The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre

The first accounts of the Yoruba masque theatre are contained in the journals of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander. To mark their seven weeks' stay in Old Oyo (Katunga), the capital of the Oyo (Yoruba) empire, the alafin (king) of Oyo, invited his guests to see a performance provided by one of the travelling troupes which at that time was waiting on the king's pleasure. The time was Wednesday, February 22, 1826.

Chief Ulli Beier, an anthropologist, who spent many years amongst the Yoruba, writing about the same theatre nearly one hundred and fifty years later, stated as follows: "The Agbegijo could be called the beginning of theatre in Yorubaland." Beier's statement on the theatre is obviously ironical since he was, in fact, a witness to the dying phase of an art which developed many centuries ago. In this essay, I propose to trace the origin and historical development of the theatre, analyse its art-form and examine its prospects for the future of the theatre in Nigeria.

1. The theatrical art belongs to the genre of the "masque" or "mask". As an entertainment it originated from the religious rites of masqueraders or maskers known as "ghost-mummery" (see N. A. Fadipe, Sociology of the Yoruba, Ph. D. Thesis, London, 1939, p. 757). Its link with court-entertainments, as will be seen later, brings it very close to the "court masque" of the sixteenth century in Europe. The traditional names by which the troupes are called by the Yoruba populace are: elegun apidan (players of spectacles) or elegun alaré (masque players) or the alarínjó (travelling dance troupes).


3. Both Clapperton and Lander classified the performances as "pantomime". It is remembered that the "masque" was a great influence on the pantomime that developed both in England and France during the eighteenth century, generally labelled "melodrama" (see Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., Oxford Companion to the Theatre, London, 2nd ed., 1957, p. 660).

4. CLAPPERTON, p. 54.

5. Agbégijó (one who takes wood or wooden face-mask to dance with) is another name by which the professional troupes are called in certain areas of Yoruba.


The Yoruba masque theatre emerged from three developmental phases: ritual, festival and theatre. The process shows the treatment and use of the masquerade for both ritual and secular occasions.

Sangó, believed to have reigned as the alafin of Oyo, probably about the fourteenth century, is thought to have introduced the phenomenon of ancestor-worship called baba (father) or later egúngún (masquerade). The egúngún is the dead lineage-head who, upon being evoked, appears as a costumed figure. The evocation takes place at a special ceremony designed to give the impression that the deceased is making a temporary reappearance on earth.1 Sangó had tried in vain to secure the remains of his father, 'Orányàn, the founder of Oyo, for burial at Oyo after the latter had died at Ife. He was told that 'Orányàn had metamorphosed2 into 'Opá 'Orányàn (a stone staff). As an alternative, Sangó designed a new funeral obsequies for 'Orányàn at Oyo. At a special ceremony, he brought the reincarnated spirit of his father to the outskirts of Oyo, set up the bárà (royal mausoleum) for his worship and placed iyámóde (the old woman of the palace) in charge of the mystery. Her duty was to worship 'Orányàn's spirit and to bring him out as a masquerade during an evocation ceremony.3

Later, this ceremony of bringing the spirit of the deceased head of the lineage to the homestead became formalised as a permanent feature of Yoruba funeral ceremony. As an institution, it came to be administered by the 'ọjọ (a guild of masked actors) based at court and supervised by the iyámóde. By the middle of the sixteenth century, during the reign of alafin Qfinran (c. 1544), the guild had been consolidated and constituted as the egúngún Society with a hierarchy of officers and priests.

The festival phase began when Ológbin Ológbojó, an official at court and a member of the egúngún Society, inaugurated the festival of “All Souls". During the festival all ancestors or dead lineage-heads were evoked and they appeared as eégúnlá (lineage-masquerades), allowed to visit the homestead and walk the streets of the community for a certain period in form of a pageant. The pageant was marked by a procession to the king or natural ruler and a staged performance before him which took place at the ọde (the open-space in front of the palace).

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1. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief, London, 1966, p. 193. It must be noted that the word egúngún has now become a generic term for all forms of masquerading.
2. The phenomenon of metamorphosis was a funerary rite at Ife. At a special ritual the deceased’s effigy was revealed and was believed to have metamorphosed into stone, terra-cotta, bronze, etc., depending on the medium in which the effigy was cast. This system operated during the Ife period of Yoruba history (c. 700 to c. 1400 A. D.) and it is said that the "Ife heads" are its products.
The performance took the form of a dance-drama with choral-chants provided by the omopó (children of the compound) of each lineage-masquerade. After this formal salute and presentation to the ruler, each pageant receded to their different homes for feasting and merriment and later danced round the community and received gifts.

The theatre phase emerged from the "All Souls" festivals. The development started when, at the instance of the alágbódá (the cultic head of the egúngún Society), a special or command performance was called for the last day of the festival. This became a kind of ludus. The masquerades were expected to act plays in a form of competition. The contest was voluntary and merely intended to raise the voltage of the festival. Presents were given in appreciation of the performance of the best masquerade.

The Ológbin lineage was remarkable for its 'ojè—a group of ballad-mongers who displayed acrobatic dancing and acted masques. The group was based at court. It was led by Olúgbére Agan as its masked-actor and acrobat and with the akúnyìngbà (praise-singers at court) as his chorus. Ológbin Ológbọjọ was the animator and iyámodé was the ballad instructor. The group was renowned for winning the contests of the annual festivals. Prompted by this, Olúgbére Agan set himself up as the masque-leader of the first professional travelling troupe, drawing his inspiration from Ológbin Ológbọjọ and the aegis of the court. This is believed to have come about during the reign of King Ogóbílì, otherwise called Abípa, who acceded to the throne as the aláfín about 1590 and reigned first at Igbòhọ and later at Old Oyo where he died around 1610. Ológbin Ológbọjọ, the 'father' of the Yoruba masque theatre, however, died at Igbòhọ but his body was taken to Old Oyo for interment in a court dedicated to his memory and called Òde-Ogóbólú-ke' (the court of the one honoured by Ogóbílì).

