

# IN SEARCH OF THE NATION: A READING OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ESU AND THE VAGABOND MINSTRELS*

Azeez Akinwumi Sesan<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Femi Osofisan's thematic focus in his plays is the social criticism of corruption, maladministration and inequity in his immediate society, Nigeria. *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* is one of such plays. The play's thematic focus is on corruption and inhumanity which characterise the postcolonial Nigerian society. This paper adopts Social Reader-Response Theory, which underlines readers' ideological predisposition as influenced by the chosen interpretive strategy, to critique the play. The plot and subject matter reveal that Osofisan writes the play from the political history of the country in the 80's. The play's reference to Nigeria's military coup of 1983 is established with the dialogue of the vagabond minstrels and the contractors who fail to deliver the rice that was paid for by the overthrown civilian government. The play, perhaps, aims to raise the consciousness of Nigerians on the view that humanity can be sustained by compassion and sincerity of purpose in dealing with fellow human beings as demonstrated by Omele in the play. In the search for an ideal nation, individuals and groups across all the ethnic nationalities need to think critically to know where things have gone wrong in the country instead of fishing in the troubled waters of the country's socio-political and economic challenges.

**Keywords:** Ideal nation, *Esu and the vagabond minstrels*, Femi Osofisan's dramaturgy

## 1. Introduction

That literature is a reflection of human society is no more in doubt as shown in matters and meanings of literary texts produced across all the genres of poetry, drama and prose. This view is premised on the fact that literature is life. Whatever the theme of a literary text, it is taken from the remote or immediate experiences of the author. Considering the connection between literature and life, literature is functional, even at the oral stage of literary production. In the pre-lettered African society, oral artists usually played the roles of the conscience and consciousness of the society and this was seen in the matters and meanings of their texts in the genres of poetry, drama and prose narratives such as folktales, myths and legends.

The matters and meanings of the oral texts in the pre-literate African society were metaphorical references to the collective human experience as reflected by the triumphs and trials of the hero or protagonist. In the oral texts such as epic and myth, the challenges of the hero always affect the whole of the community. The thematic focus of some of the oral texts, it should be

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<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Skyline University, Kano State, Nigeria. Email: azeezakinwumisesan@gmail.com

stated, is the quest for humanity and a humane society for all. The lessons learnt from every performance are meant to change our thinking and action for the better.

Like other literary texts, *Esu and the vagabond minstrels*, first published in paperback format in 1991<sup>2</sup>, enjoys multiple interpretations. The theory of the text explains that many factors contribute to its matter and meaning and, for this reason, readers and critics should be open-minded in the reading, interpretation and analysis of the text. To this end, it is important to note that a literary text does not have an invariable interpretation and meaning. The meaning a literary text depends on a particular theory and the mindset of its readers and critics.

In describing the text, the intention, exchange and interpretation of meaning are important and these factors differentiate a text from a non-text (Barthes, 1971; Foucault, 1968; Ricoeur, 1974, 1984; Webster, 1997; Akwanya, 2007). These theorists are of the view that language is central to the construction and negotiation of meaning between the writer and the reader. For this reason, they posit, in their separate arguments, that attention should be paid not to the author of the text, but, rather, to the way language is used in the text to construct meaning. Specifically, in Ricoeur's (1981, p. 201) words:

With written discourse, the author's intention and meaning of the text cease to coincide. This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention is what is really at stake in the inscription of discourse. Not that we can conceive of a text without an author; the tie between the speaker and the discourse is not abolished, but distended and complicated.... [T]he text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say.

There are some conclusions that can be made reached from the view of Ricoeur. A text and its author cannot be seen as a single inseparable entity. The role of the author ends in the making of the text while the reader is at liberty to unearth the expressed and unexpressed meanings of the text. It can thus be argued that no text should be beset with the problem of meaning because of the subjectivity and multiplicity of meanings. Readers of a text can see it from different ideological perspectives and this gives the text autonomy.

The pre-occupation of this paper is the analysis and interpretation of *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* in relation to the events in the past and in contemporary Nigerian society. Thus, this paper interprets and analyses the text within historical and sociological contexts. It considers the historical military coup of 1983 that is recounted at the beginning and in the course of the play. This military coup is significant in the history of Nigerian politics because of the bold step of the military junta of the time to purge the nation of all corrupt practices. The play is read within a sociological context because

<sup>2</sup> However, all references are to the 2003 edition in *Major Plays 2*.

of the subject matter it treats. It is a comment on the nature and state of humanity in the contemporary Nigerian society that has emphasised, through thoughts and actions, the idea of man is for himself and God is for us all. This situation has negatively affected the quality of humanity in the country.

