

Professor Dapo Adelugba¹: In Memoriam

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And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where
we started and know the place for the first time – T S Eliot

One balmy afternoon in the first quarter of 1970, my late father formally introduced me to the then Mr Dapo Adelugba who, according to him, was a most brilliant young man who used to play the part of the Fool in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. He took me by my digits, swayed unsteadily and uttered the recurrent word 'Nuncle!' That was the Fool's by-word in *King Lear*. He was willowy and athletic of build and had a cultivated beard, the size of a swallow's nest. His ebullience was infectious and genuine. He always created an impression and had a joke for every occasion. That was Uncle Dapo. A week later, he caught a mammy wagon from the main gate of the university between the old Esso petrol station and the post office on his way to teach Shakespeare to my father's literature students at Iseyin Grammar School. He subsequently did the same charitable routine, years later, when my father became the head teacher at St Bernadine's Girls Grammar School at Oyo.

Uncle Dapo had a large heart and was always generous with his laughter and his hospitality. Usually, he had peanuts, kola nuts and bitter kola on him or in his office, which he readily shared. I later discovered that his love of Shakespeare was equally complemented by his love for Yeats, Shaw and Synge. He was a most dedicated and diligent drama teacher and theatre artist. Room 100A in the main building of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, housed a large portion of his books,

¹ Professor Adedapo Abayomi Olorunfemi Adelugba
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journals and periodicals but one soon discovered that his library at home was even much bigger. He seemed to have all the books and was always willing to share them with us young faculty members. He directed his students, in turn, to borrow from any new journals we acquired.

Uncle Dapo was a man of the people and he helped to publish young and upcoming scholars in his occasional LACE series. He truly democratized intellectual spaces and he ensured that he marked the epochal birthdays of his friends with an edited volume. He was dependable and loyal; and deferred to his older friends as much as he mentored and trusted his younger folks. He readily collaborated with artists like Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark and Wale Ogunyemi as well as scholars like Lloyd Thompson, Dan Izevbaye and Egbe Ifie. Adelugba's needs were few and were easily met. He was not a fop. Excellence was the hallmark of his professional life as an actor, director and theatre impresario. His critical breadth and artistic influences were so cosmopolitan that he not only translated Bakary Traore's *The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions*, he imaginatively adapted Moliere's *Les Fouteries de Scapin* as *That Scoundrel Suberu*. That meant that he traversed British, Irish and French theatres.

He epitomized hard work and his pastime was theatre work, teaching and study. He was totally dedicated to the Academy, particularly to Ibadan University. It was a great pity that he was not retained at Ibadan after his initial retirement. When I returned from my graduate study at Leeds University, he encouraged me to stay, work and remain at Ibadan. When I attempted to locate and retrace the sites of the old *Mbari* club at Gbagi, Ogunyemi and Adelugba came to my assistance. One intellectual significance of Uncle Dapo in the evolution of Wole Soyinka's oeuvre as an artist and avatar was that he was a fundamental factor in the artistic peregrination of the Nobel laureate in his mythical night walk around the liberating bar of Risikatu in Molete where Soyinka discovered his artistic vision. The bar was an imaginative as well as a symbolic landmark in the elusive search of the artist for 'a far country'. Uncle Dapo had been teaching at Ibadan Grammar School in Molete from 1965 to 1967 from where he was a regular feature at Soyinka's Orisun Theatre. He was not only an actor; he was an acolyte.

Uncle Dapo was a dedicated family man. He loved his daughter, Yetunde Teniayo with a passion and remembered her as a wonderful and loyal child. When Teniayo would visit home from her medical studies in England, he would take her round as a proud father. Bringing Yetunde to see me at the Institute of African Studies in the 1990s reminded me of how my father walked me at the Arts Theatre two decades before. One can only wish that Uncle Dapo will rest from his labours and return to

permanently take his place in our memory, our hearts and our culture repertory. In this regard, I cannot but end with the lines of one of his favourite Irish dramatists and nationalist, J M Synge:

From our harmonized discords new notes will rise. In the end we will
[all] assimilate with each other and grow senseless and old. We have incarnated God, and been a part of the world. That is enough.

Nuncle, Daodu, as you gain azure heights and arrive at heaven's gate, partake only of the sublime and match the vision which your creator had endowed you with. *Dom spiro spero.*

Uncle Dapo, *O digba!*