King Abiódún became the aláfin of Oyo about 1770. The Yoruba empire had by then become very extensive and had, in fact, reached the apogee of its fame. Because of his patronage of the arts, many craft-guilds sprang up and organised themselves into technical specialities. In order to bid for a place of honour at court they each dedicated

1. Each lineage-masquerade presented in a dance-display an enactment-story about certain aspects of the memorable history of the lineages.
2. The play-concept had much in common with the Roman great public games (see J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens, Boston, 1950, pp. 35-36).
3. Olúgbére Agan believed to be the first Yoruba actor was the stepson of Ológbin Ológbọjọ. He was born a hybrid (half ape, half human) and the only way by which he could cover up his deformity was masquerading.
4. Oyo Igbòhọ was settled as the temporary capital after the return of the Yoruba from exile in the Borgu country. King Ogóbílì was the fourth and last aláfín to reign there before the old capital was reoccupied (see Robert S. Smith, Kingdoms of the Yoruba, London, 1969, pp. 30-40).
5. Johnson, p. 166.
6. This is borne by the oríkì (praise chants) of the craft-guilds (see Adeboye Baralola, Òíwọn Òrìkì Òrìlẹ', Glasgow, 1967, pp. 44, 95, 155).
their best works to enhance the prestige of the Crown. Since the death of Ológbin Ológbójò a number of contending masque-dramaturgists had vied for the post of the official court-entertainer. 'Esà Ṭógbín, a descendant of the Aládafà, and a maternal relation of Ológbin Ológbójò, won the contest, received his investiture at Òde-Ògbólú-ke' and resided permanently at 'Ogbojò.¹

King Abídún died in 1789 and is credited with having given the theatre the first boost in professionalism. By honouring 'Esà 'Ogbín, a sojourner at 'Ogbojò, he had recognised and encouraged individualism in masque-dramaturgy. 'Esà 'Ogbín became the first troupe-manager to obtain a release from the cultic obligations of the egúngún Society thus making the theatre a permanent part of court-entertainments.

The expansion of the empire brought about a reorganisation of the hierarchy of government and the extension of court activities to the metropolitan provinces. This also meant an increase in the number of troupes in order to cope with a wider area of operation. Each metropolitan governor could keep a troupe but it was the custom to include a troupe in their entourage during their annual visit to pay homage to the alafín of Òyò.²

The history of the Yoruba masque theatre cannot be separated from the rise and fall of the Òyò-Yoruba empire. Its development and growth were closely associated with Yoruba political and social history. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the empire faced first the rapacity of the slave trade, then the outrage of the Fulani invasion and collapsed under the outspread of internecine wars. With this break-up came the disruption of court-life and the movement of the masses southwards for new settlements. The place of the masque theatre in court and outside was thus affected but this led to a further development. Several new troupes sprang up beyond the Ológbójò lineage and these were free to entertain any individual or group of people who invited them. Names of troupes like Èiyèbà, Lèbe, Aiyèlab’ólá and others, emerged. They participated in the annual egúngún festivals as was their custom and, on non-festival days, were able to satisfy the people’s desire for entertainment and diversion; whether the occasion was a birth or a death, the troupes were specially invited to perform. In addition, they organised their own itineraries and visited places. Thus began the period of intensive professionalism.

The gulf between the theatre and the cult that inspired it was further widened by the rise of professionalism in the theatre. Professionalism not only resulted in proliferation of troupes but encouraged competition which, in turn, improved the theatrical art.

From about the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Ibadan

². ClAPPERTON, p. 53.
had risen as a power quite independent of the Oyo hegemony. For the theatre, the rise marked a new phase of expansion. The troupes became an extension of the power of the ajéle (the Ibadan resident lords) in the various and vast areas in which they were located.\textsuperscript{1} They waited on the ajéle and at their pleasure performed to the masses. This was the period when the troupes acquired their popular attribute, the alárinjó (the travelling dance-theatre troupes).

The corroding influence of such external forces as Islam and Christianity affected the existence of the theatre in the Yoruba society more than the disruption of political life. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Moslems banned theatrical activities in the Fulani occupied areas of Yoruba to the north thereby forcing the troupes to operate in the south. Also during the second half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, Christian missionary activities which moved up-country from the south had grave consequences on the traditional, social, political and religious institutions. The missionaries found ritual ceremony intolerable, made no efforts to understand traditional forms of religion and set out to reform the mental outlook of their converts.\textsuperscript{2} A Yoruba convert to the Christian faith was expected to renounce his membership of all secret societies and his participation in all forms of traditional rituals including dancing.\textsuperscript{3}

This period marked the decline of the theatre. The missionaries became hostile to the egúngún Society which was used as an organised weapon against them.\textsuperscript{4} Both the theatre-group and the cultic-group (two separate entities associated with the egúngún Society) were thus condemned by the missionaries as works of the devil without distinction. Apart from constant interruptions of their public shows by the die-hard Christian converts, the troupes also started facing privation. They were losing the allegiance of the women-folk who used to constitute the chorus of every public performance. Both the Christian converts and the growing ‘élite’ class in the Yoruba society maintained an attitude of indifference to the traditional theatre and looked down on this kind of amusement. Instead, they developed new forms of entertainment and these spread out with increasing Christian European civilization and education.\textsuperscript{5} These, in consequence, dealt a disintegrating blow on the traditional theatre and the generality of its practitioners.


II

Any theatrical art developed within a particular cultural matrix has a combination of artistic qualities and aesthetic values peculiar to it. Apart from the presence of certain signals which are likely to convey universal meaning as far as art appreciation is concerned, the full meaning of any work of art can only be achieved by the spectator whose sensibility it reflects.