## **2. *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels: The Text and Reader-Response Theory***

*Esu and the vagabond minstrels* is concerned with the problems of humanity in the face of corruption and injustice that characterise the contemporary Nigerian society. The play uses the Bertolt Brecht's style to present the story of five minstrels (Omele, Epo Oyinbo, Jigi, Sinsin and Redio) who are scavenging for food and opportunities. The vagabond minstrels get to the crossroads (Sepeteri) where their stories change and where they face the trial of their humanity. At the crossroads, they meet an old man, who gives them (the vagabond minstrels) a charm that will make them achieve their dreams by treating with songs and dances whoever is afflicted with one misfortune/ailment or another. The old man tells them further that when they have an opportunity to treat an afflicted person, they should demand whatever they want from such a person. All the vagabond minstrels, except Omele, fail to render selfless service in the treatment of the afflicted persons they encountered. Later, the old man asks them to account for their "stewardship". It is at this point of resolution that the true identity of the old man as Orunmila is revealed while the afflicted persons are also either gods or their followers.

A critical reading of the play according to the tenets of reader-response theory affords the reader-critic the opportunity to proffer different possible interpretations that are open-ended. This is because "in literature along with its various genres, each genre is actually dedicated to its readers, and those readers may bring various roles to a literary work" (Trisnawati, 2009, p. 4). Trisnawati's view explains the reasons for different critical viewpoints that a text may attract to itself. *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* has attracted such critical perspectives. Ademeso's (2009, pp. 53-64) "National development and the concept of compassion in Osofisan's *Esu and the vagabond minstrels*" critiques the play from the Marxist perspective. Ademeso's argument is that class structure in Nigerian society places the masses at the mercy of the elite and the bourgeoisie. Alongside other Femi Osofisan's plays such as *Morountodun* (1982) and *Once upon four robbers* (1980), Adeyemi (2004) uses postcolonial theory to critique *Esu and the vagabond minstrels*. In his view, the play is a representation of the postcolonial challenges confronting Nigeria with specific reference to the military coup of 1983. Adeniji and Olagunju (2018) discuss the play from pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives. Pragmatic markers of voices are significant given the roles they play in the building and construction of utterances in culture-based texts (Adeniji and Olagunju, 2018).

Considering the above critical perspectives, this paper's view is that *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* may have multiple interpretations consistent

with the tenets of reader-response theory which liberates a literary text from tyranny of interpretation. Reader-response theory, which did not receive much attention until the 1970s, maintains that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does (Tyson, 2006). Despite the various forms of reader-response theory, such as the transactional, affective, subjective and social, the significance of its tenets are that a reader cannot be ignored in the meaning-making process of a literary text and that a text yields to different ideological views of readers. One of the reading strategies of reader-response is to consider the determinate and indeterminate meanings of a literary text. Following this line of thought, this corroborates Tyson's (2006, p. 174) view that:

Determinate meaning refers to what might be called the facts of the text, certain events in the plot or physical descriptions clearly provided by the words on the page. In contrast, indeterminate meaning, or indeterminacy, refers to "gaps" in the text—such as actions that are not clearly explained or that seem to have multiple explanations—which allow or even invite readers to create their own interpretations.

Tyson's view on the determinacy and indeterminacy of meanings of a literary text suggests that a text does not have a magisterial interpretation. This is because different sociological variables, perhaps, account for the making of such text. This does not mean, however, that we are left with "the anarchy of unconstrained interpretation" (Tyson, 2006 p. 186).

Read from the perspective of social reader-response theory (a theory which affords the present writer the opportunity to situate the play's interpretation within the sociological and political experiences of Nigeria), the play's focus is on the quest for an ideal humane society through the myth of human-god relationship. There are no gods without humans and also the life and destiny of humans are manipulated and influenced by the goodwill or ill will of patron gods. Humans are in constant trial in the hands of the gods and the evidence of this is seen at the end of the play when each of the principal Yoruba gods such as Orunmila and Esu that featured in the play disclose their real identities. They have featured in the play to test the level of humanity and the kindness of the humans represented by the vagabond minstrels. With the human-god relationship in the play, the playwright suggests a human archetype whose typology is self-centered and unresponsive to the wellbeing of the general populace. The vagabond minstrels, except Omele, prioritised their personal needs far above the wellbeing of the individuals in the community.

