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Daniel O. Fagunwa, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons, A Hunters Saga*. Translated by Wole Soyinka (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2013). pp. 140.

Hiseo Lee

Daniel O. Fagunwa is the first author to complete a novel in Yoruba.<sup>1</sup> He is well-known for his creativity and ability to situate spirituality and the fantastical element within his stories. *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* mimics Yoruba story-telling traditions. It fuses the supernatural within a Yoruba historical tradition. Fagunwa utilizes the first person narrative to show how the Yoruba understand and rationalized God and His existence.

Within the novel, the narrator addresses the audience directly and invites them to experience the novel's fullness by stepping into its characters' shoes. Fagunwa writes, "Firstly, whenever a character in my story speaks in his own person, you must put yourselves in his place and speak as if you are that very man."<sup>2</sup> The translator, Wole Soyinka, furthers enriches the experience by including untranslated Yoruba words throughout the story. For those illiterate in Yoruba, a glossary is included in the beginning of the book to facilitate comprehension. The hunter's and narrator's dynamic interactions propels the story's plot.

The novel is pieced together with short stories told by the main character, Akara-Ogun. Akara-Ogun is hunter who encounters many obstacles inside an enchanting and mysterious forest.<sup>3</sup> As the protagonist is pitted against beasts and supernatural forces, a repeating theme of man's helplessness without God is illustrated.<sup>4</sup> Akara-Ogun's internal conflict reflects the need for God because corrupted human desire ultimately leads to destruction.<sup>5</sup>

Through this eloquently written mythology, the audience becomes cognizant of their own flaws. Fagunwa connects the mystical and supernatural occurrences to everyday sins and desires. For example, after Akara-Ogun travels to The Forest for the first time, people believed he would never return. However, the protagonist does not learn his lesson of danger of the unknown. The novel reads: "But, no, I did hunt again, for it is in the profession to which a man is trained that he must serve; the goods which he truly understands are what a trader sells, and it was not fitting that I should leave my profession at the prime of day and turn to masonry or wood-carving."<sup>6</sup> Fagunwa's diction evokes both

seriousness and humor to present human understanding of the spiritual and natural world we exist in. He writes, “When I have done eating I will lay my tongue to the tale of my second journey, and that story is even more delectable than the one that has gone before.”<sup>7</sup> Even through this short excerpt, Akara-Ogun portrays the skill to captivate the readers’ attention through storytelling.

Fagunwa ends his novel on a special note and moment of introspection for the readers. Wise words are written to the audience, which tie in all of the lessons learned by the main character throughout his long journey. The author challenges the readers to re-think their own lives, “put the story of this book to wise use.”<sup>8</sup> He ties wisdom and fascinating imagination to bridge all of Akara-Ogun’s adventures with real-life themes. He writes, “The key to this world is in the hands of no man, as you pass through your journey in the world, meeting with good luck and encountering the bitter, accept everything cheerfully, behave like men and remember that God on High helps only those who help themselves.”<sup>9</sup> This book is more than a morality lesson. The art of storytelling successfully lives on through *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. For those enticed by mythology, adventure, and a deeper coalescence between morality lessons and inspired writing, this book is for you.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “D.O.Fagunwa”; accessed May 28, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/D-O-Fagunwa>

<sup>2</sup> Daniel O. Fagunwa, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Translated by Wole Soyinka (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2013), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*