The form and style of the Yoruba masque theatre arose from the generalised concept of Yoruba art which, according to Fagg, is based on "selective generalization". In this form of art certain qualities are emphasized at the expense of others and only certain particular aspects of life are represented rather than the whole. To understand this tendency in Yoruba art, one has to know the artist's intention as well as his cultural and philosophical backgrounds.

The substance of what the masque-dramaturgist wishes to communicate or share with his audience is revealed in the material of his creation which also underlines his main preoccupations, namely religion and human situations. His themes depict first his faith in the ancestor and the emotional influence that the supernatural exercises on his life; they also indicate some vagueness in his own conceptualization of the ancestor and the deities and this may qualify the reason why he operates within the realm of allegory and symbolism, and secondly, his humanistic interests are not without some reference to his general concern for the continuity and survival of society.

The following art-forms are evidences of the creative genius of the Yoruba:

- the verbals arts (proverbs, riddles, tales, epigrams, etc.);
- the fine arts (carving, painting, etc.);
- the performing arts (dancing, singing and dramatization).

These art-forms are the basis of socialization and social control. The Yoruba masque theatre utilizes all three categories in a synthesis. Thus, to understand and appreciate the form and style of the theatrical art, an analysis of the functional attribute of each category of art-form will have to be made. The root-elements of the theatre are the mask, the chant and the dance; but a performance is the sum total of these and the unified product of gesture and costume:

1. William Fagg, "African Art: the Contrast with Western Tradition", The Times Review of the British Colonies, July 1951, p. 6. What the Yoruba artist wants to say is more 'unsaid' than 'said'. One has to acknowledge the values of economy, indirectness and allusion as factors influencing Yoruba concept formation to fully appreciate what is meant by "selective generalization" (see also Rev. S. Crowther, A Grammar and Vocabulary of Yoruba Language, London, 1852, p. 18; Ulli Beier, Three Yoruba Plays: Duro Lapido, Ibadan, 1964, postscript).
1. The Mask

All the characters masquerade and wear face-masks which depict the essence of their characterization. Masks were first used as an extension of the egúngún myth, a supernatural vital force; and later employed for the sublimation of the ego of the impersonator. In order to make his themes real as well as create an illusion that the egúngún (the ancestral spirit) sees the faults and foibles of those who inhabit the Yoruba society and expose them to scorn, the masque-dramaturgist communicates his ideas or themes through the use of a stylized form of presentation.

The mask is carved by a member of the guild of carvers and is then bought by the masque-dramaturgist. Sometimes the theme and plot of a play are stimulated by the creation of the carver and sometimes the masque-dramaturgist presents him with his own specification.

2. The Chant

This is the poetic element of the drama. Dramatic themes and plots also derive their sources from the oríkì (panegyric) and the orílè (totem) chants. Both the ọjọ (actor) and the akiñyùn gbà (chorus) with the accompaniment of the bàtá (orchestra) use the chant to lay the scene, convey the sense-impression and communicate the thematic points of the play. Usually the chant ends in a song and refrain. Since the drama is episodic, it is the chant that forms links for its full understanding.

3. The Dance

This is not separated from the drama. The actors indulge in very little dialogue or narrative story and the dance is the accompaniment of the chant and song. The dance not only enlivens but interprets the dramatic action and, naturally, flows from the plot.

A most significant area of aesthetic appreciation of the masques is the balanced fusion of all the three elements of mask, chant and dance; with their adjunctive qualities, they communicate meaningful signals and excite ecstasy or rapture among the spectators. The total experience which they transmit derives from a gestalt of the visual and aural patternings or configurations which are part of and confined within the dramatic form and the style of acting.

4. The Drama

There are two distinct genres: the idàn (spectacle) and the èfè (revue). The spectacle-masques are ritual enactments designed to meet religious
objectives. The style of staging is theatrical and is based on illusionistic presentationalism.¹ The religious element derives from Yoruba myths and totems and are designed to exploit the realm of magic and thus rely on symbolic action for expression. An illustrative example of the spectacle-masques is the *Masque of the Boa-Constrictor* (see Appendix A).

The revue-masques are sketched out as comments on the state of society. They tend to create the illusion of reality; but this is selectively done. In spite of the naturalness brought into the acting, both the stylized mask and the realistic costume are fixed, expressing only the prevailing characteristics of stereotypes rather than specific individuals. The simple plots are improvisational although not without some premeditation. The revues are usually based on subjects of topical interest and easily display the comic spirit of the Yoruba; but there is more emphasis on dramatic action than on the working out of plot. An illustrative example is the *Masque of the Òṣòmàǹló* (see Appendix B).

The programme for every performance is that of a Variety Show with items following a particular set order: 1) the *ijúbà* (entrance-song); 2) the dance; 3) the drama: a) spectacle, b) revue; 4) the finale and recessional dance.

1. *The ‘Ijúbà*

A formal or ceremonial opening in the form of the entrance-song of the Greek theatre of the fifth century B.C., it contains a ‘pledge’ and a ‘salute’; both chanted together, sometimes in a particular order of succession, sometimes in any order. The original pledge, called *îpèsà*, was addressed to ‘Esà ‘Ogbìn, the foremost masque-dramaturgist and founder of the first professional guild; later, it became a form of identification with the master-artist and other forces. The salute is a form of acknowledgment and a greeting to the assembly (see Appendix C).

2. *The Dance*

This is pure show. It is a sequence of ritual and social dances interspersed with acrobatic display. The ritual dance is *òríṣà* (deity) dance. While the *bàtà*-orchestra plays, the actors chant the *oríkì* of the particular deities whose dances are selected for each performance. Usually, the dance programme ends with the *agemo* dance, sometimes called *i jò orí odó* (dancing with a mortar) or *i jò fààfáá* (dancing with the raffia-mat) since both objects are used in the dance.

