

ACTOR, CHARACTER, AND PERSONALITY: THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY OF OLU JACOBS

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Abstract: This study examines the intricate relationship between an actor's personality, professional persona, and the characters he portrays through the artistic journey of Olu Jacobs, one of Nigeria's most distinguished thespians. Using a biographical and analytical approach, the paper traces Jacobs's development from his early years in Kano to his formal training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, and his subsequent emergence as a leading figure in Nigerian film and theatre. It explores how his disciplined technique, cultural grounding, and personal disposition shape his approach to characterization and performance. The study reveals how Jacobs's distinctive voice, emotional depth, and moral conviction enable him to inhabit diverse characters with authenticity and authority. The paper also investigates his influence on Nollywood's evolution and his mentorship of younger actors. Ultimately, this research highlights Olu Jacobs as a model of artistic integrity whose career bridges classical training and indigenous expression, contributing significantly to the development of contemporary Nigerian acting and performance studies.

Keywords: Actor-Character Relationship, Artistic Identity, Olu Jacobs, Nollywood Development, Performance Studies.

INTRODUCTION

This study lies at the core of the acting profession: the dynamic relationship between the actor, the character, and the actor's personality. Acting is a craft that requires the artist to bring a character to life—to embody that character's thoughts, emotions, and experiences. According to Robert, "Acting is invariably a prerequisite to the study of other theatre arts such as directing. It is also used as preparation for public speaking, politics, law, business, and communication, all of which are important." To achieve convincing portrayals, the actor must delve deeply into the intricacies of their own temperament, experiences, and unique personal qualities, which invariably influence their approach to the craft and the roles they choose to play. As Therez observes, "The actor does not create the role within a vacuum, but rather draws from within to inhabit it" (278).

Every actor possesses distinct personality traits that inform their artistic process. Rivera asserts that "the actor's personality traits determine the quality with which they approach their craft." This study demonstrates that an actor's personality can shape the genres and roles they gravitate toward and influence how they bring these characters to life on stage and screen. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, defines character as "that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents," emphasizing the moral and psychological dimensions of performance.

Characterization, therefore, is the process of describing and developing the personality and traits of a character embedded within a written script. It is through characterization that the text comes alive and the intended message is conveyed to the audience.

Ovunda explains that "through careful analysis and empathy, actors can bring characters to life with authenticity, complexity, and emotional resonance." He further notes that "understanding a character's psychology, emotions, and motivation is essential for creating captivating portrayals."

This study also considers stock characterization, which refers to fictional characters that represent specific stereotypes—figures instantly recognizable for their predictable traits and behaviors. The paper analyzes the artistic journey of Olu Jacobs, examining how his personal disposition and experiences have shaped his performances across theatre and film. Although Jacobs has occasionally embodied stock characters, his range extends far beyond stereotypes, reflecting the depth of his training and interpretive skill.

Audiences often conflate an actor's on-screen character with their real-life personality. Similarly, aspiring actors sometimes struggle to distinguish between personal identity and the fictional identities they must create. By exploring this relationship, the present study seeks to clarify the interplay between the actor's individuality and the process of character creation. It also aims to guide emerging performers and theatre practitioners in understanding how their personal traits can be harnessed to enhance performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretive, qualitative approach appropriate for literary and performance analysis. Because acting is an expressive art rooted in emotion, imagination, and lived experience, the research method emphasizes close reading, textual interpretation, and critical reflection rather than empirical

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measurement. Data for the study were drawn from three primary sources: archival and documentary materials including interviews, biographical accounts, and published profile, were consulted to establish Jacobss background, training, and artistic philosophy. A close analysis of selected films was conducted, examining scenes for vocal expression, gesture, movement, emotional tone, and psychological depth. Works such as *The C.E.O.*, *The Figurine*, *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel*, and *The Dogs of War* were chosen because they illustrate different phases of his development as an actor. The study also engages with major theoretical texts on acting, drawing on Stanislavski, Meisner, Chekhov, Chubbuck, and Brecht to frame the discussion of characterization and performance.