The crossroads of Sepeteri is mythical and mystical in its significance in the life of individuals and people of the community. The place is dreaded and this is shown in the dialogue of the vagabond minstrels. In Yoruba mythology, Esu is seen as the god of the crossroads who generates confusion. This is not to say that Esu is a devil as found in Christian mythology of the unrighteousness of Satan. The conception of Esu in Yoruba mythology is a

god with an ambivalent character that makes positive and negative events happen in the life of humans. Esu is the intermediary between humans and gods. With this significance of Esu among all the Yoruba primordial gods, people seeking one favour or another offer sacrifices to him to intercede on their behalf. The dialogue of Omele and Sinsin points to the significance and sacredness of Sepeteri. This is shown in the excerpt below:

- (1) **Omele:** I'll explain. This place... this crossroads, I used to live here. After I left the village, they brought me here, to train as a mechanic. My master's workshop was over there, by that tree. So I saw a lot of things, here. People used to bring a lot of food and leave it at this crossroads.

**Sinsin:** Why? What for?

**Omele:** As offering to Esu. From those looking for children, or for riches, or for a long life. You see, Sepeteri is the last point between the town behind us and the sacred grove of Orunmila, over there. So Esu the lord of Sepeteri, is regarded as a kind of intermediary, between men and their wishes, between destiny and their fulfillment. If you wait, in a short while you will see. They will soon begin to arrive with their baskets and pots, to placate Esu. The whole place will be laden with food.

*Esu*<sup>3</sup> ...p. 23)

Sepeteri is, therefore, the confluence of humanity where the giver and the needy do meet for one favour or the other from the gods or the ancestors. It is the cultural understanding of the significance of Sepeteri that propels the vagabond minstrels to the place to find solution to their wants. This confluence of humanity is the centre of fellowship of man, ancestors and deified beings. Esu is the umpire of the crossroads that gives to each person according to his/her needs and desires.

Esu is presented in the play as the god of the crossroads who believes in Karma-justice. Esu impersonates the old man to test the degree of humanity of the vagabond minstrels. The old man gives the vagabond minstrels the power to grant every human wish for a fee or material wealth. This is a test of faith and will. The will power to do good is influenced by different encouraging or discouraging variables. The vagabond minstrels are victims of circumstances and they are in need of improved well-being. It takes courage and love for humanity to make an individual in such a situation think of doing good. Omele should be saluted for the courage to make the decision to be good and kind to his clients despite his pauper status. In a situation of need and want, humans may lose their sense of humanity for comfort and convenience. Other vagabond minstrels are self-centered and believe so much in the ideology of man for himself and God for all of us. They are of the belief that the only way for them to be in affluence and to influence

<sup>3</sup> *Esu and the vagabond minstrels.*

is to profit from the misfortune and haplessness of their victims. The point here is that Esu is not a god of evil and he does not support evil. Being evil to the detriment of humanity depends on the ideology of each individual. The playwright concludes the play with this advice:

- (2) ESU DOES NOT exist  
 And if evil does not persist  
 We must each search our soul  
 What we've set ourselves as goal:  
 If wealth is all we seek  
 And don't care what means we're using,  
 If our ways seem so sleek  
 When we keep strange rendezvous  
 One day we'll come to reason  
 At some Sepeteri  
 Where Esu - or - History - waits in ambush  
 With his noose!

(*Esu...* pp. 95-96)

Humans should not find excuses for their shortcomings. Esu should not be blamed for the inadequacies of mankind. Every individual should be judged based on the merits of their actions.

Humanity is on trial in the contemporary Nigerian society owing to the fact that there is a shift in the paradigms of morality both in the past and the present. In the pristine Yoruba culture, there was the spirit of communalism among individuals in a community. The burden or problem of one person was that of others as well. In this regard, humanity was preserved and protected because of the sense of oneness, togetherness and collectivity that the individuals in the community enjoyed. The knowledge of old communalism also encouraged the vagabond minstrels to go to Sepeteri to scavenge for food. The hope of the vagabond minstrels is, however, dashed because they are unable to find food at the crossroads.