¹. This term has been used to denote the type of staging which, according to Gassner, emphasizes the presentation of a story in theatrical forms with the actors in direct contact with the audience, psychologically (see John Gassner, *Producing the Play*, New York, 2nd ed., 1967, p. 349).
3. The Drama

The spectacle-masques relate mainly to mythological and totemistic characters. Mythological characters include Sàngó (god of thunder and lightning), Òbàtálá (the arch-divinity and god of purity) and local heroes like 'Ar'oní. Totemistic characters use animal ‘motifs’. Certain animals like the elephant, the lion, the leopard, and others like the boa-constrictor, the crocodile, the monkey, the tortoise, and also some birds, were at one time taken as family symbols in the Yoruba society. They each have a praise-chant and tales that establish their cultural significance and identity.

The revue-masques are sociological, analysing the Yoruba society and revealing its vices, pests and morality. Some sketches like Didirín (Moron), Elékédídí (Mumps), Wòbìa (Glutton), 'Okánjúwà (Avarice) and ‘Omùtí (Drunkard) are the abstraction of deviant behaviour in society; others like Gàmbári (the Hausa), Tápá (the Nupe), Èbò (the White man) and ‘Idómi (the Dahomeyan war-general) are ‘stranger-elements’ in society. There are also sketches such as 'Iywó (the Bride), Ol'opa (the Police), 'Ap'on (the Bachelor) and Panságà (the Adulteress).

All the revue-masques depend on audience-participation for their full effect. As the sketches are mainly improvisational they are capable of infinite changes. The chants they incorporate are typical to type and the songs are topical and familiar.

4. The Finale

The 'Iywó masque is usually the last item. Known as idán àpa-re-lé (the recessional spectacular), it is the most beautiful and the most expensive to dress. It is usually acted by the leader of the troupe to display his flexibility and versatility.¹ The masque is improvisational like the revues but its distinctive features make it a fitting drama with which to end a show.

The masque is taken into a recessional dance round the streets of the community. It is an important device for collecting money and gifts (see Appendix D).

Occasionally, for an interlude, a puppet-theatre forms an item of the programme (see Appendix E).

The theatre operates on a form of repertory system. A company or troupe could have several productions from a stock-pile of masks. The masque-dramaturgist is free to base his masque on a satirical motive or on his conception of certain live or vital forces in society. Sometimes there is no sharp dividing lines between the serious and the comic; it is therefore

¹. Women were forbidden to act. It was part of the actor’s training to play female roles.
pointless to divide the masques into the two basic classical dramatic types of tragedy and comedy. Performances take place in the _ode_ (open-space); no scenery is necessary, except that, occasionally, the genius of a masque-dramaturgist manifests itself in the use of symbolic scenery. Generally, the objective in staging is not the simulation of a locality but the creation of an atmosphere.

III

The future prospect of the Yoruba masque theatre is bleak. There is hardly any other cultural manifestation that reflects the society in which it appears so fully and accurately as the theatre. The factors of change in the Yoruba society are affecting the institution of the traditional theatre. Islam has spread rapidly throughout Yoruba creating new ideas and tastes hostile to the _egúngún_, focusing on new concepts and introducing new cultural patterns into the society by its own form of education. Even more powerful has been the spread of Christian education and enlightenment through churches and mission schools, undermining belief in _egúngún_, introducing new concepts of the arts and establishing new forms of entertainment based on European models.

We are now witnessing the dying phase of the masque theatre. The old order has been yielding place to the new without an unbroken line of continuity. The development of new theatrical forms of entertainment which began in Lagos and Abeokuta in the 1860s has spread throughout the country. Since the variety concerts based on the Victorian music-hall or the vaudeville of the 1880s, the church cantata and the so-called “native drama” of the early part of the twentieth century, the Yoruba society and its growing ‘élite’ have witnessed the development of a new theatrical form first known as the “concert party” and later erroneously called the “folk opera”.

In spite of the dominance of foreign elements in the style and form of the Yoruba operatic theatre what is obvious are the special characteristics which make it at once a continuity of the style and form of the traditional theatre and yet significantly new. The influence of the traditional theatre on the modern forms of theatre is the consequence of parallel developments in artistic mode and concepts and the imaginative

2. See Leonard.
3. The ‘founding fathers’ of the Yoruba operatic theatre were the choirmasters and musicians involved with the presentation of the so-called “native drama” and church cantata during the early decades of this century. When they later emerged in the town-halls of Lagos, Ibadan and other towns in the thirties and forties, their operatic dramas were still based on biblical stories and themes. They addressed themselves to the ‘élite’ and not the ‘folk’; besides, their authors were literate drawing inspiration from traditional and foreign cultures.
apprehension of the Yoruba mode of thought and feeling by the modern Yoruba dramatist. The Yoruba operatic theatre, therefore, is distinctively Yoruba.

The most significant influence of the traditional theatre on the modern Yoruba theatre was in the use of the "opening glee" which was a modern adaptation of the ṭijībà of the masque theatre. Although the use of masks and masquerades was significant to the traditional theatre this has been abandoned by the modern dramatists. Nevertheless, Ogunde who admits to have derived his source of inspiration from the traditional masque theatre, popularised the use of 'masks' for theatrical effect in his shows. Martin Banham, in his summary of the style and form of the "Yoruba folk opera", comments on the survival in it of the significant elements of the traditional theatre.

In spite of the socio-cultural forces which militate against the continued existence of the masque theatre in present day Nigeria, the leaders of the extant troupes are searching for 'a new audience' within the context of the new wave of cultural nationalism in the country. But it is hard to see how they can succeed. The egúngún Society is now looked upon with great disfavour and there are abuses of the theatrical profession in the existence of mushroom groups of itinerant masqueraders who indulge in tricks and shoddy displays. The continued existence of the Yoruba masque theatre now hangs in the balance. In a rapidly developing modern society with its attendant sophistication in all cultural spheres, it is difficult to see how it can survive. It is, however, gratifying that its influence can be sought in the modern theatre.

