ennobling imaginative literature any more. The general consensus seems to be that such things as novels, plays and poetry are trivial and “useless”, completely irrelevant to the problems of survival. This crisis of philistinism is, to be sure, not just against the practice of literature alone, but manifests itself in the whole field of culture. The problem was defined by Prof. Akinwunmi Isola in a recent lecture, [“Rebuilding Our Cultural bank of Images”]. According to him,

There is the tendency to define and measure development through methods and measures that are primarily material: building roads, schools, hospitals, dams, buying vehicles, ships and aircrafts. But the truth is that these material goals cannot be sustained by material means alone. To make these material goals socially sustainable, the people require not only knowledge, skill and vision but also those humane qualities that constitute the intangible aspects of development

— honesty, dignity, hard work and so on. Otherwise, as a Yoruba proverb says: a child not built up morally will sell the house built by the parents.

This is why many African countries cannot yet attain sustainable development., because the leaders and the elite in charge lack those human qualities they ought to have acquired from our intangible cultural heritage mediated by literature.

It may be a cliché, but the old adage is still true, that “Man does not live by bread alone.” Literature is a kind of food too, but a food for the soul and the spirit, and these also need to be nourished just as equally as, if not even more than, the stomach. In poetry, play or prose, we are encouraged into the inner shrines of grace and contemplation that no other artistic genre, except perhaps music, can accomplish. This is what makes literature different from Nollywood, for example. To quote C.S. Lewis, “Literature enlarges our being by admitting us to experiences not our own.” It helps expand our understanding of the world, and of our common humanity. Or, as another witness, Marilyn Green Faulkner, expresses it.

The careful and compassionate observation of a human soul is the great gift that a great novel brings us. We cannot live everywhere. We cannot be everyone. But we can read, and when we read we can send out a thread of connection to another kind of human, and then another, and then another, until we are reinvented by our interconnectedness with our race.

It is our great compatriot, Chinua Achebe however who has expressed it in the most lucid way in his novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*.. Listen to him:

The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important: and the telling of the story afterwards—each is important in its own way... But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story... Why? Because it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.”

Need one say more? We need literature to be our escort through our wanderings through life and through history.

If we have not understood that, then it seems to me that we have not fully grasped the full significance of DJB’s contribution to our lives, or why this occasion should be so significant, as a tribute to him who has shown that he is not only a great teacher, but an enormously endowed actor and director, and lover of literature, a veritable model of how to mould ourselves into complete men.

Our society today is troubled by chaos and anomy, and no one seems to know where to turn to any more for solution. Religion, now in the hands of charlatans, is no longer a shelter; philosophy is out of vogue. All that surrounds us is violence and clamour. But what we forget is that sometimes, in a great book, there can be words that will help us to peace and contentment, to epiphany. Literature can bring healing and fulfilment. It can stir our imagination to unexpected heights of adoration. This is what I learnt in GCI, what the great teachers like DJB taught us. The usefulness of literature may not be how to make quick bucks, but writers can teach us how to live a happy and contented life. In running so blindly and so grimly after wealth, we often end up, sadly, in the corrosive arms of melancholy or folly. Like Shakespeare's *King Lear*, many go astray, many go insane, and many only end up in bleak despair. But great writers have written about these things, and left us sufficient lessons to guide us. That is one of the meanings of the Prize awarded to our fellow alumnus, Wole Soyinka, when the Nobel Committee described him as a writer, "who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence."

On this note then, I think it is only appropriate to end this lecture with a song by the Nobel Laureate himself, one which, at a dark moment in our history, he composed to lighten our spirit, and encourage us out of despair. So, please join me now as I sing:

*I love my country I no go lie,
Na inside am I go live and die
I love my country I no go lie
He push me I push am, I no go go!*

So who still says, with all these, that we do not need literature in our lives? Long live our country! Long live our Principal, and the spirit of struggle that he inculcated in us! Up GCI!

Thank you all for your attention.

Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan, a Professor of Drama, University of Ibadan, was born on June 16, 1946. He attended Government College Ibadan from 1959 to 1965. While on the Western State and Federal Government Scholarships as an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan, (1966 — 1969), he also obtained a Diploma in French from Dakar University in 1968, having won the French Government scholarship to undertake the programme. Another scholarship from the French Government took him to the Universite de Paris III from 1972-1973. He obtained his doctorate degree on a University of Ibadan Post Graduate Bursary in 1974.

Femi Osofisan's brilliance made him stand out early in life. In 1965, he won the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) Independence Anniversary Essay Prize. The following year, he won, at Government College Ibadan, the first TM. Aluko Prize for Literature. In 1982 he received the Bell Award for Artistic performance in the city of Pennsylvania, USA, just as he won the first prize for Literature from the Association of Nigeria Authors (ANA) in Nigeria for his book, *Morountodun and Other Plays*. Five years later (1988), he won, again from ANA, the poetry prize for his book, *Minted Coins*.

In 1993, his play, *Yungba Yungba* and the Dance Contest won the Drama Prize of ANA In 2000; he was short listed for the prestigious Neustadt Prize in the United States of America. In 1991 and 1992, he was elected the Grand Patron of Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) and Pan African Writers' Association (PAWA) respectively. The Republic of France conferred on him "Officer de L'Ordre National de Merited," in 1999. The Distinguished Alumnus Award of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan went to him in 2001 just as in 2003, he got the Lee G. Hall Distinguished Playwright-in-Residence of De Pauw University, Indiana USA. In 2004, he received the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM) the highest academic award in the country. He was awarded the Folon — Nichols Award at the African Literature Association in Accra Ghana in May, 2006.

He holds vital positions in many learned societies. He has been the President, International P. E.N (Nigerian Chapter); West Africa Regional Vice President of the Pan African Writers Association (PAWA); Former Vice president, Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA); He holds the membership of Nigeria Association of African and Comparative Literature (NAACL), Nigerian Association of Literacy Critics, International Theatre Institution (ITI), the Nigerian Chapter, the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLS) and Modern Languages Association of Nigeria (MLAN).

He started his professional career as a university teacher in 1973 and rose from Assistant Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in 1978 after teaching in the departments of Modern Languages and English at the University of Ibadan. His academic input into university education has been diverse. In 1981 he was Visiting/Exchange Senior Lecturer in Comparative Literature to Universite Nationale de Benin, Lome. He ran a workshop for American students and directed Farewell to a Cannibal Rage. He was not only a professor and Head of Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin, Edo State; he designed a new and comprehensive curriculum, built workshops, a library, music and dance studios.

He was visiting Professor of Drama to the University of Ife, Ile Ife (1985/86) Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye (1984/85), University of Iowa, USA (1991), King Alfred's College, Winchester, England (1992), Northwestern University, Evanston, USA (1993) and Emory University, Atlanta USA (1994). For five years (1983 — 1988), he was a member of the editorial board of the Guardian Newspapers, Lagos, Nigeria; and served as General Manger and Chief Executive Officer of National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria from 2000 — 2004.

His publications cover a wide range of topics and is across board. Some of them include: *Once Upon Four Robbers*, (2001; *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (2002; *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* (1999); *Les Tisberins* (1990); Translantion of The Chattering and the Song by Eliane Saint-Andre Utudjian and Claire Pergmier Kolera Kolej (1975).

Babafemi Osofisan has attended many national and international conferences and remains a worthy ambassador of his alma mater, Government College, Ibadan.