Analysis proceeded through a thematic reading of Jacobss performances and public statements. Particular attention was given to the ways personal temperament, lived experience, and cultural background inform his approach to roles. As a humanities-based inquiry, the study privileges interpretation, meaning-making, and the lived realities of creative work. It aims not to generalize statistically, but to illuminate the complexity of acting as a literary and performative art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acting as an art form has long been described as the creative intersection between an actor's personality and the characters they portray. The process of interpretation requires not only technical skill but also emotional insight and psychological awareness. This section reviews key theoretical and practical perspectives on acting and characterization, with emphasis on how personality informs performance. It also situates this discussion within the artistic journey of Olu Jacobs, a distinguished Nigerian actor whose career exemplifies the interplay between self and role. Olu Jacob is equally in the mould of outstanding directors in both stage and screen. Essi citing AbdulRasheed Adeoye opines that directors are indeed the gods of the theatre (Essi, *Carving Out a Niche...1*).

Scholars generally agree that acting is a process of transformation through which the performer embodies the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of a fictional being. Stanislavski famously noted that "the fundamental aim of our art is the creation of the inner life of a human spirit and its expression in artistic form." His system emphasizes psychological realism—encouraging actors to access emotional truth by understanding their characters' motivations and objectives. For Stanislavski, theatrical emotion is not imitation but a disciplined expression of genuine feeling. Aristotle earlier established that drama represents "men in action," asserting that characters reflect moral and psychological distinctions that mirror or exaggerate human behavior. Both thinkers underscore the moral and emotional depth required of the actor.

Building on this foundation, later theorists developed distinctive approaches to performance. Lee Strasberg's *Method Acting*, inspired by Stanislavski, requires actors to draw from personal memories and emotions to create authentic portrayals. Strasberg's method invites deep emotional recall, enabling the actor to merge inner truth with external action. Similarly, Sanford Meisner's *Technique* emphasizes spontaneity and truthful response: actors must "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances." Meisner trains performers to react in the moment, reducing artificiality and heightening believability.

Ivana Chubbuck's *Twelve-Step Technique* extends these earlier methods into a contemporary framework. She argues that actors

must identify their characters' "primal need, goal, or objective," and connect this objective to personal emotional pain. Her twelve steps—including overall and scene objectives, obstacles, substitution, inner object, beats and actions, and the "moment before"—guide the actor from psychological analysis to embodied performance. Chubbuck's process reinforces the idea that self-awareness and emotional honesty are essential tools in character development.

Other practitioners have proposed contrasting or complementary approaches. Michael Chekhov emphasizes the imaginative and physical aspects of acting. His *Psychological Gesture* technique uses the body as a conduit for emotion, allowing actors to access subconscious impulses through physical expression. In contrast, Bertolt Brecht's *Epic Theatre* encourages detachment and critical distance. Brechtian acting aims not to immerse the audience in illusion but to provoke reflection and social awareness. Brecht urged actors to reveal rather than conceal performance, using commentary, gesture, and irony as tools for critique.

The Expressionist and Physical Theatre movements highlight the communicative potential of gesture and movement. Caldarone observes that effective action is not "right or wrong" but "helpful or unhelpful in fulfilling the objective and telling the story." This view aligns with Branko's argument that actors must remain conscious of their gestures as deliberate aesthetic choices. Expressionism transforms inner emotion into visible form, often exaggerating movement to externalize psychological states.

In contrast, *Classical Acting*, rooted in Shakespearean and traditional theatre, stresses clarity, diction, and controlled movement. Here, precision and rhetorical skill are paramount. Caldarone suggests that the actor should "start by clarifying what the character wants—the objective—and then choose a transitive verb for each sentence to achieve that objective." This linguistic focus demands discipline and conscious interpretation rather than instinctive improvisation. Essi holds that this stands Duro Oni out as one of the contemporary directors in Nigeria (5).

Improvisation occupies an intermediate position, allowing actors to create dialogue and action spontaneously. It enhances creativity, responsiveness, and character authenticity. Improvisation is often used in actor training to cultivate flexibility and emotional availability.

