

Ritual Imagination in Selected Plays, of

J. P. Clark, Ola Rotimi and

Wole Soyinka

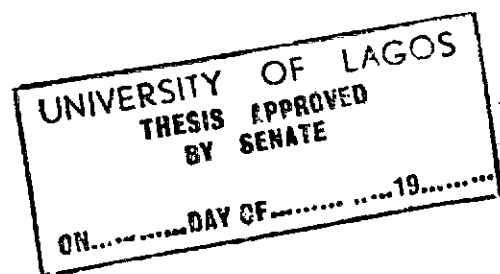
By

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A B S T R A C T

If we examine the writings and opinions of African philosophers, creative writers, religious leaders, and social critics, it would be revealed that there is great concern about the abandonment of values and mores which had held communities in close affinity. As a result, there has been a call for a return to those thought-patterns and acts which are profound, which serve, or represent the spiritual factor in the lives of human beings.

The reason for this call is that, in spite of the gains of science particularly in the 20th century, the general feeling is that mankind has missed an important link in the chain of things. In the microcosmos presented in the selected works of John Pepper Clark, Emmanuel Olawale Gladstone Rotimi, and Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, that missing link is provided by the characters' apprehension of all actions and events as transcendental phenomena. This is the ritual imagination.

The underlying rationale for ritual is found in the cosmic, perennial conflicts which plague all mankind. This, no doubt, is the result of a collective reaction to uncertainty in the lives of people who for centuries had forged an existence guided by moral codes of behaviour. In such societies, people derived strength from myths and legends, from laws on taboos, and ritual prohibition. Such

constructs found in the African past, have informed the themes and styles of the plays selected for this study.

Ritual is perceived as a unifying force, as a celebration and affirmation of life, both at individual and communal levels. Sacrificial deaths are positive in the sense that they provide a redeeming feature in the daily lives of characters, redeeming them from the evil effects of cosmic dislocation.

Some radical critics have taken exception to the use of the ritual imagination, accusing mythopoeists of embracing negritude, as it were, through the back door. The response of the ritual-dramatist is that pre-colonial African communities did enjoy an appreciable level of socio-cultural cohesion with the aid of the values being currently castigated by representatives of foreign interests. The message of the ritual-dramatist therefore is that some universal lessons can be learnt from the actions of the characters presented in their dramas. This thesis contends that the ritual imagination still provides a paradigm for contemporary consciousness.

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welcoming him back any time he returned from Lagos.

Greatest thanks to God Almighty for giving me
life.

DEDICATION

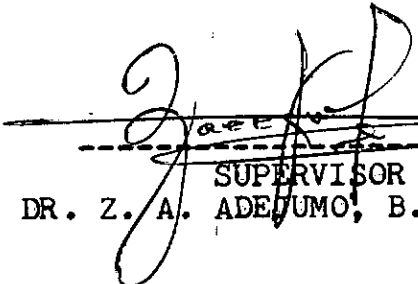
I dedicate this project to the memory of my late father, I. U. Bghagha who went to sleep before I achieved the dream of a doctorate in English.

D E C L A R A T I O N

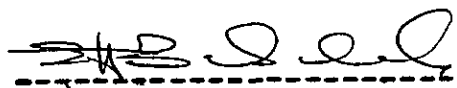
I declare that this dissertation is an original research work carried out by me.


HOPE OGHENERUKEVBE EGHAGHA.

We certify that this thesis was written under our close supervision in the Department of English, University of Lagos, and represents the original effort of the author.


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CERTIFICATION

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS -

RITUAL IMAGINATION IN SELECTED PLAYS

OF J.P. CLARK, OLA ROTIMI, AND

WOLE SOYINKA

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IS A RECORD OF ORIGINAL RESEARCH CARRIED OUT BY

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PREFACE

This study is an attempt to examine the specific world-view which we have identified as the main influence on the thematic pre-occupation of selected works of three Nigerian dramatists - John Pepper Clark Bekederemo¹, Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, and Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka (Nobel laureate for literature, 1986).

The choice of the three playwrights has been by no means accidental, considering their enormous contributions to drama in Nigeria, and in fact, Africa. Etherton has gone a step further in evaluating the worth of Soyinka when he groups him along with Bertolt Brecht, John Arden and his wife Margaretta D'Arcy as "the greatest dramatists of our time - though First World critics may not agree with this judgement"². Although we can not place the three writers on the same footing in terms of creative abilities, no doubt, they have distinguished themselves as master-dramatists among the first generation of writers in Nigeria³. Their stature has been enhanced not only by the sheer number of creative works thus far attributed to their pen but also by the amount of critical attention which they have received individually, (Biodun Jeyifo, 1988;

Yemi Ogunbiyi, 1987). Besides, Rotimi and Soyinka have had some of their popular plays staged by both amateur and professional groups both within Nigeria and abroad⁴.

The second reason which justifies the choice of these playwrights is more fundamental to the central thesis of this research. We have observed that a unity of vision which we have termed 'ritual imagination' permeates the six plays selected for this study. The plays are Ozidi, and Song of a Goat by J.P. Clark, The Gods Are Not To Blame and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi by Ola Rotimi; and, The Strong Breed, Death and the King's Horseman by Wole Soyinka.

If we have implied in the last paragraph that the ritual imagination as will be defined in the course of this work cannot be said to be operative in all the works of the playwrights, it is deliberate. To illustrate this point, it is clear that ritual imagination does not determine the sequence of actions in such works as Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, Hopes of the Living Dead, and If, all by Ola Rotimi. Also, we cannot see this world-view in the following plays by Soyinka: The Jero Plays, The Lion and the Jewel and A play of Giants. The

point being made is that we cannot foist a stereo-
type interpretation on the creative works of the
playwrights⁵. However, in most of Clark's other
plays such as The Masquerade, The Raft, The Boat,
The Return Home, and Full Circle,^{the} ritual imagination
determines theme and character development. Also,
in Soyinka's The Road, A Dance of the Forests,
The Bacchae of Euripides, and Kongi's Harvest,
there is an abiding concern for ritual conscious-
ness, for the spiritual essence in the life of Man,
an aspect which we shall soon discuss as one of the
essentials of the ritual imagination.

Out of the several plays mentioned above,
we have selected six for in-depth and analytical
study. This choice, we hope, will provide an ample
opportunity to do a vertical study of all the salient
issues raised in the thesis. This however, does not
imply that references will not be made to other works
of the writers. When the need arises, examples will
be drawn from, and references will be made to, other
sources.

We have identified six features, six components of
the^{the} ritual imagination. Together or individually

they constitute the essence in the characters' metaphysical world-view. Each play focuses on one of these, with some others developing either as sub-themes or recurring ideas. For example, although we have identified restoration of harmony as a focal theme in Ozidi, Elesin's sacrificial act is also expected to keep the world in balance in Death and the King's Horseman. Such an approach provides us with a concise perspective in order to illustrate the ritual imagination.

The first feature is the restoration of harmony between natural and supernatural forces through ritual. We shall attempt to explain what constitute natural and supernatural forces and how harmony can be disrupted.

The second refers to the archetypal struggle of mortal man against supernatural forces with the aid of ritual. What this means is that man sometimes fights against what may have been imposed by a higher force. Within the context of our study, such a struggle results in tragedy.

The third feature is similar to the second, it is the archetypal struggle against fate and destiny. The difference between the concept of struggle against supernatural forces and that of archetypal struggle against Fate and Destiny, is

that while the former is alterable, the latter is unalterable within the context of our study.

Yet, another feature is the violation of taboos and its consequences. When a taboo is violated, it results in conflict, and ritual practice is meant to resolve the conflict.

Scapegoatism and the idea of sacrifice constitute the fifth feature. In the play which treats the theme of scapegoatism, a character bears the sins of the community.

The sixth feature is that the ritual-person emerges as a hero.

Chapter One titled "The Nature of Rituals" is an introductory essay. It gives several definitions of ritual and emerges with a working definition. It also reviews the link between ritual and drama and how different playwrights have appropriated ritual as material for drama. It takes a general look at the Greek experience and the African concept of drama. Finally, after taking a position on the nature of rituals, it provides a theoretical framework which has informed the thesis.

Chapter Two is an examination of selected plays of Clark. It is divided into two sections. The first section is titled "Restoration of

harmony through Revenge - a study of Ozidi".

The second section is titled "Archetypal struggle of mortal man against supernatural forces - a study of Song of a Goat".

Chapter Three is a study of selected plays of Ola Rotimi. The first part is titled "Archetypal struggle against Fate and Destiny - a study of The Gods Are Not to Blame", while the second bears the title "Taboo as a source of dramatic conflict - a study of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi".

The Fourth chapter examines selected plays by Soyinka. This is also divided into two segments. The first is titled "Purification through sacrifice - a study of The Strong Breed" while the second is "The Ritual-person as a hero - a study of Death and the King's Horseman".

Chapter Five, titled "Ritual as Metaphor" is an interpretative study which attempts to present the relevance of the ritual imagination to contemporary society.

