

**African Performance Review**

**Vol. 11, No. 2, 2019**

**pp 62-63**

**Book Review**

**Sola Adeyemi, *Vision of Change in African Drama: Femi Osofisan's Dialectical Reading of History and Politics*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 241pp. £76.27 (hc)**

Sam Kasule  
*University of Derby*

---

*Vision of Change in African Drama: Femi Osofisan's Dialectical Reading of History and Politics*, Sola Adeyemi's study of Femi Osofisan's dramatic writings and practice offers the reader of Osofisan's works both an historical, political and a theoretical analysis so comprehensive that it will become critical for future scholars of contemporary African/Nigerian drama. Adeyemi's work will be useful to scholars interested not only in drama but also in broader cultural and political issues. This is the work of a broadminded scholar, one who reads with remarkable attention to detail and a broad range of relevant scholarship. While reading *Vision of Change in African Drama* one is struck by the evolution of Osofisan's engagement of various political, cultural, historical, and sociological approaches, and in particular his focus with the increasing examination of pan-Africanism. In *Vision of Change in African Drama* Adeyemi contextualises Osofisan's work by demonstrating its resonance with the writing and practice of other writers such as Wole Soyinka, Hubert Ogunde, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Duro Ladipo, and Bode Sowande. Notably, in as much as Osofisan has contradicted Soyinka's views on the revolutionary dynamics in ritual, similar to all these writers, his work, as attested in this book, "theatre draws its cultural relevance from the belief system of the Yoruba... to structure his postcolonial engagement". (15).

Adeyemi examines Osofisan's political plays within which the playwright candidly addresses contemporary social/political issues by either deliberately rewriting Nigerian/Yoruba history, adopting folktales and legends, or adapting classical European dramas that challenge audiences to question the actions of the leaders. Central to Adeyemi's contribution to the study of Osofisan's theatre is his skilful examination of political

plays including *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, *Tegonni* and *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* as constructions of an original form of African and Nigerian theatre writing practice that draws on national and inter-cultural forms and styles. In opposition to readings of these plays as Yoruba/Nigerian dramatic creations, he argues persuasively that overlooking or side-lining these performances denies us of a full understanding of theatre and performance in Africa and its diaspora. Instead of focusing his study on essentialist readings, Adeyemi deciphers the post-colonial and post-negritude discourse which argues that instead of “post-colonialism is an engagement with, and contestation of colonialism’s discourses, power structures and social hierarchies.” (2) Adeyemi explores different topics focused on Osofisan’s theatrical concerns. For example, he effectively reads into *Nkrumah-ni...Africa-ni!* (1994) a multiple agendum – Osofisan the socialist in dialogue with Osofisan the Pan-Africanist, examining the actions of Pan-Africanist leaders, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Amil Cabral, and their diasporic sensibilities, in actions and words. This book brings previously marginalized texts, especially the reinterpretations of classical dramas to centre stage through an extraordinary contribution to the study of the ways in which Osofisan makes the classical European texts ‘talk African’.

Some of Adeyemi’s best contributions in the book are rather brief, as if there is too much to investigate, such that he wishes to reserve the rest for another volume. In his conclusion, he looks at Osofisan as a dramatist who “radically modifies and transforms contemporaneous material to provide this audience with dramas that have global appeal even as they emphasise his Yoruba heritage” (219), a view that he would use as well. This is a useful observation because Osofisan’s political views are a vivid part of his work and remain central to his drama.