

WE WORLD

W HERE WAS

I to start thinking about what! Do I start with personal effects which went with the fire or departmental properties which were in my care as Head of Department for the two years immediately preceding the fire? I have been associated off and on with the Department since 1961 - the days of the School of Drama. I was a member of Wole Soyinka's 1960 Masks out of which grew the Orisun Repertory.

I remember my copies of pictures of some performances by Orisun; The Lion and the Jewel, 1964, The Trials of Brother Jero 1963 both directed by Wole Soyinka himself. There were also pictures of our performance of B. Holos' The Creation Myth. This was a dance drama choreographed by Peggy Harper. There were pictures of several revue sketches by Wole Soyinka. More than the pictures were manuscripts with Wole Soyinka's handwriting as he amended the scripts to suit different performances during the heady days of political turmoil in the then Western Region of Nigeria. Orisun's production of J.P. Clark's The Raft (1963?) which was performed before Leopold Sedar Senghor has particular memories. The younger members of Orisun, Tunji Oyelana, Jimi Solanke, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi (then Eddy) Fatoba, Betty Okotie (now Betty Edewoh) Yewande Akibo (now Yewande Johnson) and Dele Oti were all involved in the building of the set. The show was lit by Wale Ogunyemi. The picture of the set by itself on stage looked like it was sitting on

• **Personal memories of a departmental fire and a recount of irreplaceable records and texts**

real water. I lost the playbill, pictures of The Raft particularly those of Wole Soyinka, Ralph Opara, Yemi Ujadu and Segun Olusola, the four members of the cast. The production was directed by Wole Soyinka.

There were some of the cornerstones of my foundation as a theatre practitioner before I left the country in 1964 to study Speech and Drama at the Central School of Speech and Drama, London, England. Since my final(?) return to the country in 1977 I have been in the Department as a teacher. I have seen many students through the Department. Almost all of them graduated. It is not the fact of their graduation which was affected by this fire but the process of their graduation in the actuality of the files of some of their very memorable productions. Garcia Lorca's Blood Wedding directed by Lola Fani-kayode, Wole Soyinka's Death and the

Femi
Fatoba

Editor's Note: As the University of Ibadan forges on with repair work on blocks of buildings which housed the Theatre Arts, Philosophy and Arabic studies departments destroyed entirely by a fire incident on the night preceding 25th January 1995, Fatoba who with other colleagues lost their whole personal libraries, recounts that the fire wiped out so many priceless documents, photographs, audio tapes, landmark production programmes and posters that money can by no means replace.

Opposite picture, of a 1969 Arts Theatre production handbill, is representative of the lost antiques.

King's Horseman directed by Segun Ojeyuyi, Jean Genet's directed by Saidat Odofin. Nothing is left of the production files of these productions, thanks to that fire. Nothing was spared, not the staff files either of such productions as Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers 1978, Zulu Sofola's Song of a Maiden 1979, each directed by its playwright; Ionesco's Exit the King directed by Femi Fatoba 1979, Jean-Paul Sartre's Lucifer and the Lord directed by Carroll Dawes, choreographed by Femi Fatoba in 1981, Femi Osofisan's Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen directed by Sunbo Marinho in 1989 and Wole Soyinka's The Road directed by Femi Osofisan in 1990; The Scoundrel Suberu an adaptation of Moliere's Scapin by Adelegha and Egbe was performed in 1986, directed by Dapo Adelugba. Yinka Adediji directed A flash in the Sun (an ensemble creation) which was the participation of the University of Ibadan in the programme marking the exhibition of Treasures of Ancient Nigeria in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. in 1982. Later the production toured Netherlands, Japan and W.Germany in 1983 and in 1984 it was taken to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Apart from production files there were pictures from Fidelina Okwesa's Nonyelum, a dance-drama co-choreographed by Okwesa and Fatoba in 1978 and repeated in 1979. Most painful is that the pictures and production files came from the premiere of most of the African plays mentioned above.

For the production of Alem Mezgebe's PULSE directed by Bayo Oduneye in 1980 I painted a big blazing red pudenda on which one big human eye was superimposed. This was at the request of the director. The painting was one of the prominent stage props and it was conspicuously displayed on the table of the lead character played by Ayo

Akinwale. The painting attracted a lot of attention and controversy and Mr. Oduneye always transferred the burden of explaining or interpreting the painting to me. It wasn't that he didn't know the symbolism of the painting in the context of the play, after all he commissioned it. The fact is that he just wanted to put the joke on me. The difficult part is that the said painting attracted attention from female members of the play's audience than it did from males. This persisted even more after the production when Mr. Oduneye put the painting in his office purely as a work of art, out of its original symbolic context.

Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* was directed by the playwright in 1982. The cast include Tunde Laniyan and Ayo Akinwale. In 1988 Adelugba directed Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi*; in 1990 *Waiting for Anini* by Kunle Famoriyo was directed by the playwright; in 1991 Osofisan directed his *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*. It was later presented to Ibrahim Babangida on the occasion of his official visit to Oyo State. The occasion of that performance at the cultural centre, Mokola, Ibadan afforded me the opportunity of seeing men and women of the State Security at work. They ranged from the very intelligent to the utterly stupid. Most of them tried to disguise while some openly flaunted their identity when Jide Malomo and I were rehearsing the students at the Cultural Centre. Some were so officious that they went as far as violating the performance area during the performance. I remember praying for a James Booth even though Babangida could and would never compare with George Washington. A lot of the costumes and props for that production went with the fire.

In the case of the staff productions mentioned here, except each member kept his own production file in offices outside of the Departmental office block, we lost them all to the fire as they were records of artistic achievements.

Records of academic achievements such as copies of all Ph.D. thesis and M.A. dissertations ever written (except the departmental written in a few which were borrowed and yet to be returned by post-

graduate students) were lost in the fire. As Head of Department for two years, the sitting arrangement in my office was such that each time I looked up I saw the glazed pictures of those who ran the Department before me except that of Femi Osofisan who was yet to provide us with his picture. Geoffrey Axworthy, the first Head of the School of Drama; the Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, the first Nigerian Head of Department followed by J. A. Adedeji, the longest serving Head of Department (so far) and Dapo Adelugba. Each time I looked up at those pictures I felt inspired particularly by the faces of Axworthy and Soyinka and I told myself that I will make myself worthy of stepping into the shoes they left behind. I first experienced real theatre through Soyinka and knew Axworthy at Ibadan but he later became the principal of my college during my last two years in college in London.

All those pictures were destroyed by the fire. I can only carry them in my memory. I remember always telling students not to damage departmental property, telling them of the importance of legacies for coming generations. Legacies of all B.A. long essays and other artistic projects which were ever undertaken in the Department constituted reference materials housed in the departmental library. We lost them all. So were playtexts from all over the world, covering generations from the times of the Pharaohs.

Of course I lost the whole world. Theatre was the centre of my life. My library was the core of that centre. There I lived with all the great poets of the world, from ancient Greece to modern-day Nigeria. There I lived with all the great artists of ancient Ife and Benin to moderns like Cezanne, Picasso, Onobrakpeya and Jimoh Akolo. There I lived with the mythologies and folklores of the ancient and modern world. There I lived with all the playwrights of the world from Euripedes, Sophocles to Shakespeare and Marlowe, Maxim Gorky and other Russian writers to the moderns of Europe and America and back home to Africa and Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan and the lesser-known ones. There I lived with the great critics on both the right and left of critical appreciation of Literature. The great storytellers of the

world were also there from Dostoyevski to D. O. Fagunwa. There were recorded performances of Duro Ladipo, discs of Ebenezer Obey, Ayinla Omowura and Haruna Ishola. There I also lived with some of my own creations, the many canvasses with which I conversed while creating images on them. I lost my world of manuscripts and journals. I was not sure at what point I started crying after I saw the wreck of what only the previous day, housed the pride and wealth of my academic, literary and artistic being.

A few weeks before the fire, (another departmental teacher) Dr. Lanre Bamidele had come to my office to ask me some questions about a student or so, then he looked at a section of my library. He was delightedly surprised to see some books he knew would help in some paper he was writing or planning to write. He there and then asked if he could use my library. Of course I said he could. He too lost part of that world. So did the mature students and other lecturers. I remember sitting at the bottom of the tree in front of the Arts Theatre watching colleagues in the Philosophy department pick up remnants of their lives from the wreck, and listening to people lamenting, cursing, some asking questions directed at nobody in particular.

Some went into the story of how the fire was first noticed and how the University's fire department had been summoned but could not do anything because they had no water. They told of how some of the fire fighters refused to risk their lives and eventually it was the students from Tafawa Balewa and Kutu halls of residence who mobilised and stopped the fire spreading to take on the Arts Theatre also. There were many more recounts but those trailed off and became mere echoes to the ears. Each time I thought about the magnitude of the losses Akin Isola's words kept coming back. There was a chance meeting with the playwright on that same day in the home of Professor O. O. Olatunji, of the Department of Linguistics and African languages. Professor Isola's words were based in Yoruba philosophy: 'Eniti o ni nkan osin a ku gbi. Nkan osin re lo ku, ka dupe pe iwo ko loku.' (A person without a pet dies easily. It is your pet that died, lets thank God it wasn't you who died). **GR**