APPENDIX A

MASQUE OF THE BOA-CONSTRICTOR

In this masque the story that is enacted is that of a powerful hunter, called 'Ogünmefun, who metamorphosed into a boa but owing to circumstances beyond his control he could not change back to a human being. In the theatrical performance of the story the leading actor plays the hunter and his own name, Aiyélab'ọlá, is used:

Aiyélab'ọlá walks out of the 'tiring-room' costumed in the ag'ọ (over-dress) at the summoning of the bàtá (orchestra). He sits down on the mat spread out before him and begins to chant:

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1. See Hubert Ogunde, Journey to Heaven, Lagos, [n.d.], pp. 1-2; and Yoruba Ronu, Yaba, [n.d.], pp. 5-6.
Aiyélab’ólá:

'O tó o!
'O tó onibáá mí,
Afínjú onilù títí f’áran s’ósán.
Èmi l’ègún Alàrá a-bi-kokó l’éttí aṣo.
Bí pé bá délè pé wí fún yeye mí,
E pé 'Ojọlá l’omo dá

Ní kò wàlè mò!

Aiyé tí bíni Agbe;

Nw’ọn pà’yé rè l’èró.

Aiyé tí bíni Alùkò;

Nw’ọn kun tí è l’òsùn.

Aiyé ló bíni ‘Ojè Lárinìnkàá
Ni nw’ọn so’mọ è m’òlè danin-danin.

Aísí nilé ‘Ojè Lárinìnkàá

L’omo d’érrè tó b’èrrè lc.

Enough!
It’s enough my bárà drummer,
The dapper drummer who uses velvet as string for tightening his drum.
I am the Masque Player with a concealed knot.
When you reach home tell my mother,
Say it was a Boa that his son transformed into

And never returned home!
The world was angry with the bird agbe

And dyed his wings in indigo.
The world was angry with the bird àlùkò

She dyed him with the henna.
The world was angry with the actor Lárinìnkàá,

And tied his son’s back down tightly.
It was in Lárinìnkàá’s absence

That his son transformed into a Boa and passed off with the Boa.

After this chant, he is completely surrounded by other actors who conceal him from the view of the spectators. He quickly puts on the costume of the Boa which he conceals in the ag’ọ (sack) and lies outstretched waiting for the orchestra to beat:

‘Bárá’:

Aiyélab’ólá! Aiyélab’ólá!

Mo ní Aiyélab’ólá d’èrrè o b’èrrè lc!
Aiyélab’ólá! Aiyélab’ólá!

I say Aiyélab’ólá transformed into a Boa

He passed off with the Boa.

Then Aiyélab’ólá now the Boa cries out:

Aiyélab’ólá:

Ikú rè é l’óri mí o! [Thrice.]

Behold death is on me! [Thrice.]

He goes into a deep slumber (indicating that he is now in the animal world). The chorus then begins to chant:
CHORUS:

*Nw’ón ní, “B’á bá wí fún mì.
’Nse là ìgb’ò.
Bí a bá s’or’ò s’énià,
’Nse là ìgbà.
Àwí lì gb’ò, s’òun lò mì’gbófò ‘òlá ba Ajíéláb’ólá.’
Ajíéláb’ólá d’érè,
‘O b’érè lò.

They said, “If one is warned,
   It is proper to take heed.
If one is talked to,
   It is proper to take advice.
Stubbornness, this was the cause of Ajíéláb’ólá
   [playing into the hands of the enemy.”
Ajíéláb’ólá transformed into a Boa,
He passed off with the Boa.

SONG:

Ajíéláb’ólá d’érè,
‘O d’érè l’òni,
Àdàm’ò d’érè,
‘O d’érè, ‘O d’érè l’òni,
Àdàm’ò d’érè. (Repeatedly.)
Ajíéláb’ólá has transformed into a Boa,
He’s a Boa, he’s a Boa today,
The changeling is a Boa. (Repeatedly.)

The second act begins with a warning from the bátá:

BÁTÁ:

Ajíéláb’ólá ‘O!
Má jáfara, alé ‘nílé lò!
Ajíéláb’ólá ‘O!
Bó bá bùrù tàn,
‘Iwò nikan ni yìò kù.
Ajíéláb’ólá ‘O!
Ajíéláb’ólá!
Don’t be careless, evening is approaching!
If the worst comes,
You’ll be left to your own devices.
Ajíéláb’ólá!

Then the chorus hails him back:

CHORUS:

Ajíéláb’ólá ‘O,
Ajíéláb’ólá ò-ò-ò!
Ajíéláb’ólá,
Oh, Ajíéláb’ólá!

Ajíéláb’ólá who has completed his mission in the animal world returns by answering the call:
The third act begins when the bâtâ praises him for his feat as follows:

**Bâtâ:**

'Ojòlá, a-du-m'o'prin
Qlá là ìkà,
*Ômọ a gün bi ewé-agogo*
Boa, you black one with the pleasant gait.
We are counting our honours,
Child, as straight as the ‘bell-leaf’!

There is joy everywhere when the Boa makes pantomimic gestures opening and closing his mouth, wriggling and dancing to the acclaim of the chorus:

**Chorus:**

Àdàmọ̀ d'èrè!
'O d'èrè, 'O d'èrè lònti,
Àdàmọ̀ d'èrè! (Repeatedly.)
The changeling is a Boa!
He's a Boa, he's a Boa today,
The changeling is a Boa! (Repeatedly.)

The act is brought to a close when the other actors surround him as before, cover him with the ag’ọ. He then changes his Boa costume and walks back to the booth with the other actors dancing to bâtâ beat.1

**APPENDIX B**

**Masque of the Òsòmàáló**

*Note:* This masque is a satirical sketch on the Ijesha-cloth dealers who operate a system of ‘hire-purchase’ as a means of attracting buyers. Because they do not demand ready cash, they add a certain amount (interest) to the normal selling price of the material and allow the buyer a respite.