Meanwhile, scholars such as Perescu, in her thesis *Personality, Person, Character*, explore how an actor's lived experiences shape performance choices. She argues that actors often project aspects of their personal identity into their roles, consciously or unconsciously blending self and character. Rivera similarly observes that "the actor's personality traits determine the quality with which they approach their craft." These perspectives reaffirm that personality and artistry are interwoven.

This study also acknowledges the practical differences between stage and screen acting, even as both share core principles. Stage performance demands vocal projection, broad physicality, and sustained emotional energy to engage a live audience. Screen acting, by contrast, requires subtlety, restraint, and an understanding of camera framing and continuity. Tucker notes that "for the stage, the actor starts at the beginning and goes to the end in one continuous event, while for the screen, the actor is often asked to act scenes widely out of context and out of time order." Despite these differences, both forms depend on emotional truth, timing, and disciplined collaboration.

Stanislavski's and Meisner's principles also apply to both media, as realism and internal motivation remain central to performance credibility. The distinction lies mainly in degree and expression. Stage actors externalize emotion to reach distant spectators, while screen actors internalize and modulate expression for the intimacy of the camera. Rivera observes that the goal in either case is belief: "when an actor becomes a character on stage, in film, or on television, there should be conviction from the spectator's point of view that the actor is that role."

Within this theoretical framework, the artistic journey of Olu Jacobs provides a compelling case study. His training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) exposed him to Western performance traditions, while his return to Nigeria allowed him to synthesize these with indigenous forms of expression. Jacobs's work in films such as *The C.E.O.*, *The Figurine*, *The Dogs and the Hawk*, and *The Royal Hibiscus Hotel* demonstrates mastery of voice, gesture, and emotional authenticity. His performances illustrate how personal discipline and cultural consciousness can coexist in a single interpretive style. This research illuminates the relationship between biography and performance. His roles often reflect moral strength, leadership, and introspection, traits that parallel his real-life personality. As a mentor and icon, Jacobs exemplifies how the actor's individuality can both shape and transcend specific roles.

Ultimately, the literature affirms that acting is not mere imitation but a synthesis of self and art. The performer's identity, experiences, and emotional intelligence profoundly affect interpretation. This study builds on that understanding by situating Olu Jacobs's career within the continuum of global acting theory and Nigerian performance practice, contributing to the discourse on characterization, cultural identity, and the evolving language of performance (Eze, et al, 2025).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ACTORS PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

Essi is of the opinion that Olu Jacob is one of the outstanding actors in Nigeria, in the stead of Adolphe Appia, a quintessential director cum actor of our time, just like Duro Oni himself (3).

The relationship between an actor, their personality, and the character they portray is a complex and delicate interplay. An actor's lived experiences, emotional history, and distinctive traits often intertwine with the fictional persona they embody, influencing the performance and sometimes blurring the boundary between reality and imagination. Every actor possesses a unique configuration of characteristics that shapes their artistic preferences, interpretive strengths, and the roles to which they are naturally drawn. A vivacious, outgoing performer may gravitate toward comedic roles, while an introspective personality may feel more at home in dramatic or contemplative narratives. As Barbara notes, personality is "the set of psychological traits that uniquely characterize an individual," distinguishing one person from another and colouring behavior in recognizable ways.

To portray a character convincingly, actors must understand the character's motivations, emotions, and backstory. Through research, rehearsal, and creative experimentation, they explore the many dimensions of a role and discover effective ways to embody it. Rivera observes that the actor transports "themes, morals, and storyline" through performance, and explains that actors often create detailed personality profiles for their characters to guide their interpretation. Williams further suggests that in performance,

the actor undertakes a "double effort" that at once reveals them as a performer and conceals them within the dramatic illusion.