Chapter Six is a summary of, and conclusion on the major issues raised in the thesis. It emphasizes the contribution to knowledge which the dissertation has achieved.

END NOTES

1. At the time Clark wrote and published Three Plays (OUP, 1964) he was simply John Pepper Clark. For an obscure reason, he left out the family's traditional name-Bekederemo. We conjecture that as a young and up-coming writer, he needed a name that could be easily pronounced. Lately, after nearly three decades on the literary scene, Clark has added Bekederemo to his names.
2. Michael Etherton. "Tribute to Wole Soyinka". Before Our Very Eyes. Ed. Dapo Adelugba, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987 p. 34.
3. The first generation of writers include the late poet Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, and Wole Soyinka. This is a rather broad classification because, according to Rotimi, by the time he returned from the United States of America in 1966, Soyinka had already established his presence in the fields of drama and poetry. However, in view of the fact that they all belong to the category of the writers who first had publishers' attention and published their works about the same time, we can classify them as first generation writers. See "Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers". DEM SAY, Ed. Lindfors. Texas: 1974, pp. 57-68.
4. Among students of secondary schools and universities, The Gods Are Not to Blame, The Lion and the Jewel, and The Trials of Brother Jero are very popular. Clark is first encountered and recognized by students as a poet (having been exposed to "Abiku", "Night Rain", "Ibadan", etc.) in the school syllabus, before knowing him as a dramatist. This is perhaps due to the complex nature of his published plays which may not be very popular with an audience in search of pure entertainment in the Nigerian scene.

5. The danger in classifying a writer's works as belonging to a particular ideological camp lies in the fact that a writer could see different issues from different perspectives at different times. This is particularly true of Soyinka whose eclecticism has produced such diverse themes in The Trials of Brother Jero and The Road for example. Also, Soyinka castigates Molar Ogundipe-Leslie in "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?" (1977) for asserting in a review that Soyinka has 'become ideological' on the basis of one work of art. For the same reason, we cannot say that Ola Rotimi has become a marxist writer on the strength of his socialist consciousness in If.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION - THE NATURE OF RITUALS

The search, even by modern European dramatists for ritualists roots from which to draw out visions of modern experience, is a clue to the deep-seated need of creative man to recover this archetypal consciousness in the origins of the dramatic medium.¹

In his seminal essay titled "The African Imagination", Abiola Irele makes a fundamental distinction between Janheinz Jahn's attempt to posit 'a structure of mind common to members of the black race, informing a collective vision of the world' and his (Irele's) "collective experience and certain cultural determinants which could be said to have given a special dimension to that experience by dismissing the former as being racist."² He then builds up an argument on how the African imagination can be used to refer to "a conjunction of impulses which can be said to have given a unified expression in a body of literary texts"³. In the notes that follow his presentation, he explains that it is in this context that

Trilling employed the label 'The Liberal Imagination' for the writers he discusses in the book of that title; we are also familiar with terms such as 'The Romantic Imagination' and 'The Dialectical Imagination' and today 'The Female Imagination'.⁴

It is in this context that we refer to ritual imagination in this study as a 'faculty of mental images' to suggest a peculiar world view.

In a nutshell, the ritual imagination refers to the socio-cultural orientation found in the micro-cosmos presented in the plays which view all actions as transcendental phenomena. In other words, all actions are perceived to be linked to forces beyond the ordinary. Man is still concerned with the 'essence' the deep and religious structures of the cosmos. This necessarily suggests a religious mind which Eliade refers to as sacred forces.⁵

Furthermore, the ritual imagination refers to the frame of mind and unity in vision guided by certain social, environmental and cultural currents which inform the imaginative works of the chosen writers. Such constructs are found in interpersonal relationships, intra-family conflicts, in relationships between Man and Deity; and in relationships between Man and his community. They are also reflected in

the characters' interpretation of natural and supernatural events, infringement of taboos, daily incidents and occurrences.

Some writers in the 20th century notably Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Antonin Artaud (1896-1924) have made use of the concept of ritual in their theatrical experiments. Lisbeth Grant has also described the New Lafayette theatre productions as ritual.⁶

For the purpose of clarity, we shall examine some definitions of ritual and emerge with one which reflects the imagination so depicted in the plays. There are indeed a legion definitions of ritual, each guided by contextual demands. In other words, definitions are proffered to reflect the immediate or general purpose of each writer. It is for this reason that we find differences in points of emphasis in definitions given by drama critics and sociologists.

A compendium of the various definitions which we shall examine below suggests that the subject can be divided into two broad categories. The first

category is flexible, accommodating activities like waking up, greeting, and eating. It is certainly not from this perspective that we are going to consider ^{the} ritual imagination.

The second category is that in which sacrality is attached to actions and symbols. We must state from the outset, that this category is more relevant to our perspective of study. In the definitions from this category, the religious essence forms the core of meaning, both implicit and explicit, playing a dynamic role in our understanding of ritual. It is elicited from societies which have not lost their connections with the roots, the profound meaning of existence encapsulated in myth and ritual.

Our first definition is that which is offered by Raymond Firth who says that rituals are "formal procedures of a communicative but arbitrary kind, having the effect of controlling or regularizing a social condition".⁷ Firth gives this definition within the context of social intercourse. Such words as 'communicative' and 'regularizing' are significant in any definition of ritual. Furthermore, ritual is seen as a means of imposing or establishing order in society. We have therefore extracted these two

words from Firth's definition in our effort to arrive at a working definition. Perhaps we should elaborate on the concepts of daily intercourse and forms of greeting as ritual.

Patterns and forms of greeting sometimes indicate rank and seniority both in terms of chronological age and social status. Among the Urhobo of Delta State of Nigeria, it is customary for the younger of two persons to greet the elder "Mi gwo" (literally 'I'm on my knees'). Kneeling down is the highest form of respect which a young man in Urhoboland can show to his elder. The elder would then respond "Wre do" (literally 'Stand up. How are you?'). It is obvious that this type of action is symbolic of deference. There is a context however, in which this mode of greeting can be altered. This happens usually during payment of bride-price, as a final step to marriage. During the occasion, all members of the bride-groom's family (no matter the ages of those involved) would be expected to kneel before the bride's family to plead for some favour. When such practices become formalized, they can be classified as ritual. It is in this context that Firth defines ritual.

Ritual is defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as a "specific, observable kind of behaviour based upon traditional rules".⁸ In this definition, the writer lays stress on 'behaviour' based on 'traditional rules'. We find a similarity between this definition and the one offered by Firth. What it suggests is that any action which is based on established traditional rule can be referred to as ritual. Rules are meant to control, to establish an order in the realm of things. We find such rules implicit in the ritual drama of Hellenic times as well as in Elizabethan Revenge tragedies. For example, in an introductory essay to Macbeth, Walter captures the ritual essence of the drama-world of Shakespeare:

The stability and concord of the universe was maintained by the balancing of opposites, for every thing had its opposites. There were also a system of correspondences between the micro-cosmic and the macro-cosmic world of man, kingdoms were the macro-unit of the world while man was the micro-unit, events therefore involved analogue events in the other; people believed that any sort of rebellious activities against a King, was a disruption to the divine arrangement and that this could bring about strange occurrences in the world.⁹

Within this arrangement, God Almighty was considered the greatest force who could decide the destiny of man.

J. Goody defines ritual as "category of standardized behaviour (custom) in which the relationship between the means and the end is not 'intrinsic', i.e. is either irrational or non-rational".¹⁰ Goody introduces the element of the irrational or non-rational which is one of the features of ritual. In other words, by their very nature, rituals can not be said to provide any scientific link between cause and effect, between action and consequence. However, from this definition, we can extract the concepts of 'standardized behaviour' and 'irrationality'.

To the ritualist, ritual is potent, functional and redemptive. It is for this reason that its practitioners believe in its efficacy. Graham-White was guided by this view when he defined ritual as "a religious act in which the worshippers re-do or produce in the form of imitation, a group experience for the purpose of effecting a specific end. As a result it has consequences beyond itself. It is functional and is expected to produce results in the future".¹¹ This definition is significant because it presents

the situation the way an 'insider', a 'devotee', or 'spiritual communicant' would perform it. We are beginning to make progress in the development of definitions of ritual, having begun to consider 'functionality'.

The other definitions which we shall give fall in the second category which we considered above. Jane Harrison defines ritual as "a religious act in which the group gives an intense emotional vent to a past group experience".¹² This definition refers to group experience because of the context in which Harrison examines ritual. Ritual can also be private, involving an individual and a deity. In another of her books Harrison says that "ritual within religion, seems the only way man's desire to preserve and conserve life may be acted out".¹³ We can also observe that Harrison's definition in this context is from the religious perspective. It therefore, comes close to our working definition.

If La Fontaine defines ritual as "any symbolic action in relation to the sacred"¹⁴, it implies that any symbolic action which takes place within a community for sacred purposes is a ritual.

When we add the 'rules' and 'standardized behaviour' which we had elicited from previous definitions, we would then have 'any practice regularized in order to provide rules for sacred purposes'.