**Play:** A young Ijesha (identified by the tribal marks on the face-mask) comes along and begins to display some cloths. He tries to sell them to the spectators who tease him appropriately, to the beat of the bâtâ:

**'Bâtâ' and Spectator:**

'Oṣòmàáló dè,
*Ijesha, Òmọ Ìgí!* [Several times.]
The 'Oṣòmàáló has arrived,
Ijesha, offspring of the Stick! [Several times.]

1. Compare with the *Masque of the Boa-Constrictor* described by Clapperton, pp. 53-54.
2. This masque was performed in the courtyard of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, by the Ajàngílá troupe on November 4, 1967.
Osömáló [sings]:

'Osömáló, lá a r'éèrè ọjá,
B'órí bá je l'ọ lọ mà d à je o. [Several times.]
The 'Osömàáló will reap the profit of the bargain,
If luck should bring success tomorrow,
I shall be honoured. [Several times.]

Soon Baba Olóògún (a medicine man) comes along. Both bargain and a deal is made. Baba Olóògún goes off and 'Osömàáló tries his luck once again with the spectators.

Baba Olóògún returns not to honour his bargain but to peddle his own medicines. 'Osömàáló demands his money. But Baba Olóògún denies any knowledge of the bargain. He reports 'Osömàáló to the spectators who react by calling him "Baba, Onígbèsè!" (Father, the Debtor!). 'Osömàáló squats and drags at Baba Olóògún to demand his money. Baba Olóògún is annoyed by this molestation and strikes 'Osömàáló with a poisoned waist-band. 'Osömàáló totters and falls into a swoon.

When Baba Olóògún realises the consequence of his action, he tries to bolt away. The chorus pleads with the spectators to prevail on Baba Olóògún to revive his victim. Baba Olóògún succeeds in restoring his victim to life. As soon as 'Osömàáló comes to, he drags at Baba Olóògún once again, taunting him:

Osömáló:

'Osömáló gb'owó mi!
Onígbèsè a b'orín kókó-kiki,
'Osömáló gb'owó mi!
I’ll squat till I get my money!
Debtor with a stubborn neck,
I’ll squat till I get my money!

When the chorus again pleads with the spectators to intervene, they react by throwing money into the ‘circle of play’ as ransom. 'Osömàáló gets his due and dances away jeering at Baba Olóògún who also dances off indifferently.

APPENDIX C

The following is an example of the traditional entrance song of the Yoruba masque theatre as presented by the Agbegijo troupe at Otta:

CHIEF ACTOR:

Mo jùbà, kí ìbà mi ń jè.
'Íbà ni ngó k'ò jù ná, aré mi d'èhin.
Mo rí bá, mo rí bá Baba mi Ajámkoro Dùgbè.
'Oun l'eégún Aláré, a-bi-kókó l'élí aṣòp.
Afinjú 'Ọjè ti i díin kókó lóri Eégún.
Bába mí mà a gbóhùn énu mi,

1. This entrance song was recorded at a performance by the troupe in February 1966.
Mo ri'bá, mo ri'bá.
J'e k'óde ònì ye mi o.
Mo jùbá pé'é ow'ó.
Mo jùbá pé'é esè.
'Mo jùbá ài'èlesé ti kò hu'run tó fí dè gb'ogb'o'ó itan.
Ará iwájú mo tiúbá,
Jànmáá mo bèbè èhin.
'Ibá ényin 'Iyámi 'Ošòròngá
Eìye a-bówó winni,
Eìye a-bèsè winni.
Afìnjú eìye ti i jì láárin òru.
Mo jùbá o, k'óde ònì o yè mi.
Mo tó jùbá Èsù Láàlù, Òkùnrin 'ơnà.
'O sá 'mo l'ogb'e, gùn'mo l'qòbe.
Èsù Láàlù mo jùbá o
Mo jùbá j'òdé ònì o yè mi.

CHORUS:
Ojú Aiyé pé! [4 times.]
E wá wo gbèdu àwa.
Ojú Aiyé pé,
E wá wo èègùn àwa;
Èègùn àwa nfo Tápà, ó nfo 'Jèṣà.
Ojú Aiyé pé!
'Ita pé!
Ará pé!
E wá wo gbèdu àwa.
'O-ṣèrè l'Adéòw'ó.
'O-ṣèrè l'Òdígbo.

CHIEF ACTOR:
Olóde àgò o!
'Ókúta àgò o!
Ényin Olóde!
È bùn wá l'óde o
K'áwa ó rí bì jó.
'O d'ow'ó ìrèlè.
'O d'ow'ó ìtá,
'O d'ow'ó Òsànyin,
'O d'ow'ó Ògbojò tó l'èègùn.
Nítorí 'Ôgèèdènghè ló d'òjè 'lè,
Sòunghè ló ti k'ó awo ó ìṣè.

SONG:
Ibi è ri, è kíge mi lò,
Ibi è ri o è kíge è mi lò. [2 times.]
Èmì Adéòw'ó òmò 'Sábi.
Ibi è ri o è kíge mi lò,
Èmì ba sè l'àivé mú.
'O-ṣèrè l'Adéòw'ó.

CHORUS:
Ojú Aiyé pé! 
'Ita pé!
Arà pé!
E wá wọ gbèdù àwa.
'Ojúkú oríkọ
'Iyàmì 'Oṣòròngà.

SONG:
'Emù Aiyé!
E má mà mu wa!
Emù Aiyé o!
E má mà mu wa!
Ení ba sé l'Aiyé mú,
'Oṣèrè l'Adèlọwọ.

