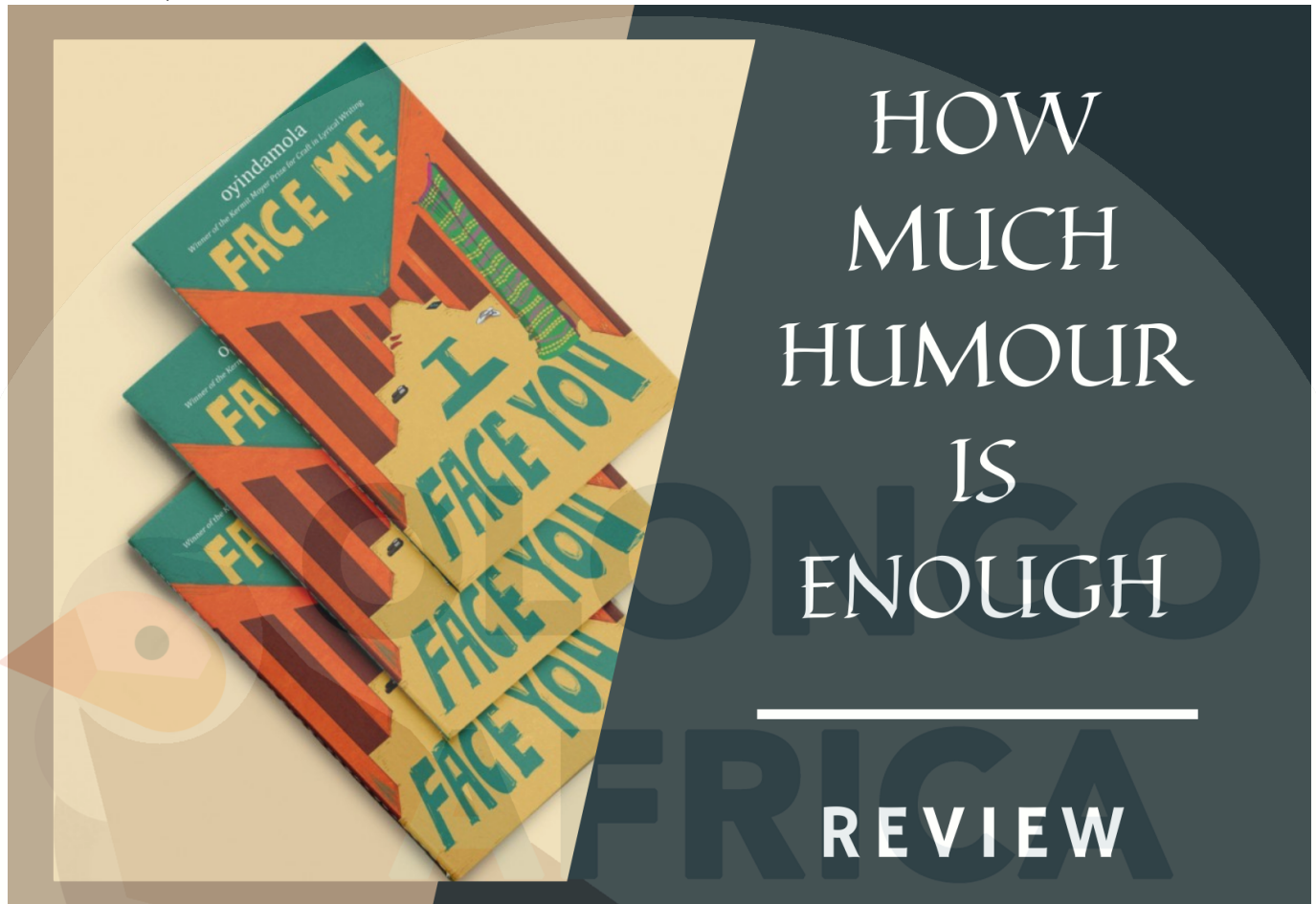


# How Much Humour Is Enough

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## HOW MUCH HUMOUR IS ENOUGH

### REVIEW

One of the critical comments on humour I often return is *Humour, Silence, and Civil Society in Nigeria* of the foremost Nigerian critic, Ebenezer Obadare. Obadare showcases critically how the work of humor is central to the understanding of Nigerian society. He explores how humour by cartoonists, dramatists, and stand up figures power resistance through jocular language. To Obadare, Humour is “letting off steam” and where “absurdity of everyday life” can be turned into the element of ridicule. This everydayness of life as a scene where one can witness the sheer ridiculous and absurd is most visible and realised in Oyindamola Shoola’s *Face Me I Face You*, which won the Kermit Moyer Prize for Craft in Lyrical Writing.

Oyindamola, who received an MFA at the American University, Washington DC, crafted these satirical poems employing wit and humour to present the everyday life of Nigerian people. Unlike writings in recent times, Shoola’s work is different owing to the aesthetics of humor infused into the poems. Her poetry is set apart because of its indebtedness to the traditional form - an heritage that has lingered on in modern African poetry whose vanguard include the Ugandan poet, Okot p’Bitek. One question that the work of Shoola asks that, how much humour is enough?