Ritual has also been defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as a "practice done or regularly repeated in a set or precise manner so as to have a symbolic or quasi-symbolic significance"¹⁵. Apart from the emphasis on the symbolic, the writer mentions a precise manner of repetition. This cannot be said to be a universal concept because a ritual celebration of one year may be different from the ritual celebration of the following year, both in terms of sacrificial requirements and pattern of enactment.¹⁶

We shall now, on the basis of the ideas deduced from the foregoing observations, present a working definition of ritual. A ritual within the framework of our study is a belief system which categorizes actions into the realms of the sacred and the mundane in order to establish rules for standardized behaviour. Some of the actions are either symbolic or quasi-symbolic and are ^{not} ends in themselves, but means to an end. The rules are un-written. The characters are all aware of them,

and these regulate inter-personal behaviour.

We find the rules of behaviour in Ozidi or in Death and the King's Horseman for example.

In ritual drama, an individual may be entrusted with keeping the rules on behalf of the community. He may serve as the one whose action is expected to re-affirm communal solidarity in relation to a particular deity. When the individual fails to fulfil his communal responsibility, the seed of tragedy is sown. This tragic feeling is not borne by the affected characters alone. In fact, at the moment of carrying the burden, the protagonist loses his personality. Soyinka elaborates on this when he says:

entering that microcosmos involves a loss of individuation, a self-submergence in universal essence. It is an act undertaken on behalf of the community, and the welfare of the protagonist is inseparable from that of the total community.¹⁷

This is ritual drama which the central characters in the selected plays perform on behalf of the communities.

Ritual is said to have developed out of man's fear of the unknown, out of his belief that no disaster was natural.¹⁸ Such occurrences as cyclone, famine, incessant attacks by wild animals immediately called for ritual. In effect, it was man's inability to comprehend the unpredictable course of nature and

the causes of disasters which made him resort to certain practices as a way of appeasing natural and supernatural forces. Also, such practices were believed to ensure economic, social and most importantly, agricultural prosperity. Another researcher, Bell states that man's contact with the earth made it imperative for him to exploit all resources - both physical and metaphysical, to induce land to produce food for him. Bell states further:

while no doubt feeling his environment as frequently hostile, primitive man none-the-less felt his relation to it as continuous rather than transcendental or alien.¹⁹

In other words, in spite of the hostile environment, man felt the need to make the land arable and friendly. He had to conquer the land. In order to achieve this, man is said to have resorted to ritual which invariably included sacrificial acts. Sacrificial victims were said to include both human beings and animals. The blood of the slaughtered victim (usually on the altar slab) was believed to be efficacious. The early white men who came to Africa cited the stoppage of human sacrifice as one of their objectives. However, as we read from Frazer's account, human sacrifice was a universal practice.²⁰

Deities were then created which were believed to have control over nature. Adejumo writes that:

man's oldest problem on earth was fear and physical dis-orientation, and his instinctive behaviour of precipitous choice of gods (was) a creative quest for an answer which gradually formalized into several hues of worship.²¹

Such hues of worship were re-enacted during certain periods of the year in order to avert disaster. While commenting on the African situation, Osofisan states that

In this context, perhaps the closest comparison will be the ancient Greek sense of it, where an analogous metaphysical concern was manifest in the need to set the human and the mystic in perpetual contact, to define divinity within such terms that they were always close and concrete, impinging on the earthly through multifarious manifestations.²²

The Greek experience was that of close affinity between man and the gods, just the way the Yoruba view of life is presented by Soyinka in Myth, Literature and the African World.²³ Manifestations of the transcendental were found in gods and priestly Kings.

Frazer contends that rituals developed in order to facilitate agrarian fertility.

Fertility rites involved

Scapegoat floggings, purifications, burning, sexual intercourse and various transparent manipulations of plants and animals.²⁴

By supernatural means, it was believed that the reproductive function of the earth can be influenced by copulation. Frazer continues:

according to a widespread belief which is not without foundation in fact, plants reproduce their kinds through the sexual union of male and female elements and that on the principle of homoeopathic or imitative magic, this reproduction is supposed to be stimulated by the real or mock marriage of men and women who masquerade for the time being as spirits of vegetation. Such magical dramas have played a great part in the popular festivals of Europe, and based as they are on a very wide conception of natural law, it is clear that they must have been handed down from a remote antiquity.²⁵

The irrational aspect of human thought or belief underlies this view of ritual practice as recorded by Frazer. We must note here the established link between ritual and drama in the European context. As we shall find out later in this chapter, such practices still occur in certain parts of Africa.

It is further said that man needed harmony with the cosmos because a tilt of the world from its course would result in disaster. In Yoruba and Ijaw communities²⁶ which provide the background to the world-view of the texts selected for this study, festivals are usually held during which time deities are worshipped. These deities, according to Soyinka, are represented in ritual drama

by the passage-rites of hero-gods, a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his environment, physical, social, and psychic.²⁷

In this way, man attempted to assert his will over nature and make things develop in his favour. This, of course, was an attempt to make man a master of the universe, controlling and harnessing nature to work in his favour.

The nature of rituals, the guiding principles and underlying myth, entail intricate and largely symbolic actions which have evolved with time. For, after all, rituals are not static. The dynamic nature of the human spirit has continued to affect the form and content of ritual, such that, with each generation, modifications have been introduced, and emphasis shifted from the spiritual to the mundane. Osofisan (1976) observes:

And it is not only that the machinery provided by the old society for dealing with chaos has lost its capacity for total effect, it is also that the very metaphysical *raison d'être* of that machinery has been eroded with the advent of a new socio-political philosophy.²⁸

In this age of emphasis on science, the essence of ritual as a way of controlling national ethos and 'world affairs' is being relegated to the margins. Even in drama, more and more dramatists are interested in the western type of drama at the expense of ritual. Ogunba offers consolatory words when he says: "In compensation for the loss of ritual, there is the corresponding gain in the skill of presentation and other elements of theatre".²⁹ This is his response to the fear that traditional rituals are dying gradually and are quietly being replaced by other forms of entertainment.

A study of the nature of rituals therefore is an examination of peculiarities. Nature here refers to qualities that are either physical, mental or spiritual and which belong to a thing. In the context of our study, the nature of ritual refers to the things associated with ritual. Some of these attributes such as 'actions' can be classified as physical while mental or spiritual refers to the state of mind, the totality of beliefs of a ritualist.

Such features vary from one environment to another, subject to sociological and cultural factors. These two attributes suggest two levels of ritual practice and how ritual can be observed by a non-participant. The first, 'action', has fundamental relevance to the relationship between ritual and drama in the sense that theatre is basically a place of action. The second, which is the 'state of mind' (associated with suspension of disbelief in drama) is concerned with the essence, the metaphysical dimension of ritual.

If, as we earlier remarked, the word 'nature' suggests characteristics, then we must also pay attention to the myth behind some rituals and their categories. Two main schools of thoughts seem to dominate the argument on the link between ritual and myth. While the one argues that myth is behind every ritual, the other contends that myth is the product of ritual. Our concern with myth in this study is that the uncertainty emanating from certain myths, is controlled by ritual. For example, the myth about poor harvest, or about the spirit of the dead wandering until it is avenged (as in Hamlet) is controlled by ritual.

Myths are narratives or stories which are handed down from past generations encapsulating the early beliefs of ^arace or tribe. Myth is found in all

societies and among all human beings. Jung states that myth-making is a "universal experience and the impulse is part of the psychic make-up of every human being".³⁰ Myth-making therefore aids ritual, and due to this link between myth and ritual, we find between them, similarities in the mode of communication. One of such similarities is in the use of symbols and signs. Thematically, a story may be created by using the theme of an ancient myth to symbolize present day socio-political reality. Enekwe says that "myth is important in terms of an ideological position, that is, the ideology of the moment".³¹ In this way, myth is not presented as an experience to be taken as reality, but as a projection of possibilities.

There is a sense in which myth is regarded as history. This is when it contains elements of what could have happened, much like the universal truth explained by Aristotle. According to Raffaele Patlazoni,

myth is not fable, but history, 'true history' and not false history. It is true history by virtue of its content, the narrative of events that really occurred, beginning with those grandiose events of the origin.³²

Myth, in other words, can be said to be history in the sense that it contains elements of truth about past occurrences. The quarrel is that myths tend to exaggerate not paying attention to detail.³³

Some myths are presented and preserved through ritual. They are concretized through dramatic presentations and dialogue for posterity. As a result, some inexplicable incidents are explained. It is the opinion of Kiping' eno Koech that

the African myth explains in the context of African cultures such great human concerns as death, creation, the evolution of living things, man's relationship to other living creatures and natural phenomena like day and night.³⁴

A close examination of the intentions behind most rituals would reveal that they are indeed concerned with life and death. Even in ritual dramas, such concerns are prominent. It is this search for the meaning of life and death which leads to Professor's death in Soyinka's play, The Road. Also Oedipus' desire to know the truth about his fate, his origin and the future of his life, leads him to his tragic fall. In King Lear, the storms and the haunting noise from the dark help to intensify the level of awe which we feel while in contact with

the story. Koech also says that traditionally, myth serves as a socializing agent, teaches the meaning of the universe, provides emotional and psychological easement by pointing to the redeeming features in what appears to be a bad situation, and serves as a form of entertainment.³⁵ By serving in this manner, myth actually reinforces ritual.