CHIEF ACTOR:

I submit my pledge, may my pledge be fulfilled.
It is the pledge I will first submit, my performance comes at the end.
I behold a pledge, the pledge is to my father, Ajáŋkóro Dùgbẹ.
He is the masque-actor, with a concealed knot at the hem of his garment.
The scrupulously neat masque-histrion who is a threat to the existence of other masquerades.
My Father, hearken to my voice, Behold the pledge.
Let us become worthy of this outing.
I pledge to you my open hand.
I pledge to you my flat foot.
I pledge to you the underfoot that grows no hairs, even as far as knee.
To you who have passed before me, I humbly bow. [high.] From you my companions, I beg for courage.
The pledge is to you, 'Iyàmì 'Oṣòròngà,
A ‘bird’ with divers hands,
A ‘bird’ with divers legs,
The scrupulously neat ‘bird’ whose sorties are at midnight.
I hereby submit my pledge;
Let me become worthy of today’s outing.
My pledge is also to you Esù Làlàlù who patrols the road.
Who slashes and inflicts wounds.
Esù Làlàlù, behold my pledge.
I submit the pledge,
Let me become worthy of this outing.

CHORUS:

The eyes of the World are set! [4 times.]
Come and see our gbèdù.
The eyes of the World are set,
Come and see our masquerade;
Our masques speak Tapa, they speak Ijesha.
The eyes of the World are set,

1. The reference to ‘father’ is conventional. It is an implied recognition of the person who was the actor’s source of inspiration and tutor. ‘Father’ may, in fact, be the lineage-head from whom the actor has descended, acting being a lineage profession.
2. She is ‘Mother Superior’, the head of the guild of witchcraft.
3. The expression is rhetorical. A pageant is implied and not the royal drums.
THE YORUBA MASQUE THEATRE

'Itá' is complete!
Brethren are assembled!
Come and see our gbèdu.
Adélow’o is a player;
'Odigbó is a player.

CHIEF ACTOR:

You owner of the Open, make way!
You owner of the Open, give us a space,
A space to put on our show.
We consign ourselves to the deity 'Irèlè;
We consign ourselves to the deity 'Itá;
We consign ourselves to the deity 'Osanyin;
We consign ourselves to 'Ologbojò, the owner of the masquerade.
Because of 'Ogèdèngbè, he introduced masque-dramaturgy.
He first learnt the secret at Sàungbè.

SONG:

Shout my name, wherever you may,
Shout my name wheresoever you may. [2 times.]
I am Adélow’o, son of Sábi,
Shout my name, wherever you may.
It is he who offends that the World catches.
Adélow’o is but a player.

CHORUS:

The eyes of the World are set!
'Ità is complete!
Come to see our gbèdu
'Early homage' is your name Mother Superior, 'Oṣòròngà.

SONG:

You catcher of the World, do not catch us!
You catcher of the World, do not catch us!
It is he who offends the World catches.
Adélow’o is only a player.

The following is an example of a modern ‘opening glee’ of the Ogunmola travelling theatre in 1947:

CHORUS:

Erè dé, erè o.
Erè tò gbámúṣ'èn,
Erè tò lārinrin,

1. It is not the ‘open’ that is being referred to but the owner of it, sometimes called Olódè (the Lord of the Open or the god S’onp’ôná). The expression is to the effect that the god’s presence has made the open space whole.
2. ‘Ogèdèngbè is one of the attributive names of Òlugbèré Àgàn, the first Yoruba mummer or masked-actor.
3. This “opening glee” was used in respect of the performance of any play by the company until it was abandoned in the early sixties.
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Ari mà le è lọ,
Awo-padà-s'èhin,
È f'ara ba lè ke' ri ran o e.

CHIEF ACTOR:
Alága wa o, àti 'gbáhejì,
Ènyin iyáda wa,
Ènyin bàba à, wa,
Ki a tó má a b'èrè wa lọ,
Bì babaláwò bá jì,
A júbà l'òw'ò lfá.
B'óniṣẹgùn bá jì o,
A júbà l'òw'ò 'Ọsanyin.
Ongbágbó tó bá jì o,
A j'ìbà j'Orùn.
Oba ọ'run, araúné-r'ọrun,
Awa mà júbà t'òw'ò Rẹ o.

CHORUS:
'Oñi a dá'ì'ọ eré.
'Ola a f'ókàn s'ọna.
Qf'ọ tí a dá pé l'oni o,
È f'ara balè,
Kẹ f'ara balè wọ ran l'ọjọ ọni o.
Agbe t'ó l'aró, Kí i rähùn aró.
Àlùhò t'ó l'osùn,
Kí i rähùn osùn.
Lèkélè t'ó l'efun, Kí i rähùn efun.
Kí è mà rähùn owò,
Kí è mà rähùn ọmọ.
Ohun t'ẹ o je, t'ẹ o mun,
Kò mà w'ọn yin o.
'Oñi a dá'ì'ọ eré.
'Ola a f'ókàn s'ọnà.
Qf'ọ tí a dá pé l'oni o
Gbogbo ènià.
L'òw'ọ ik'ekùn Aiyé,
L'òw'ọ ik'ekùn Èsù,
L'òw'ọ alákóbá Aiyé o
Abáni-wà-kùn-ẹni,
Èdu'marè ko gbà wọ o.
Awa l'èlèrè Ilè,
Awa l'èlèrè omi,
Ègbèré, 'Oṣùpá, Ilè, ilè-ayé o. [2 times.]
Bì're lo bá m'ọ 'ọ sè,
Ko mùrù o kikan-kikan.
Bìbi lo bá m'ọ 'ọ sè a,
Ko mùrù o kikan-kikan.
A, Páradìsè la ó ti sè 'dáy'ọ
A, Páradìsè!

CHORUS:
We are here to present our play.
This is the time for the play.
A play that is gripping.
A play that is entertaining.
A play that one would see and would not like to leave.
A play that one would like to see backwards.
Be patient and see a real show.

CHIEF ACTOR:

Our chairman and his supporter,1
Our mothers,
Our fathers,
Before we go on with our play, when the priest of the ìfá cult awakes,
He places his pledge in the hands of ìfá.
When the physician awakes,
He places his pledge in the hands of deity Òsanyin.
The Christian, when he awakes, pledges to God, King of Heaven, One
This is our pledge to Thee who oversees earth and heaven.