Although the terms personality and character are sometimes used interchangeably, they carry different meanings in the context of acting. Personality refers to an individual's habitual traits, patterns of thought, and ways of being in the world. Once actors understand their own temperaments and capacities, they can begin the difficult task of stepping into a different identity. This process involves analyzing the script, examining the character's relationships, motivations, and psychological tendencies, and immersing oneself in the fictional world. Perescu stresses that the construction of a character "starts from the analysis of the script," while also noting that just as individuals fit into psychological patterns, so do the characters they portray.

Character, in contrast, refers to the persona assumed in performance—the figure with distinct beliefs, behaviours, physical attributes, and moral impulses. Aristotle describes character as that which reveals "moral purpose," showing what kinds of actions a person chooses or avoids. Jonathan similarly argues that actors contribute significantly to narrative meaning through their relationship with the roles they accept. Because actors' personal identities do not always align with the characters they play, they must rely on empathy, imaginative projection, and keen observation to bridge the gap between self and role.

Transformation is at the heart of acting, and one of the most remarkable aspects of the craft is the actor's capacity to inhabit entirely different identities. Stanislavski describes characterization as a "mask" that shields the actor's individuality, enabling them to reveal their inner life with extraordinary vulnerability. Through adjustments in voice, posture, movement, and emotional disposition, actors alter their presence to reflect the world of the character. Stanislavski also noted the actor's ability to register and later recall vivid impressions—expressions, gestures, mannerisms, vocal patterns—that assist in building a believable performance.

An actor's personality inevitably influences their portrayal of a character. Certain traits may align naturally with a role, making embodiment more intuitive, while other roles require extensive imaginative effort. Actors must learn when to draw from personal identity and when to set it aside to avoid bias and preserve the integrity of the role. The interplay between the actor's nature and the fictional persona can enrich a performance, but it may also challenge the performer to stretch beyond familiar emotional terrain.

Ultimately, the relationship between the actor, their personality, and the characters they portray is intricate and profoundly human. It requires self-awareness, empathy, imagination, and a willingness to transcend personal limitations. Through this dynamic engagement between self and role, actors captivate audiences. Psychological exploration plays a central role in this process. Robert argues that the actor's mind must be able to inhabit the "inner turmoil" of the character, moving through states of lust, terror, joy, and exaltation as required by the narrative. Acting, he notes, becomes a form of self-transformation—a movement in and out of character shaped by the demands of the performance. This psychological grounding enables actors to portray emotions and thought processes with authenticity.

Emotional depth is equally essential. Nina observes that actors often receive incomplete information about their characters, but can infer vital clues from textual descriptions, behaviour, and

context. Barbara adds that an actor “in character” behaves in accordance with a personality crafted by the writer, shaped by the director, and finally interpreted by the performer. The ability to access and express a wide emotional spectrum enriches the performance, adding layers of nuance that allow audiences to connect with the character on a deeper level.

Method acting represents one approach to achieving this connection. Inspired by Stanislavski and later developed by Strasberg, it encourages actors to draw on personal experiences and emotional memory to achieve a truthful inner life for the character. This technique demands research, improvisation, vulnerability, and emotional recall, enabling actors to produce performances that resonate with authenticity.

ences, provoke reflection, and illuminate the complexities of human experience.

CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY: OLU JACOBS ON-SCREEN AND OFF-SCREEN

Olu Jacobs occupies a singular position in Nigerian screen and stage performance, embodying a creative duality in which public persona and character interpretation intersect. His performances reveal a dynamic interplay between personality and craft, a relationship that performance theorists have long described as central to the actor’s vocation (Rivera 1; Ovunda 24; Molokwu, & Uchime, 12). Jacobs’s authoritative screen presence, his vocal precision, and the emotional acuity of his portrayals contribute to an acting style that fuses lived experience with artistic technique.

On screen, Jacobs frequently assumes roles defined by leadership, wisdom, and moral gravitas. His performances in *Oloibiri*, *The Meeting*, and *The C.E.O.* exemplify the authoritative figure whose presence structures the narrative world. His resonant delivery — “Success is not about making money; it is about making a positive impact on people’s lives” — reveals the emotional and intellectual clarity that often anchors his characters. Even in comedic or light-hearted films like *Phone Swap*, the persona he constructs remains rooted in dignity and command, underscoring his versatility and charisma.