A few examples from the texts selected for this study are particularly illustrative of this relationship between myths and ritual. The myth that the Alafin needs the services of the horseman in the other world informs the ritual sacrifice of Elesin Oba in Death and the King's Horseman. The myth also establishes the link between the world of the living and the world of the living-dead. Also, the myth that Ozidi senior will not have rest in the world of the ancestors until his death is avenged guides Ozidi's revenge mission.

The use of myth is not peculiar to African dramatists. Shakespeare, as we observed earlier on, drew from the mythic ghosts and witches respectively to create spectacle and sense of foreboding in such plays as Hamlet, Julius Caesar, and Macbeth. The ghost was used as a force to restore order or to warn an offender against the

consequences of evil.³⁶ The witches, for example, must have had credibility in Macbeth's time to have succeeded in manipulating him. The significance of these observations is that Shakespeare felt confident that his audience would understand such a construct of experience and suspend disbelief. In a way therefore, the experiences of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Brutus reflect the Elizabethan belief in the supernatural world.

In his review of Joyce's Ulysses, Eliot emphasizes the importance of myth as a way of ordering the chaos of contemporary times. Eliot is quoted here by Bell:

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him... it is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.³⁷

We are further told by Bell when he examines Eliot's The Wasteland, that:

he uses the myth of the fisher king and its medieval avatar, the Grail legend, as a metaphysical framework placing the contemporary experience in a satiric and pitiful perspective.³⁸

This is one of the ways in which we can use myth. In some cases, myths are selected to teach morals and to explain the social norms of a human community. This is usually expressed through ritual.

Symbols are fundamental to the nature of ritual because actions and words require an element of association in order to be meaningful. In most cases the participant in a ritual performs his actions by using symbols. Also, there is a functional correlation between symbols and myth because they express a community's way of looking at the world. In other words, they become a projection of the self as noted by Rollo May:

both symbols and myth
have the same function
psychologically; they are
man's way of expressing
the quintessence of his
experience, his way of seeing
life, his self-image and his
relations to the world of
his fellow man and of nature -
in a total figure which at
the same moment carries the
vital meaning of this
experience.³⁹

Symbolic actions which are always found in ritual also express beliefs and myths, and convey to the external world the subjective projections

of the community. The relationship between myth, symbol, and ritual therefore would appear to be symbiotic one depending on, and at the same time reinforcing, the other. It is in ritual that such expressions and wishes are dramatized through dialogue (incantations and chants), songs, dance and action. This relationship under reference can be found in the day-to-day rituals and dramatic rituals which have been scripted.

The language of ritual is that of myth, which is esoteric and an extension of symbolic actions. It is coded, requiring association, as earlier on explained. Let us illustrate this point with a speech delivered by that powerful character Clytemnestra when she welcomes Agamemnon back from Troy.⁴⁰ The symbol of the purple carpet which Aeschylus employs through Clytemnestra to ensnare Agamemnon is very striking. She says:

Now, dearest husband, come, step from
your chariot

But do not set to earth, my lord, the
conquering foot

That trod down Troy. Servants do as
you have been bidden;

Make haste, carpet his way with
crimson tapestries,

Spread silk before your master's feet;

Justice herself

shall lead him to a home he never hoped

to see (73)

(My Emphasis)

Agamemnon replies:

And do not with these soft attentions

woman me

Nor prostrate like a fawning Persian mouth

at me

Your loud addresses; not with your spread

cloths invite

Envy of the gods, for honours due to gods

alone :

I ~~count~~ it dangerous, being mortal, to set foot

On such embroidered silks. I would be

reverenced

As a man, not god. (73-74).

Both characters understand that the wrath of the gods would be invited if he dares step on the carpet of purple. She ironically plays on 'justice' leading Agamemnon to a home he did not hope to see any more, a clear reference to his death which[^] could have occurred in battle. The King does not see beyond the surface level. He initially rebukes his wife, but soon weakens when she hits the chord of mortal vanity.

Hear her:

There is the sea - who shall exhaust
the sea? which teems
With purple dye costly as silver, a dark
stream
For staining of fire stuffs, unceasingly
renewed.
This house has store of crimson, by Heaven's
grace, enough
For one outpouring; you are no king of beggary,
Had oracles prescribed it, I would have
dedicated
Twenty such cloths to trampling, if by care
and cost
I might ensure safe journey's end for
this one life
Now you are come to your dear home,
your altar hearth,
The tree, its rout refreshed, spreads leaf
to the high beams
To veil as from the dog-star's heat
your loved returned
Shines now like spring warmth after winter;
but when Zeus
From the unripe grape presses his wine,
then through the house
Heat dies, and coolness comes, as through
this royal door
Enter its lord, perfected to receive his own (74).

These words of endearment are meant to alter Agamemnon's weak mind which had appeared firm when he made his initial resolve. He soon steps on the carpet, inviting the gods' wrath. Vellacott comments on Clytemnestra's speech quoted above:

(She) rejoins with a flood of two-faced imagery which rouses in the audience an easiness to balance Agamemnon's. The sea she says, is an inexhaustible source of purple dye; and Agamemnon can well afford to tread on expensive cloth. But the 'sea' she speaks of is the family feud, inexhaustible in hate; the purple dye' is blood shed for revenge; the 'one out-pouring', the 'safe journey's end', are like ambiguous. The 'unripe grape' is a word used for a 'young virgin, and therefore means Iphigenia, from whose death springs the wrath of Zeus against her father; 'coolness' may be shelter from the heat, or the chill of death; and 'perfected' is the word used of an unblemished victim upon which all the rites preliminary to sacrifice have been performed. But Agamemnon, self-confident and contemptuous, listens without comprehending.⁴¹

We have quoted this passage at length to demonstrate how much meaning can lurk underneath the surface of words, which in essence is symbolic language. The characters live in a world in which certain actions have meaning and it is within such context that we appreciate the language. The message is lost

on Agamemnon, doomed already, but not on Cassandra who understands it all but is incapable of taking any action to save the situation.⁴²

A symbol represents and communicates a coherent, greater whole by means of a greater part. The part which is presented makes it possible for us to understand the whole, hence, it is said that symbols are based on complementation. We are further told that

The symbol object, the sign, the word, and the gesture require the association of certain conscious ideas in order to fully express what is meant by them. To this extent it has an esoteric and at the same time an exoteric, or a veiling and revealing function. The discovery of its meaning presupposes a certain amount of active co-operation.⁴³

The subjectivity or irrationality of symbols is determined by its close reference to context, or a social group, a cult, or a movement. Some symbols are universal. The sun, rainfall, and storm are universal symbols. Firth tells us that the

essence of symbols lies in the recognition of one thing or standing for (representing) another, the relation between them being that of concrete to abstract, particular to general. The relation is such that the symbol by itself appears capable of generating and receiving effects otherwise reserved for the object to which it refers - such effects are often of high emotional charge.⁴⁴

We can infer two levels of symbolism from Firth's description and apply them to our discussion of ritual. While the one refers to specific acts in ritual, the other concerns ritual itself as a symbolic act. Ritual itself has meaning and at a broad level, it can be said to 'stand for' another thing. It is in this context that ritual is said to be symbolic.

Most rituals are accompanied with sacrifice, either physical or spiritual,⁴⁵ and in most cases, it involves the shedding of blood to placate a deity. Hubert and Mauss tell us that

sacrifice is a religious act which through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of a certain object with which he is concerned.⁴⁶

Consecrating a victim could be by making the victim 'clean' for the purpose of shedding blood. Gerald Moore is more specific when he says that the purpose

of sacrifice is to preserve harmony between God and man, and to restore harmony when it has been disturbed by some human act of omission. He says further that death can only be said to be sacrificial when it is beneficial to the living. In other words, the shedding of the victim's blood must be for another person or persons.⁴⁷ The import of these statements on sacrifice is that sacrifice necessarily involves one person doing something on behalf of another.

Egberike tells us that in Ijaw society, sacrifice is meant to normalize breached divine-human relations, liberate vitality to the celebrants, redeem a lost virtue or people, and secure peace to a dis-oriented state.⁴⁸ In doing this, the celebrant or ritualist acknowledges the strength of a higher force, a supernatural one, and the blood of the victim is expected to make life favourable to the ritualist.

It is also in the nature of ritual to expel evil from society by using a carrier. In some cases, the victim's life is taken. Frazer says that the victim usually "was burned on a pyre built of wood of forest trees; and his ashes were cast into the sea".⁴⁹ Egberike gives a breakdown of types

of scapegoats as that of the dying god as a bearer of material or symbolic communal guilt; the scapegoat killed or offered as a sacrificial victim on a sacred altar or on some sacralized apparatus, and the scapegoat treated as an effigy of evil or a human embodiment of evil who must be expelled from the community.