The shift in the structure of the society from pristine traditionalism to modernism has exerted much influence on the moral ethos and cultural episteme of individuals in the country. Among the components of modernity in the contemporary Nigerian society are architectural designs, innovation in science and technology and modern religions (Christianity and Islam) that are alien to Africa. With the modern architectural designs and religions, African gods and goddesses have been losing their prime place among their worshippers and adherents. The gods and goddesses are no longer worshipped. Individuals also live a life of isolation, caring for themselves and their families alone and severing the ties of the extended family and the compound. The outcome of this is a loss of human face and humanity in our dealings and interactions with others. The vagabond minstrels still in the illusion of the past think that Sepeteri will still receive much sacrifice that will satisfy their wants and needs. The Sepeteri crossroads is deserted and

humanity suffers in the process because the vagabond minstrels are unable to satisfy their needs. As excerpt (3) shows, Omele laments that time (and by extension, modernity) has changed his people. They are no longer humane and responsive to the needs of the helpless and less-privileged:

- (3) **Omele:** Charity! That was the creed were all raised on, and the whole village practiced it! Not even a stranger passed by without finding a roof, or a warm bed. They taught us to always give, freely like Mother Nature. They said God owned everything, and that every man was a creature of God. Created in his image! So, how was I to know that in just five years, five years since I left, all that would have changed? How could I have foreseen it, that a day would come when these same people, my own people would see men in torment, and drive them back into the wind?

(*Esu...* p. 19)

Omele's dialogue shows his belief in traditional communalism that promotes humanity among individuals irrespective of social status and gender. Similarly, he expresses disappointment in the new social order of modernism that promotes individualism among people. There is a tone of nostalgia for the past traditionalism that promotes humane culture among people. This paper posits that nothing is constant and that change is inevitable. This inevitable change, however, should not affect our values for humanity rooted in the concept of "Omoluwabi" (the Yoruba notion of an individual with commendable moral character). The dialogue of Omele upholds the concept of Omoluwabi who believes in fairness, justice, equity and humane behaviour in dealing with others within a geo-cultural group.

Whatever we do for humanity is for history and posterity. With the centrality of history to the propagation and promotion of humanity, history is taken as the meta-narrative that provides impetus/story for further texts. Reading within this historical context, *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* is a play on the social and political history of Nigeria, a country in search of humanity since her political independence in 1960. The play is set within the socio-historical context of the 1983 military coup in Nigeria. Femi Osofisan wrought the play in such a way that it captures the social realities and historical experiences of the country. The dramaturgy of Osofisan shares semblance with the epic literary style *in-medias-res* (the events or actions of the narration beginning in the middle of events). The play blurs events that culminated in the military coup of December 31, 1983 that brought Major-General Muhammed Buhari to power as the military head of state of the country. Prior to the military coup, the country had witnessed a series of electoral violence and massive corruption that nearly crippled the economy. Not satisfied, the military government in Nigeria took over the administration of the country from the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Thus, the playwright chronicles and comments on the past experiences of Nigerians.

The civilian administration of Shehu Shagari was accused of impunity that culminated in gross corruption in all sectors and sections of the national

economy. The play opens with the apprehension of the populace about the gains of military administration in the country. They fear for the continuity and success of Nigeria as a country, basing their judgment on the experiences of the first military coup of 1966. Opinions differ on whether the performance of the play should take place or not because of the coup. The opening of the play sets the tone and mood of the play as a commentary on the political history of Nigeria during the truncated second republic. The coup takes place a week before the competition where the play, *Esu and the vagabond minstrels*, is to be performed. The coup makes some people to opine that the competition will not take place. The excerpt below shows the reaction of Chief, one of the people, on the possibility of the performance of the play not proceeding the following week:

- (4) **A Voice:** But, Chief... the competition is still on? I mean, with the coup d'état and the change of government in the capital...?

**Chief:** The competition is still very much on, my friend! What do they say? "The government changes, the people remain!" Let them go on with their fighting over there in the capital! It doesn't concern us, does it?