The poems, told in an omniscient narrator POV, are broken into three sections—Palava, Face Me I Face You, and Water and Garri. The spatial setting of the collection occurs within a shared housing setup often referred to as ‘Face-Me-I-Face-You’ in Nigeria, a metaphor for everyday Nigerian life where there is an interesting assembly of personalities and individuals who are not family members but are sharing kitchen, bathroom, and toilet. The relatable characters, cultural backdrop, drama,

and narrative device employed in *Face Me I Face You* are depicted in a way to rouse the readers' sense of nostalgia.

The collection sets off with an illustration of a family tree, where each page bears illustrations that embody each character perfectly. The first section of the book, *Palava*, has three strong characters—of which Mama Shade is one, a typical religious Nigerian woman who spends her nights fighting unknown spiritual enemies:

Her speakers take over at 6 am blasting music we can't twerk to. Stricken with insomnia, I wonder if the God she swears isn't deaf and needs all that noise to hear her prayers.

In the poem, 'Baba Sade's Jalopy,' the reader finds out about Baba Sade's promiscuous ways and how he hides them from his wife.

With its perfect rhythm and wit, the poem, 'A Visitor from Hell' shows the busybody character of Aunty Sola:

she talks about Lagbaja's marriage to Tamedu and we knew where this would lead.

...when will you find a man to marry and bring children for us to carry?

Every character in this section reminds us of a dramatic neighbour who is almost familiar to any average Nigerian, but when it comes to Maami, a character with a gentle demeanour in 'How I Got This Ring,' she strives to balance the tension.

Just like what is typical of every Face-Me-I-Face-You apartment, there is a Sade who is enamoured with John, a cheater. And hell will one day break loose when she finds out that her lover is cheating with someone in the house.

The narrative technique in the second section makes it feel like someone is holding you by the hand and stopping at each door, telling you about the occupants. In this part, readers experience the spinster and bachelor lives of three characters: Delilah, BroDa Samson, and Bimpe.

Delilah is known for her promiscuous lifestyle which she is proud of. Her carriage and undauntedness makes her sound somewhat like a feminist who believes every woman has the right to do with their body what they want:

I must dress to kill," she says, as she matches her royal madness with Madam Koi Koi's red bottoms.

In this 'A Name for their Kind', the author introduces a character called BroDa SaMson who shows interest in Delilah. BroDa SaMson wears his religion on his sleeves but fails to conceal his extracurricular activities as his path crosses with Delilah's:

At every service, BroDa SaMson prays that God will fight his battles with the same mouth he tells Delilah at night, Spread me like butter on your hot Agege bread, and serve my dinner with your holy water.

Bimpe, a single introvert who desires to marry a wealthy man, does not hide her high taste in men. She will not be dissuaded regardless of what anyone says—even when she fails to meet these standards herself:

Bimpe, you retort when we say A. Men must pay for the time God spent creating me. Yet you work 21 hours per week and 1,092 hours yearly, enhancing the work your perfect God has done.

The last section, *Water and Garri*, delves into the romantic bond between the soon-identified narrator and her lover:

Recalling their love at first sight, other people describe their lover's face, body, or smile. Folake, all I remember is when I asked for your number and you said Bank account or phone number. And we became inseparable since then.

With the character, Folake, the writer subtly infuses culture into the book which further emphasises her intentionality in bringing her roots into the view for the readers. We find out that Folake is from Ibadan and does things typical of an Ibadan lady:

Although you wash your tongue into tasteless accents, Ibadan clings to the home of your mouth, and its aroma seduces the atmosphere's whistles when you call cushion, Kusine, and chicken Siki.

Oyindamola takes us through the progression of their love—how Folake grapples with the pressure of meeting her lover's family:

The day I feared finally arrived. I practise my greetings and what to say when they ask how we met. Five minutes before their arrival, I wore an apron and ruffled my hair, sprinkled a little flour on my wrists, and dotted Iya Basira's catfish stew on my white dress. I poured the stew into a pot, turned the gas cooker on low heat, and stirred it like a true chef.

Looking at the poems that end each of the sections—'A Naija Christmas,' 'I asked Maami Where Time Went' and 'Breaking Up with the Moon'—they are all charged with a kind of nostalgic energy that portrays childhood memories:

Before we started worrying about dresses that didn't fit us, the purpose of life, and the price of Lactose-free milk at supermarkets... we were once children riding through the night, thinking the moon ran with us.

For a fact, Oyindamola has shown us that *Face Me I Face You* is a breath of fresh air that is needed to dispel the tension often portrayed in the tragic, serious collections that have been published over the last few years in Nigerian contemporary poetry. This book does not just pass as another humorous collection of poems which is uncommon, it awakens a part of us that we have abandoned. The verses are written in simple diction that is easy to read and mentally stimulating (thanks to its pocket-friendly size that makes it easy to take around). *Face Me I Face You* should be read by every lover of humorous poetry and everyone eager to experience the beauty of life through poetry.

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Damilola Omotoyinbo (Frontier XIX), is a Nigerian Creative Writer and Software Engineer. She is a fellow of the Ebedi International Writers' Residency, the winner of the Spring Writing contest, a co-winner of the Writing Ukraine Prize, the winner of the 2023 Writivism Poetry Prize, a joint winner of the SEVHAGE-KSR Hyginus Ekwuazi Poetry Prize and a finalist for the 2022 African Writer's Awards. She has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart prizes. Damilola has work

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