Human life is considered as a very high price to pay for any 'sacrificial act. The reasoning is that if a man is to serve as the 'archetypal surrogate of human iniquity, he must be pure, without blemish.

Egberike's point on the dying god as a scapegoat can be illustrated by Money-Kryle's story recorded in Japan. It is a form of punishment on the god for being ineffective; it is destroyed in the process to give way to another. Here is Money-Kryle's account:

In a Japanese village, when the guardian divinity had long been deaf to the peasants' prayer for rain, they threw down his image and with curses loud and long, hurled it head foremost into the stinking rice-fields. 'There', they said, 'you may stay yourself for a while to see how you will feel after a few days' scorching in the broiling sun that is burning the life from our cracking field.⁵⁶

As earlier on observed, the dying god is expected to rejuvenate society.

Each ritual practice is guided by certain principles and ideas usually dictated by cultural elements. As a result, no single explanation of all ritual behaviour can be sustained. Each ritual experience is unique. Different rituals therefore, could be performed to achieve the same goal. This is evident in the example of a tribe in Central Australia which, according to Money-Kryle, may request a young man to let his blood flow over an older person's body to rejuvenate the old man.⁵¹ This is different from the example given by Frazer about the King of Sweden who slaughtered his children one after the other to rejuvenate himself and prolong his life. Let us read Frazer's account in full:

Aun or On, King of Sweden, sacrificed nine of his sons to Odin... in order that his life might be spared. After he had sacrificed his second son he received from the god an answer that he should live so long as he gave him one of his sons every ninth year. When he had sacrificed his seventh son, he still lived, but was so feeble that he could not walk but had to be carried in a chair. Then he offered up his eighth son, and lived nine years more, lying in his bed. After that he sacrificed his ninth son, and lived another nine years, but (was so weak)

that he drank out of a horn like a weaned child. (He) now wished to sacrifice his only remaining son to Odin, but the Swedes would not allow him. So he died and was buried in a mound at Upsala.⁵²

In the two examples given, the blood of the young is believed to give fresh life to the old man. The difference between the two lies in the fact that one entails a loss of life while the other simply causes blood to flow from a part of the body.

Let us illustrate the point which we made earlier on that ritual behaviour is perceived in different ways in different communities. In Kurunmi, tradition demands that the King's eldest son should be sacrificed upon the king's death while in Death and the King's Horseman, the Elesin performs the role as dictated by tradition. Furthermore, in The Strong Breed, we are made to understand that in Eman's native place, the carrier does not lose his life in the sacrifice. However, in the village where The Strong Breed is set, the victim is assaulted and loses all respect after the ordeal.

This difference in ritual practice is also present in some communities that have totems. Among the Aino of Japan, the bear which has the status of a totem is worshipped when dead, spoken

of as a divinity when alive and sometimes classified as an ancestor. However, according to Money-Kryle, when the bear is fully grown,

it is ritualistically killed amid wailing and lamentations and apologies. It is reminded, in a long oration, of all the kindness that has been showered upon it and entreated to give a favourable report of its murderers to the gods.⁵³⁾

In this community, killing and eating the totem rejuvenates the people and it is done ritualistically. A different picture of the totem is presented by Chinua Achebe in Things Fall Apart in which we are told that the sacred python must not be killed. If by accident this occurs, the culprit will be expected to make atonement and perform an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. When Ezeulu's son locks up the sacred python in a box as recorded in Arrow of God, it causes consternation and greatly embarrasses the Chief Priest Ezeulu.

In some communities, time has eroded the significance of totems. For example among the Orogun people of Delta State of Nigeria, the Alligator is a totem. In the past, the alligator used to visit the village freely, without suffering molestation from anyone. It was welcome in every

home since no one dared to kill for fear of incurring the wrath of the ancestors. However, with the coming of christianity, the alligator, sensing that it can now be killed and eaten, has returned permanently to the bush. The final point made by the elders of the village is that the alligator has lost its sacrality.⁵⁴

In ritual, a deity is usually chosen to represent the powerful force believed to be supernatural. Such a choice gives a feeling of well-being, a feeling of certainty that a god will actually grant one's requests. Kirk observes that characters chosen are often 'superhuman, gods or semi-divine' heroes, or animals who turn into culture heroes in the era of human and cultural creation.⁵⁵ It should be noted that there are some ritual sacrifices in which a deity is not called upon. In other words, it is not stated that the sacrifice is being made to a particular god. In such examples, Dawson says that the

Power of the sacrifice has nothing to do with god or gods, it is an invisible transcendent principle (apurva) that is generated by the sacrifice and needs no external power to make it efficacious.⁵⁶

Dawson concludes that this form of ritual is atheistic and by implication suggests that a ritual-sacrifice can indeed bring change about, even when no deity is called upon.

Arinze⁵⁷ summarizes the ends of ritual to be propitiation, purification, petition, thanksgiving, and warding off molestation from evil spirit.

A propitiatory ritual is performed when an individual or the community recognizes that an infringement of a sacred law has occurred. He will then be expected to perform the necessary ritual to be absolved. Some societies believe that while a man is in this state, any evil could befall him because his status has changed. A change of "status" is conceived in many different ways in different societies, but everywhere there is the idea that it involves the likelihood of some minor or major misfortune which will befall the person concerned".⁵⁸ This view is taken seriously in communities where ritual imagination determines the mores. Among the Igbo, such infringements are called 'alu' or 'nso ani' (abomination). It is believed that if such abominations are not atoned for, there will be disaster. Arinze also notes that

if the culprit in the major abomination is known, he is cut off from social communications, he is ostracized from the market, and if he dies he is not given full burial rites. To hide one's crime or to refuse to sacrifice is to lead a dangerous life, to walk a tight rope, to play with fire.⁵⁹

This world view is predominant in Zulu Sofola's play King Emene - Tragedy of a Rebellion.

A purificatory ritual is needed when a taboo has been broken. In King Emene, the taboo of performing the New Year ritual when past sins have not been atoned for is broken by the King. In this play by Sofola, the King loses his life for being insensitive to oracular warnings. In Song of a Goat, Zifa breaks a ritual rule when he calls back his father from the land of dishonour before the time is ripe. For this he is punished by the gods with impotence. Also, in the play, Ebiere and Tonye break a taboo by having sexual intercourse before the necessary sacrifice of blood of goat is performed. In Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo breaks a taboo when he beats his wife during the Peace Week. In the Bible, the priests of the Levitical order were commanded to avoid contact with corpses. If such contact occurred by any accident, the priest would be expected to

cleanse himself. (Leviticus Chapter 21, verses 1 to 11; Chapter 22 verse 7). Oedipus' incestuous relationship with his mother is also an example of pollution. His unwitting search for himself, and his self-discovery and eventual expulsion are a form of purification.⁶⁰

A scapegoat may be needed for a purification ritual. The choice of the victim depends on the gravity of the situation or the culture of the community in question. Sometimes, a human scapegoat might be required for the exercise. Frazer gives an account of a community experiencing drought. They believe that the land is polluted so

a party of villagers goes in procession to the bed of a mountain torrent, headed by a priest, who leads a black dog. At the chosen spot, they tether the beast to a stone, and make it a target for their bullets and arrows. When its life-blood bespatters the rocks, the peasants throw down their weapons and lift up their voices in supplication to the dragon divinity of the stream, exhorting him to send forthwith a shower to cleanse the spot from defilement.⁶¹

In this ritual, the blood of the victim is believed to purify the land. In another example given by Koech, the basis for selection is the victim's beauty and chastity. The ritual is expected to perform dual functions - to propitiate and then

purify. Owing to the communal nature of the problem, an elder addresses the gathering of the villagers thus:

You know, you sharers of sorrows that we have sacrificed every kind of possession we have, and no rain has come. It is our practice to care for each other, each man for another. We pride ourselves on this; we do this to please ourselves and the moulder of the earth... One of us, it seems, must be sacrificed to appease the heavens. Let us therefore look among our families and pick a girl who is willing to be given so that her sisters may live.

The victim, according to Koech, is selected by her family for the purposes of atonement and purification.

Ritual is also used for rejuvenation. We find this practice in almost all cultures. In some communities, ritual-copulation is believed to affect agriculture. We are told by Frazer that

our rude forefathers personified the powers of vegetation as male and female, and attempted, on the principle of homeopathic or imitative magic, to quicken the growth of trees and plants by representing the marriage of the sylvan deities in the persons of a King and Queen of May... Such representation were accordingly no mere symbolic or allegorical dramas, pastoral plays designed to amuse or instruct a rustic audience. They were charms intended to make the woods grow green, the fresh grass to sprout, the corn to shoot, and the flowers to blow.⁶³

Such symbolic acts were believed to influence agriculture. We still find such practices in Africa. As reported by Bridget Owhotu in The Guardian, in Swaziland, the monarch still performs a yearly ritual of sex in full view of his chiefs in order to rejuvenate the King and thereby facilitate agriculture:

The King has four wives, two of whom are traditionally bestowed on him from two families on his coronation. His first wife, in particular, is a ceremonial one as he may not bear children by her. He meets her only once in a year, we were told, before an audience, of elders as part of the rites to rejuvenate the King at the time the produce of the harvest is to be eaten, between December and January.⁶⁴

When the King's vigour is renewed, it is believed that the land will become fertile. Also, among the Baganda, a barren woman is usually sent out of the land so that her infertility may not affect agriculture.