Jacobs’s off-screen persona mirrors this gravitas. He is widely recognized for humility, wit, and reflective intelligence — qualities that colleagues frequently cite as central to his longevity in the industry. Essi notes that many Nigerian actors of Jacobs’s generation forged “a performative identity grounded both in artistic discipline and in an ethos of cultural responsibility” (Essi, 45; Eze & Molokwu, 14). Jacobs exemplifies this model: his professional conduct reinforces his artistic persona, creating coherence between life and performance that enhances the audience’s trust in his characters.

OLU JACOBS’S APPROACH TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND INTERPRETATION

Jacobs’s method of character development is rooted in rigorous preparation, intellectual engagement, and emotional intuition. His first step is meticulous script analysis, where he interrogates the character’s motivations, psychological layers, and narrative function. As Rawlins observes, effective screen performance demands more than textual fidelity; it requires “lifting words off the page and rendering them as believable thought” (Rawlins 23). Jacobs embodies this principle by foregrounding the internal logic of his characters, crafting interpretations that feel lived rather than performed.

His process also includes cultural and historical research, especially when playing characters situated within specific Nigerian or transnational contexts. This aligns with Essi’s argument that the Nigerian actor must navigate “cultural memory, communal identity, and inherited performance registers” in order to construct believable roles (Essi 52). Jacobs’s performances show this consciousness: he attends to the sociopolitical textures that shape character psychology.

Furthermore, Jacobs emphasizes emotional connection, drawing from his personal reservoir of experiences to animate his characters. Stanislavski’s insistence that the actor “pour into [the role] his own soul” (15) resonates strongly with Jacobs’s practice. He deepens this connection through physicality, using posture, gesture, and controlled movement to externalize the character’s inner life. Theatre practitioners often note his mastery of stillness — a technique that communicates authority without exaggeration.

Jacobs also embraces rehearsal as discovery. Through repeated practice, he refines intention, rhythm, and emotional truth. This aligns with his belief that repetition yields mastery, a sentiment that echoes Stanislavski’s notion of subconscious activation through repetition (Stanislavski, *Building a Character* 183). Improvisation, too, plays a role in his method, allowing spontaneous truth to emerge in performance. Jacobs collaborates intensely with directors and co-actors, fostering what Huber describes as the shared “personality profile” of a character shaped collaboratively by actor, director, and audience expectations (Huber 1). Through these layered techniques, Jacobs constructs multidimensional characters who resonate beyond the screen.

INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY ON ARTISTIC CHOICES AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Jacobs’s personal temperament exerts clear influence over his artistic decisions and interactions within the industry. His disposition — marked by authenticity, integrity, intellectual curiosity, and emotional openness — guides the types of roles he accepts and the relationships he cultivates. His authenticity inclines him toward characters grounded in human complexity rather than superficial archetypes. Essi argues that veteran Nigerian performers often gravitate toward roles that reflect “ethical intentionality and cultural depth” (Essi 61; Molokwu & Uchime, 159)), a pattern strongly evident in Jacobs’s career. His roles tend to foreground moral questions, generational wisdom, and the negotiation of identity.

Jacobs’s versatility stems from a personal openness to challenge. His adventurous nature allows him to navigate multiple genres, from political dramas to romantic comedies to epic historical films. His collaborations with directors such as Kunle Afolayan, Mildred Okwo, and international filmmakers demonstrate his willingness to cross stylistic boundaries. His warmth and professionalism underpin his reputation as a collaborative actor. These traits foster long-term partnerships and mentorship relationships. Jacobs frequently supports emerging actors, embodying what Essi calls “the intergenerational ethic of Nigerian performance culture” (Essi 70). His mentorship of younger actors contributes substantively to the sustainability of the Nigerian film tradition.