(*Esu...* pp. 12-13)

The interpretation of the need to continue with the performance of the play is taken beyond the ordinary, denotative meaning. Critically interpreted, the continuation of the performance of the play implies that nothing should stop despite the change of government. Every normal activity is not expected to be interrupted by any political circumstance. Nothing should stop and man or woman must continue to live a fulfilled life in the service of humanity. The new military government of the time was quick to understand the plight of Nigerians and the trials of humanity in the face of corruption. Thus, it instituted some policies that would check the menace of corruption in the country. The corruption of the politicians prior to the military takeover of power in 1983 had affected the status of humanity and the national economy of the country. The politicians squandered national resources on frivolities with little or no consideration for the standard of living of individual citizens in the country. Omele, Jigi and Sinsin hint on the frivolous spending, corruption and wastefulness of the politicians in their dialogue:

- (5) **Omele:** We learned the trade our father taught us. And we learned it well. Pity, that the season turned bitter, and the leaders grew corrupt. We had to eat! And how those politicians sprayed when we sang for them.

**Jigi:** They loved the sound of their names! My voice wrapped them in lovely fantasy!

**Sinsin:** No one! No one could have known that times would change like this! That the feasting would end, the dancers would go to prison. And we, the singers, so many times decorated,



would turn to vagabonds.

(*Esu...* pp. 26-27)

The above dialogue is made within the historical context of the events of 1983 that prompted the coup and what happened after the coup up till 1985. When General Muhammed Buhari assumed office as the military head of state in the country, he was not comfortable with the economic and political decay in the national life of the country owing to the factors of corruption, recklessness, impunity and self-centeredness of the politicians. In order to tackle the problems of corruption and inhumanity in the country, General Mohammed Buhari introduced War Against Indiscipline (WAI) to try all the corrupt politicians and civil servants. The victims of these trials were sent to prison. With the austere measures put in place by the military administrator, the sycophants and praise-singers of the corrupt politicians were forced to look for profitable work.

Osofisan, perhaps, uses *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* to surreptitiously question the rationale for the overthrow of the civilian regime by the military usurpers of power. The language and aesthetic consideration of the play (with reference to songs) point to this fact. The following song-text in the play reveals the playwright's view on power and governance by the civilian and military governments in Nigeria:

- (6) Khaki and Agbada  
 De two dey waka together  
 Khaki comes to power  
 Imitate Agbada!  
 Agabada comes to power  
 And go dey do like Khaki (*Esu...*p. 2)

The above song-text also offers another interpretive strategy for the play. The playwright, perhaps, reveals his personal experience with both the military and civilian governments in Nigeria. The aesthetic contribution of the songs to the play is seen in its use of language and thematic orientation. The core idea in the song-text is that civilian and military governments in Nigeria demonstrate similar ideologies (self-centeredness as against collective benefits). With the use of language (English language and Pidgin), Osofisan aligns his action with Yule's (1996, pp. 19-20) view that "in making reference, a speaker or writer uses language to enable a listener to identify a person or something". The language has been used in the song-text and the entire play to identify Buhari and Shagari as the key players in Nigeria's military coup of 1983.

This critical study of the vagabond minstrels shows that they are inherently lazy and that they want pleasure without stress. Before the military coup, they were in the habit of singing the praises of the civilian government for economic benefits. They were not doing this with sincerity of purpose, but, rather, to survive financially. Instead of looking for profitable employment to contribute meaningfully to the gross domestic product (GDP) and national

economic development of the country, the vagabond minstrels chose to live at the mercy of the givers. The laziness of the vagabond minstrels makes them victims of the antics of Esu, disguised as the old man. These vagabond minstrels never took life seriously, and they wanted to enjoy it to the maximum. They became victims of Esu because of their gullibility and their belief that life is a bed of roses. Were this not so, they would have understood that singing and dancing alone could not solve the several problems of their clients. Apart from being lazy, the vagabond minstrels are greedy. They ignore the old man's wise counsel: "Esu loves to help men, but only when they show that they can live happily among other human beings" (*Esu...*p. 32). Contrary to this wise counsel, men have not learnt to live happily with other human beings, as shown in the attitude of the vagabond minstrels to their clients. All of them, except Omele, victimise and terrorise their clients with the mystical power they get from the old man. For instance, Epo Oyinbo collects the ring and valuables of the impotent man before healing him; Sinsin collects a huge fortune from a man dying of bullet wounds; Redio collects landed property and fortunes from three men that are searching for the manager that ran away with their licence for the importation of rice; and Jigi is promised wealth before attending to the crown-prince who killed the age-long sacred snake of his people. Only Omele is kind enough to heal his clients without collecting any payment. He even goes further to carry the cross of the male and female lepers – He bears their leprosy in order for them to live a normal life. This is an uncommon act of humanity which is in contrast to the agenda that other vagabond minstrels have for themselves.