There is also what Arinze calls a thanksgiving ritual, which as the name implies, is performed to show appreciation to a higher force. Such a ritual may include the presentation of a goat or chicken. Arinze further records that after obtaining the 'ozo' title "the candidate performs a sacrifice to Ifejuoku to thank him for having provided the yams and other crops without which the taking of the title would have been impossible".⁶⁵

What we can infer from the foregoing example is that each community tries to bridge the gulf between it and the supernatural forces. In this connection Soyinka observes that

the Yoruba does not discard his awareness of the essential gulf that lies between one area of existence and another. This gulf is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf.⁶⁶

This is the essence of ritual imagination represented in ritual drama by characters whose perception of the world necessitates a transcendental relationship with the forces in the cosmos. This now brings us to the question of the link between ritual and drama. We shall do a general survey of the Greek experience and see whether there are parallels between the Nigerian situation and what transpired in Attica during the 5th Century.

Literary historians in the dramatic genre have contended that there is a strong link between ritual and drama, one having evolved from the other. Clark has argued that this also must have happened in Nigeria. He compares the Nigerian festivals with the Greeks', pointing out in the process elements of mimesis.

Greek society was largely ritualistic during the times of the great tragic poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. This world-view is represented in their dramas. The link is said to have been established through the worship of Dionysius the Greek god who was said to have liberated the peasants from the domination of the Olympian gods. What was significant was the cult-worship that developed around Dionysius. Hartnoll explains:

The origin of the modern theatre can be found in the dithyramb (or unison hymn) sung around the altar of Dionysius, the wine-god whose cult had spread to Greece from the Near East, by a chorus of fifty men, five from each of the ten tribes of Attica. The process of evolution from the simple act of worship must have been a slow one.⁶⁷

Dionysian worship we are told provided an outlet for pent-up emotions and grievances against their oppressors - the land owners. This spirit of freedom infected many people and those who rejected the movement were advised against doing so. Soyinka captures this spirit in The Bacchae of Euripides when he makes the Herdsman tell Pentheus the King:

Whoever this god may be
Sire, welcome him to Thebes. He is
great in other ways I hear.⁶⁸

The peasants welcome Dionysius to Thebes (Athens) and through this celebration, we are told, drama emerged.

In Greece, the festival called the 'ritual of city Dionysia' was celebrated at the end of March which was the beginning of the Spring, and lasted, according to George Thomson, for at least five days. Hartnoll recognizes three important festivals held in Greece at this time in honour of Dionysius. He says that of the three 'the Rural Dionysia' held in mid-winter which laid stress on Dionysius as the god of fertility gave theatre the leader of the chorus. Continuing, he says that the first day was marked by a procession of worshippers that took the image of Dionysius from the temple in which it had been kept throughout the year to a shrine in the outskirts of Athens. At the shrine, sacrifices were made and songs were sung in praise of the god. The celebrants were given wine and after the feast, the procession took the image back to Athens, this time to the theatre where it was placed in the middle of the orchestra. It remained there until the festival ended. The Dionysian worship became drama for entertainment.

The competitions organized in Greece were of two kinds - the dramatic competition and the dithyramb. Thomson says that the first step towards art was when the leader of the chorus imitated the god. And finally, he concludes, since there is reason to think that the leader of the chorus impersonated the god, it is plain that we have here the germ of drama. In essence therefore, drama began when mimesis was introduced, when role-playing was embarked on by the Chief Priest. We have gone into the details of the development of Greek drama, representing, as it were, what is already known, in order to make our own contribution to the development of Africans, in particular, Nigerian drama.

While some critics have argued that rituals and festivals constitute drama, others have contended that religious festivals cannot be called drama. In some cases, we notice outright bias. Take Hartnoll for instance. After concluding that Greek religious festivals constituted drama, he dismisses the Egyptian Abydos Passion play as a religious event which cannot pass for drama. However, a close look at the Passion Play reveals that it has all the features of drama, even in the Greek sense.

In his own contribution to the debate, Clark argues that the roots of Nigerian drama can be found in festivals and rituals. He says:

as the roots of European drama go back to the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionysius, so too are the origins of Nigerian drama likely to be found in the early religious and magical ceremonies and festivals of the peoples of this country. The egungun and oro of the Ibo, and the owu and oru water masquerades of the Ijaw are dramas typical of the Nigerian national repertory still generally acknowledged today.⁶⁹

Although Clark does not tell us specifically why they are drama, it is implicit in his article that it is impossible to divorce entertainment from what an outsider would consider a sacred event. Ola Rotimi contends that we can only talk of drama in ritual when there is mimesis. His argument is Aristotelian, and this school of thought is succinctly expressed by Obiechina:

ritual and myth... would first of all be shorn of their coagulating sacredness and rendered sufficiently mobile for use in a secular drama built on the destiny of differentiated, individual characters.⁷⁰

With these two conflicting views, we have what has come to be known as the evolutionist and relativist theories of the development of Nigerian drama. Our contribution to the argument is that the festivals and rituals cannot all be termed

drama since some were strictly for religious worship. However, there were and are some rituals which combined god-worship with entertainment. In such dramas, there is role-playing, combining all the elements of total theatre - singing, dancing, drumming, dialogue - to produce drama. As Osofisan has observed, ritual drama is a terminological misnomer; 'sacred' theatre would have served the purpose better. Bakary, the first writer to investigate ritual drama in Africa, summarizes the argument:

If we consider that the theatre finds its subjects mainly in folklore, that is, in an aggregate of myths, legends, traditions, stories, then we can say that a specifically Negro-African theatre has existed since the beginning of African civilization.⁷¹

The final point therefore is that drama has existed well in Africa before contact with Europe and that this theatre took its source from religious ceremonies and ritual.

In modern African drama, we have playwrights who have, as it were, returned to the form of ritual drama which our cultural heritage has bequeathed us. The drama of most of these playwrights can be said to have been shaped by ^{the} ritual imagination. Adrian Roscoe has observed that we:

... have witnessed in (these)
plays the birth of a new species
of drama, a typically African
growth taking the form of a
fusion of ritual, dance, song and
chant, the like of which the
Western stage has never seen
before.⁷²

This, generally speaking is what written African
drama has inherited from ritual. The celebration
of life which we find in Ozidi, The Strong Breed,
and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi is the product of intense
ritual imagination.

In concluding these general reflections on the
nature of rituals and ^{the} ritual imagination, we must
observe that the specific framework of references
which we find in the selected texts represents
only an aspect of the vision of the writers. We also
would like to observe that the creative process
cannot be fettered by disputations on whether
contemporary written African drama evolved from
ritual or not, or whether the oral tradition which
has, for a few decades, existed side by side with
the written is under threat of extinction. It
is instructive that the oral forms continue to
provide materials for writers of different
ideological persuasions.

It must also be noted that by the very nature
of rituals, a seed of drama is sown in all
communities where rituals are performed. Through

a gradual but definite process, ritual has provided two important ingredients for drama - action and an audience. In Yoruba and Ijaw communities which have provided background material for the dramas selected for this study, the nature of ritual has engendered the growth of a lively dramatic tradition. Their myths, legends and beliefs have informed several aspects of their socio-cultural lives. How Clark's drama has been influenced by this particular world view is the subject of the next chapter.

END NOTES - (CHAPTER ONE)

1. Wole Soyinka. Myth, Literature and the African World. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975. pp. 42-3.
2. Abiola Irele. "The African Imagination in Research in African Literatures, Ed. R. Bjornson. Vol. 21, No. 1. 1990. p.50.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. p. 66.
5. Mircea Eliade. The Sacred and the Profane: the nature of Religion. New York: Harper and Row, 1957. p. 15.
6. Elizabeth Grant. "The New Lafayette Theatre" in The Drama Review. Vol. 16. No. 4. Dec. 1972. p. 51.
7. Raymond Firth. Tikopia Ritual and Belief, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967. p. xvii.
8. Encyclopaedia Britannica. No. 17, p. 863.
9. J.W. Walter. Hamlet-The Players of Shakespeare. London: Heinemann, 1972. p. 6.
10. J. Goody. "Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem" in British Journal of Sociology. p. 159.
11. A. Graham-White. "Ritual and Drama in Africa" Educational Theatre Journal. Vol. xxii, No. 4, Dec. 1970. p. 339.
12. Jane Harrison. Themis-A Study of the social origins of Greek Religion- London: Cambridge UP, 1927. pp.36-7.
13. Jane Harrison. Mythology; London: G. Hurrays, 1914. pp. xi-xii.
14. La Fontaine Ed. Introductory essay to The Interpretation of Ritual. London: Tavistock, 1972. p. 3.
15. Encyclopaedia Britannica. No. 15. p. 864.