CHORUS:

Today we announce the date of our performance.
Tomorrow we look forward to it.
But today completes the announcement.
So be patient to see our show this day.
The bird agbe,2 who is the possessor of the indigo, never lacks the dye.
The bird àlúkò, who is the possessor of the osùn,3
Never lacks the dye.
The cattle-egret who is the possessor of the chalk,
Never lacks the colour.
May you not lack money,
May you not lack children,
May you never be short of what to eat and what to drink.
Today we announce the date of our performance
Tomorrow we look forward to it.
But today completes the announcement
To all people.
From the snare of the World.
From the snare of Òṣù,4
From the World’s troubleshooter who increases one’s misfortunes,
May the Almighty deliver us.
We are the players on the Land.
We are the players on the Waters,
You Spirits, Moon, Land of this World. [2 times.]
If doing good is your accomplishment,
Be steadfast at it.
If evil doing is your accomplishment,
Be steadfast at it.
It is in Paradise that we shall face judgement
Yes, in Paradise!

1. In their early history, it was customary for the operatic theatre troupe to appoint a chairman and supporters who donated generously.
2. Agbe is the blue touraco Musophagidae of the cuckoo family.
3. Osùn is the African camwood which yields dye used as cosmetics.
4. Òṣù in this reference is the biblical devil, Satan or Lucifer. He is thought of as the malignant supernatural being capable of malevolent acts.
APPENDIX D

THE ‘IYÀWÓ MASQUE’

Note: The ‘Iyàwó (Bride) masque is normally presented as the ‘finale’ of every show.

Play: The Bride prepares for leave-taking. She displays all her costly apparels—iró (wrappers), bùbá (blouses), gélè (head-ties) and iborán (shawls). She then puts them on, one after another. Later, in song and dance, bids her people (the spectators) farewell and prepares to leave for her new home.

Soon, the Husband emerges on the scene. The Bride resumes her song and dance and starts taking off her dresses, one after another, giving them each to the important people spotted in the audience until the penultimate dress. She then confronts her husband, removes the last set of dresses and demands that the Husband pays for them. When this is done she reveals a baby (a decorative doll) on her back which she hands over to the Husband and collects the owó ọmọ (money for the baby).²

Next, she performs the feeding of the baby. She then hands him over to the Husband and both of them dance amidst choral singing. As the Bride dances she goes round collecting money from those who got the dresses she stripped.

CHORAL SONG:

Ọmọ l'èrè ojà o,
Ọmọ l'èrè ojá.
Olùwa kò fún wa l'ọmọ,
Ọmọ l'èrè ojá.

Child is the profit of the market,
Child is the profit of the market.
Lord, give us children,
Child is the profit of the market.³

Then the bátá beats the ‘finale’:

BÁTÁ:

'O tó ká re'lé,
Ilé ti tó ṭo,
'Ojè kan hò s'awo-s'awo
Kó gbàgbé ilé.

It’s time we went home
No mask-actor ever carried on his show
And forgot home.

1. This masque was performed by the Àjàngàlà troupe on November 4, 1967.
2. The baby-doll is a dramatic symbol, signifying fertility. It is a ritual indication that the Bride’s gift to her husband is children.
3. ‘Market’ is used in the song as a poetic symbol standing for the world which the Yoruba believe is a market-place where people collect and barter. The Yoruba’s quest for ‘child’ is an evidence of his concern for continuity in procreation. After the bargaining process is done with, the transaction yields a profit only if a child is left behind to continue.
CHORUS:
‘O tó ká re’lé,
Ilé lár ìpọ,
‘Ojè kán kò s’awo-s’awo
Kò gbàgbé ìlé.
   It’s time we went home,
   It’s home we are going.
   No mask-actor ever carried on his show
   And forgot home.

BRIDE:
‘O tó o!
Awa ìpọ,
‘O dìgbà-o-ṣe!
Ká má ṣ’oju y’ara wa,
Ká má ṣ’pọṣe y’ara wa.
   It’s enough!
   We are leaving
   Adieu!
   May our eyes not miss one another,
   May our feet not miss one another.

CHORUS: [Repeat.]

The songs go on in many verses as the Bride leads the troupe out in a kind of recessional dance round the streets of the community collecting gifts.

APPENDIX E
THE PUPPET THEATRE (Erugàlè or Ajólókèlokè)

Note: The Aiyélab’ọlá troupe is reputed to have introduced puppetry into their show.¹ The puppets are carved wooden figures, manipulated by someone in concealment, so that they emerge into a great height where they are made to dance, usually male and female.

Play: A typical scene: a raffia mat, used as concealment, is displayed in the centre of the arena; the báta strikes the salute and the chorus begins to sing:

CHORUS:
Kó dìde o. [2 times.]
Erugàlè, kó dìde.
   Let him emerge. [2 times.]
   Let Erugàlè emerge.

Then the carved figure of a man emerges. The Man dances:

¹. The origin of the Aiyélab’ọlá troupe dates back into the nineteenth century. Nowadays, every troupe uses the puppet show as a form of ‘interlude’.
bàtá:
'O dé!
Ajólókhélókhéló dé
'O dé, 'O dé.
Erugàlè, ijó dé!
He’s arrived!
He that dances in the air has arrived,
He’s arrived, he’s arrived.
Erugàlè, its time to dance!

The Man stops dancing, stalls for a partner. Suddenly, the Woman (a female counterpart) emerges and a long, tedious conversation ensues (with the bàtá talking through). They fall into romance and sex; then there is a kind of misunderstanding between them which results into knocking each other about. The mistress apparently unable to stand it any more disappears.

CORRIGENDUM

Par suite d’une omission typographique de guillemets, deux passages des articles de Christiane Seydou, « Introduction » et « Un conte breton... » (CEA, 45, XII-1, 1972, pp. 10 et 130), cités dans l’article de Denise Paulme, « Morphologie du conte africain » (ibid., pp. 159 et 161), ne ressortent pas comme des citations. La rédaction s’en excuse auprès des lecteurs et des auteurs.