With this rare kindness to the needy and the infirm, Omele successfully answers the questions of the old man:

- (7) **Old Man:** Are you ready to help  
 Those among you, who are in distress?  
 To bring redress to the wronged?  
 And justice to the exploited? (*Esu...* pp. 32-33)

The questions asked by the old man foreshadow the test that is to come for the vagabonds. The goal of this test is to measure their level of humanity for the sustainability of their universe. The healing power of the songs that the old man gives to the vagabond minstrels positions them well far above other individuals, particularly their clients. All of them, except Omele, abuse their power because of greed. At the end of the exercise of their power, Male Leper (as Orunmila) says that only Omele passed the test of humanity. In the test of humanity, the primordial gods (Esu, Orunmila, Obaluaye and Osun) are in unity – to reward the kind and punish the wicked. The position of this paper is, therefore, consistent with the view of Awodiya (2010, p. 90):

*In Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Orunmila in unity with his messenger, Esu, the trickster god tests the starving vagabond musicians by giving them the magic power to cure suffering people. All but one of the musicians abuse the power by exploiting their patients and thus enriching themselves. After Orunmila and

Yeye Osun have tested the only musician again, and still find him compassionate, Esu then punishes the four greedy musicians and rewards the only one that healed without amassing wealth from patients.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Sepeteri is a metaphor for a nation that is in endless search for humanity. The greedy and self-centered vagabond minstrels are metaphoric references to individuals that are privileged and well-positioned in a nation. Despite their privileged positions, the individuals are not mindful of how they relate with the needy and the less-privileged in their neighbourhood. They are only concerned about themselves and their families. The attention of the audience and characters of the play is on the purging of the ills and vices at the national level with the coup that ushered a new political atmosphere in the country. Can this purging at the national level succeed without doing the same at the grass-root level? What the four vagabond minstrels have done to their clients or victims is an instance of grass-root corruption that has been militating against a humane society for all. These four vagabond minstrels (Jigi, Sinsin, Redio and Epo Oyinbo) request gratification before they serve humanity. The power to heal is given to them free. The issue with these four vagabond minstrels is that they are among those who complain about the corruption and inhumanity of the civilian government.

For a humane society for all in a nation, the following variables should be considered. Firstly, fairness and justice should be the watchword of individuals and groups in relating with everybody (citizens, aliens and wayfarers) within a definite geographical entity in the country. Secondly, there should be relative equity in the distribution and allocation of natural resources to individuals, geographical entities and groups without political, religious, social and ethnic sentiment. Thirdly, there should be a responsible and responsive government that will attend to the needs of the masses with promptness and effectiveness. Fourthly, followers should be responsible and responsive to the national need for sustainable peace and development irrespective of ethnicity, religion and political affiliation. Redio, Sinsin, Jigi and Epo Oyinbo do not demonstrate grassroots humanity and yet blame the central government for inhuman activities. A nation should learn from the mistakes of the past and stop blaming god (s) or other people for its misfortunes. As the Old Man in *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* says:

- (8) **Old Man:** Esu loves to help men, but only  
 When they show that they can live  
 Happily among other human beings.  
 For human beings are greedy...  
 (*Esu...* p. 32)

### 3. Conclusion

Like other plays of Femi Osofisan, *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* reveals the ideological bent and unique dramaturgy of the playwright. The playwright,

through characterisation, dialogue and plot, has presented the sociological and political issues in the play. This action has not robbed the play of its creativity. Social reader-response theory underlines the significance of reader's interpretive strategies to get the determinate and indeterminate meanings of the text. *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* projects the concerns and worries of the playwright with reference to governance and corruption in the country. The play's thesis is that every government has the tendency for corruption. The only alternative, as inferred from the play, is the quest for and sustenance of humanity. The evidence for this argument is found in the characterisation of Omele who shows compassion for the needy despite his own problems. Femi Osofisan's dramaturgy in *Esu and the vagabond minstrels* shows that the missing gap between the actual and the ideal Nigerian society is lack of humanity or lack of compassion for fellow human beings.

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