16. F. Akinrinsola. "Ogun Festival". Nigeria Magazine
No. 85. 1974, p. 85.
17. Wole Soyinka; Op. cit. p. 42.
18. In earliest societies, nature was believed to be beyond man's control except through ritual and sacrifices. It was also traditional to determine the cause of any deaths through the medium of the ritual. As a result, death could be traced to acts of pollution. It was customary to consult the oracle whenever things happened which did not conform to expectation. Such a belief is said to have given rise to ritual.
19. Michael Bell. Primitivism. London: Methuen; 1972. p. 43.
20. George Frazer. The Golden Bough. London: Macmillan, 1957. p. 381.
21. Z.A. Adejumo. "The Genesis of Drama and its roots in Africa", Unpublished manuscript.
22. B.A. Osofisan. "The origins of Drama in West Africa. A study of the development of drama from the traditional forms to the modern theatre in English and French". Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis. Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, 1973. p. 39.
23. Wole Soyinka. Op. Cit. See the Chapter on "The Ritual Archetype".
24. J.G. Frazer. The Golden Bough. p. 76.
25. J.G. Frazer. Quoted in "Aspects of Nigerian Drama", J.P. Clark. Drama and Theatre in Nigeria, a critical source Book. Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi, Nigeria Magazine, 1981. pp. 57-58.
26. Clark's play are set in Ijawland, in the Delta State of Nigeria. Egberike says: "Orua is the seat or origin of the Ozidi legend. The town still exists today in Ijawland, situated along the bank of one of the lower tributaries of the Niger Delta. Even at this moment of writing, Orua still maintains its legendary character.... Orua is the citadel of the traditional myths and esoteric customs of the Ijaws

from that part of the world. "J.P. Clark and Ijaw Mythology", a paper presented at the 1st Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference, 1976. Ola Rotimi straddles two cultures. His father was Yoruba and, his mother was Ijaw. As a writer, he has been able to depict different cultures in his plays. Wole Soyinka has written extensively on Yoruba world-view and this has formed the basis of his works.

27. Wole Soyinka. Op. Cit. p. 1
28. B.A. Osofisan. "Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos". Paper presented at the 1st Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference, 1976. p. 1.
29. Oyin Ogunba. "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Case Study, Indigenous Festivals". Ph.D. Dissertation. Unpub. University of Ibadan, 1967. p. 521.
30. Carl Jung. The Spirit of Man, Art and Literature. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952. pp. 80-1.
31. Ossie Enekwe. "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igbo land". Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book. Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981. p. 33.
32. Raffaele Patlazoni. "Miti e leggende" (Turin) 1948. Vol. I P.V. Quoted by G. Van Der Leeen in "Primordial Time and Final Time". Ed. Joseph Campbell Man and Time. (Bellingham Sewes xxv. 3). pp. 330-1.
33. The Yoruba myth of creation cannot be considered as factual, at least not in the sense that every aspect of the myth is true. What we can sift from it is that the world was created at a particular time. The myth attempts to account for creation of man through the Yoruba races thereby boosting the image of the race.
34. Kipng eno Koech. "African Mythology: A Key to Understanding African Religion". African Religion: a symposium. Ed. S. Booth. London: NOK, 1977. p. 34.

35. Ibid. p. 118.
36. Shakespeare's ghosts effectively established the presence of the supernatural. In the same manner, African dramatists have established link with the supernatural world in their plays through ritual. In Ozidi, for example, Oreame stands for the unchallengeable power of the supernatural.
37. Michael Bell. Primitivism. Eliot is quoted by Bell on p. 42.
38. Ibid. p. 43.
39. Rollo May. Symbolism in Religion and Literature. London: George Braziller, 1960. p. 34.
40. According to Phillip Vellacott, "Clytemnestra is the most powerful figure in The Oresteia; one of the most powerful, indeed, in all dramatic literature". (Introductory essay to the Oresteian Trilogy, p. 13).
41. Ibid. p. 26
42. Cassandra who broke her marriage promise to Apollo was punished by the god. Apollo doomed her to be always a true prophet and always disbelieved. See Introduction to the Oresteian Trilogy. p. 28.
43. Encyclopaedia Britannica, No. 17. p. 900.
44. Raymond Firth. Symbols-Public and Private. London: Allen & Unwin, 1973. pp. 15-16.
45. In The Holy Bible, abstinence of any type is considered as spiritual sacrifice.
46. Hubert H. & Mauss, M. Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1964. p. 13.
47. Gerald Moore. The Chosen Tongue. London: Green & Co. Ltd., 1969. pp. 177-8.
48. J.B. Egberike. "The Tragic Hero as a Scapegoat". Ph.D. Thesis, Department of English, University of Ibadan, 1975. p. 48.
49. Frazer. Op. Cit. p. 759.

50. R. Money-Kryle.. The Meaning of Sacrifice. London: Hogarth Press, 1965. p. 82.
51. Ibid. P. 83.
52. Frazer. Op. Cit. pp. 381-2.
53. R. Money-Kryle. Op. Cit. p. 83.
54. Myths associated with the alligator have been destroyed. It is possible that people have learnt from the experiences of others who killed the alligator without suffering any form of sanctions.
55. J.S. Kirk. Myth, Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures. London: Cambridge UP; 1970. p. 40.
56. C. Dawson. Religion and Culture. New York: Steed & Ward, 1948. p. 40.
57. F.O. Arinze. Sacrifice in Ibo Religion. Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1976. p. 101.
58. ~~Raddiffe~~-Brown. Structure and Function in Primitive Society. London: Cohen & West Ltd., 1952. p. 135.
59. Arinze. Op. Cit. p. 35.
60. Francis Fergusson comments: "The figure of Oedipus himself fulfils all the requirements of the scapegoat, the dismembered King or god-figure... **Oedipus** starts out as the hero, the triumphant human adequate to rule and ends, like Teiresias, a scapegoat, a witness and a suffers for the hidden truth of the human condition". The Idea of a Theatre. New York: Anchor Books, 1953. p. 39.
61. Frazer. Op. Cit. pp. 95-6.
62. Koech. Op. Cit. p. 118.
63. Frazer. Op. Cit. p. 421.
64. Bridget Owhotu. The Guardian. Ed. Lade Bunuola. Lagos: Guardian Newspapers, 10th July 1986, p. 8.

65. Arinze. Op. Cit. p. 43.
66. Soyinka. Op. Cit. p. 144.
67. Phyllis Hartnoll. A Concise History of the Theatre, London: Book Club Associates, 1974. p. 8.
68. Wole Soyinka: The Bacchae of Euripides. London: Methuen, 1973. pp. 61-2.
69. J.P. Clark. "Aspects of Nigerian Drama" p. 58.
70. Emmanuel Obiechina. "Literature-Traditional and Modern in the Nsukka Environment". The Nsukka Environment, Ed. G.E.K. Ofomata. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Pubs. 1978. p. 26.
71. Bakary S. Quoted in B.A. Osofisan's thesis. Op. Cit. p. 7.
72. Adrian Roscoe. Mother is Gold. London: Cambridge UP, 1971. p. 250.

CHAPTER TWO

THE [REDACTED] WORLD OF J.P. CLARK BEKEDEREMO'S DRAMA

We encounter human beings whose occupation and environment are elemental and visceral. Flood and ebb affect their daily existence, their language, their spectrum of perception.¹

The complex nature of the world presented in Clark's drama demands a coherent apprehension of the forces, mores, and cultural norms which motivate his characters. In order to delineate such a world view vividly, one needs knowledge of the playwright's background including the influences of other writers on him. Such information, would aid the researcher in explicating the selected texts. For example, in order to grasp the central motif and motivations in Ozidi, one would need to understand the metaphysics underlying Ijaw folklore.² Ikiddeh expresses this view when he opines that "Ozidi is a work steeped in 'monolithic' tradition beyond the common experience of cultural influence which all literature is affected by".³ This, to a very large extent, is a representative view on most of his plays.

In this chapter therefore, our study shall be a combination of both textual exegesis and an analysis of

some important issues arising from Ijaw society.
These issues amplify ^{the}ritual imagination which we have
examined in Chapter One.

II

RESTORATION OF HARMONY THROUGH REVENGE: A STUDY OF CLARK'S OZIDI

The dual attributes of destruction and restoration embodied in the concept of revenge is indeed a paradox, a dramatic paradox which Clark, like several other writers before him, has explored in his plays. Our sensibilities are shocked and enthralled at the same time as we witness the unfolding drama of revenge and its consequences, particularly in Ozidi, in which a single character bears the burden of restoring order in society.

In several ways, we are attracted to the character whose unpleasant responsibility it is to rise above the ordinary man and perform feats usually ascribed to men of heroic stature. He is usually an unlucky agent chosen by the god of retribution for an unpleasant and self-annihilating task in order to set the world aright. In the process of achieving the heroic, he creates a myth around himself and offends the very concept of order in society which he had set out to restore in the first place. As a result, we have a cycle of violence, almost Pyrrhic.