Jacobs’s personal values also shape his selectivity. Rather than pursuing roles for fame or financial gain, he chooses projects aligned with his artistic and ethical vision. This self-discipline strengthens his legacy and contributes to the coherence of his body of work.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS CONTRIBUTION TO NIGERIAN THEATRE AND FILM

Jacobs's contribution to Nigerian performance is both foundational and transformative. He is widely regarded as a bridge between earlier postcolonial theatre traditions and the contemporary Nollywood aesthetic. His work in British theatre and television in the 1970s and 1980s provided him with a global lens, which he brought back to Nigeria, enriching the emergent video film culture with professional discipline and international standards.

His innovations in acting technique, especially his integration of classical training with indigenous performance sensibilities, helped shape Nollywood's evolving acting style. He served as a model for younger actors seeking to merge tradition with modernity. Jacobs has also played a central role in industry leadership. His status as one of Africa's most respected actors has contributed to the professionalization of Nigerian film. In recognition of these contributions, he was awarded the national honour of Member of the Order of the Federal Republic (MFR) in 2011.

As a cultural icon, Jacobs has become emblematic of excellence, artistry, and integrity. Critics and scholars frequently cite him as one of the most influential African actors of his generation. His iconic portrayals of kings ("igwe") — far from reinforcing stock stereotypes — elevate these roles through nuance, emotional intelligence, and refined character work. Essi emphasizes the importance of actors who "construct cultural meaning through performance" (Essi 73; Eze, et al, 20). Jacobs exemplifies this role: his characters articulate social concerns, cultural values, and moral questions central to Nigerian life. Through his artistry, mentorship, leadership, and sustained excellence, Olu Jacobs has made an indelible impact on Nigerian theatre and film.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the artistic evolution of Olu Jacobs, situating his work within the broader trajectories of Nigerian theatre and Nollywood film culture. Through a biographical and analytical lens, the project explored the convergence of Jacobs's personality, performance strategies, and creative commitments. His journey—from his formative years in Kano to his training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, and subsequently to his distinguished career in Nigerian cinema—reveals a performer whose craft is shaped by discipline, ethical intentionality, and cultural consciousness.

The analysis foregrounded Jacobs's approach to character construction, emphasizing script interrogation, interpretive depth, emotional recall, physical expressivity, and sustained rehearsal. His style illustrates the dynamic interplay between personal identity and character embodiment, demonstrating what Essi identifies as "the actor's negotiation of cultural memory and performance identity" (Essi 52). Jacobs's on-screen authority, vocal resonance, and nuanced portrayals position him as a central figure in defining Nigerian screen realism. Moreover, the study underscored Jacobs's influence as a mentor and cultural icon. His intergenerational mentorship, professionalism, and intellectual generosity reflect the communal ethos described by Rivera, Ovunda, and Essi, who assert that Nigerian performance traditions are built upon shared learning, collaborative ethics, and artistic responsibility. The body of work Jacobs leaves behind—across stage, television, and film—constitutes a significant archive of Nigerian cultural expression and artistic innovation.

Olu Jacobs's contributions to Nigerian performance culture are profound and enduring. His artistic journey exemplifies a rare fusion of classical training, indigenous aesthetics, and personal integrity. Through careful attention to character psychology, emotional truth, and dramaturgical structure, he expanded the expressive possibilities of Nigerian screen acting. His portrayals reveal a consistent dedication to authenticity and depth, qualities that have shaped audience expectations and influenced industry standards over several decades.

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, it is recommended that researchers in film, theatre, and performance studies should expand critical engagement with Jacobs's corpus, situating his work within broader African performance epistemologies. His career offers fertile ground for inquiries into actor training, cross-cultural performance, and Nollywood's evolving aesthetics. In addition, aspiring actors and theatre practitioners should study Jacobs's methods—particularly his script analysis, rehearsal discipline, research-driven characterization, and emotional authenticity. Institutions may incorporate elements of his practice into curriculum and mentorship programs. Documentaries, critical essays, public lectures, and media retrospectives should be produced to illuminate Jacobs's artistic philosophy, his impact on Nollywood, and his broader cultural significance. Public platforms can deepen audience appreciation of his legacy.

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