In the end, the dramatis personae involved in the fights experience a sense of loss and waste.

Several characters lose their lives, including innocent people. We must quickly observe that from the point of view of restoration of harmony, of ritual purification of the community, revenge tragedy cannot be said to be unnecessary. Clark's play Ozidi is written in the tradition of revenge tragedy.

The theme of revenge is a familiar one in literature. Aeschylus' Oresteian Trilogy depicts the nature of revenge and justice, as we see in the character of Orestes. In Greek society, "the dividing line is narrow between the judge and the avenger ... the dispenser of justice and the instrument of justice".⁴ Invariably, a single person combines all the attributes of the judge and the dispenser of justice, the avenger and the instrument. Such a situation endangers the concept of justice when the conflict involves a great and unassailable personage like a king. State instruments may not be enough to chastise him. Vengeance at that level may come from a higher force. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the theme of revenge that is depicted is sanctioned by the renaissance monolithic moral code: "bloodshed cries

aloud for vengeance and cannot be silenced until blood is shed in return for justice".⁵ Ironically, once blood is shed, it continues to flow, until a special instrument is introduced, sometimes through divine intervention to stop the cycle.

With this knowledge of the concept, nature and the consequences of revenge in mind, it becomes easy for us to appreciate the enormity of the task before the avenger. Whether he takes action or not, there will be calamity. Owing to the distinctive characteristics of such persons, they usually take the bold step - that of violent confrontation with the opposing force. Such characters are universally acknowledged and they are found in myths.

Several critics have commented on the similarities found in the works of Clark and some previously written literature. In a review of Clark's first three published plays, Robert Fitzgerald referred to the playwright as a man who "has learned from a variety of masters" and in whose works we can find traces of Greek theatre, Lorca and Synge.⁶ Nkem Nwankwo also expresses the view that Clark imitates Greek tragedy. In a fairly detailed contrastive study between Clark's The Raft and

Stephen Crane's short story titled The Open Boat, Frances Ademola says that influences of Crane can be found in Clark's dramatic presentation of the men caught adrift in a raft. In apparent reference to Clark's claim of coincidences between some of his works and works of other writers, Frances Ademola concludes that "the parallel between The Open Boat and The Raft cannot be attributed to mere coincidence".⁷

The question that comes to mind is the extent of external influence in Ozidi. Let us see whether we can locate the play in a typical African environment and exonerate Clark from the accusation of critics.

Another dimension to the criticism on Clark is added by Osofisan. His criticism is on the characters of Ozidi and Oreame (as) instruments of justice, and the use of the Ozidi saga to reflect the socio-political crisis of an epoch. Osofisan says:

I think Clark is limited by the same cultural obfuscations that the Negritude authors were always guilty of. They tended to see traditional society as Clark sees Ijoland: as an a-temporal, a-historical social structure, idealized, exotic and mythical, placed outside the pressures of concrete physical, phenomena.

The root of this kind of abstraction is to be traced to the familiar humanist illusion ... that is, the notion that tribal myths anticipate rather than reflect or merely record socio-political disjunctions.⁸

The first school of critics reflects the view of those who see Clark as an imitator, 'an excellent borrower' whose art is sometimes hampered by the desire to borrow. Osofisan's marxist approach to the use of source material faults Clark's exposition on the Ozidi story.

If Clark has been an 'excellent borrower' in Ozidi, he appears to be on firm grounds. There is no doubt that the source is the saga. In the Author's Note to Ozidi, Clark observes:

The play is based on the Ijaw saga of Ozidi, told in seven days to dance, music and mime, and which I have recorded on tape and filmed with a grant ⁹ from the University of Ibadan.

As regards the theme and story therefore, we can make bold to say that Clark was basically concerned with his immediate milieu, his native community from which we cannot divorce him. In a paper presented at the First Ibadan Annual Literature Conference in 1976, Egberike makes some uncomplimentary remarks about Clark's artistic approach to Ozidi. He says:

It is a play in which the poet has made very little, if any, artistic transmutation of the original material to accommodate it to the limits and demands of the stage. Although the saga is a 'performed' tale, it exerts such a strain on one's imagination that such supernatural experiences as Ofe's disappearing acts and Oreame's self-transmogrifying tricks which border on magic and miracle require a great deal of stage and verbal illusion to make them theatrically authentic and credible. A Shakespearean parallel of this kind of task is to be found in The Tempest; but in his Ozidi, Clark did not follow 'The Example of Shakespeare'.¹⁰

Although Egberike's obvious objective is to sanction Clark for inadequately utilizing material at his disposal, he accidentally establishes one point of interest. In Ozidi, we do not have cause to villify the writer for imitating any classical work.

Ozidi is found in the folklore of the Ijaw. Egberike tells us that the "Ozidi personality has come to appear for the Ezons the symbol of the hero, for he single-handed undertook a revenge against his father's murderers... The figure of Ozidi is traditionally associated with the posthumous avenger in Ezon folk sagas".¹¹ What this means is that Ozidi is an indigenous play, from the points of view of both theme and form. Olu Obafemi observes that Clark 'has always fashioned' his drama out of his Ijo

origin though elements of external influences can be found in some of his works.¹²

In the much quoted interview which he granted Lindfors and others, Clark admits the possibility of influences. However, he cautions that although the influences may be there, one must note that there are coincidences too, because we are all human beings with the same basic emotions and experiences. What the playwright implies is that as a result of some universal experiences, it is possible to create in an environment works which have similarities with other works. This explains the similarities we find between Ozidi and Hamlet for example.

The play Ozidi takes its source as earlier observed, from the Ozidi saga which Clark recorded on film in 1963, mainly from the version given to him by narrators and in situ recording in Ijo country. It is the story of a young man obliged to avenge the death of his father. His father, also called Ozidi, had been murdered by some conspirators led by Ofe the short. Against his wish and common sense, Temugedege the Idiot had been made King of Orua. This is done by the king makers to spite Ozidi and install a figure-head as king. Temugedege becomes king and no one is willing to serve him nor bring him tributes. In anger Ozidi roars:

You elected my brother king. You knew
He was soft in the head. But you
placed upon him
The supreme burden, knowing well he lacks
The pad to bear the weight.

• • •

I see, when the crown comes the way
of my family, service
Becomes crippled at once, and lions that
should be out
Prowling are purring by the fireside
like cats in
Laps of women without seed. (13)

Ozidi's vituperation provides Ofe with an excuse to plan the assassination of Ozidi the elder while hypocritically urging Orua people to go on hunting expedition to bring homage to Temugedege. The battle horn is blown and Ozidi, unsuspecting rushes from the house. In his shrine, he encounters a lizard which is enough to warn any ritual-conscious individual that there is danger. Orea his wife tells him:

No use; I have seen it already; it is
A lizard scampering out of your shrine.

Ozidi: I cannot believe it.

Orea: Well, there is the creature
Coming back; perhaps, to convince
You of the fact (20).

Ozidi is adamant like Shakespeare's Julius Caesar whose wife's dream is not enough to prevent him from going to the Capitol. Orea, whose interpretation of the lizard's presence in the shrine portends tragedy, tells Ozidi further:

But the lizard, my husband, the lizard
Ran ahead of you! And what use
Will tributes be to anybody if you trip?
(21).

At the battlefront, Ozidi is killed. When news of his death comes to Orea, she attempts to commit suicide. But a witch is sent to tell her that Oyin Tamara, the goddess of creation, has blessed Orea with a child. She says:

Do not wail more; do not seek to take
Your life. Or don't you know you are
heavy with
Another life, yes, a son whom Oyin Almighty
Herself is sending forth to put to right
This terrible wrong done to his father?
(31).

This is the first mention of revenge which will be carried out by a yet unborn son.

Ozidi the younger is born by Orea and reared by Oreame the grandmother, referred to as the 'supreme witch'. He is given charms and potions and soon he is invested with supernatural strength to take on his father's enemies. He does this successfully.

What Clark has done in the play is to select some feats attributed to Ozidi in the saga. For example, out of the ten fights and conquests attributed to Ozidi in the saga, Clark selects five. These are the fights against A'zezabife the Skeleton man, Ofe the Short, Sigrisi, Tebesonoma, and Odogu. With this selective representation, we

begin to see elements of artistic arrangement of scenes. This artistic arrangement receives commendation from Ofori Akyea who sees it as "a work which shows J.P. Clark at his artistic best as a dramatist. He evokes character and situation with skill and understanding and in doing this he uses traditional means to great effect".¹³ Akyea goes on to isolate elements of traditionalism which Clark has imaginatively used in the play and concludes that although Clark writes in the medium of English, he has been able to show that "the components of that efficient vehicle could be African traditional elements".¹⁴ This, no doubt, is based on the playwright's ability to infuse traditional elements such as song, dance, proverbs and others into the play.

The Ijaw community which Clark presents in Ozidi is one in which the day to day events such as the ebb and flow of the tide, or low and high tide, birth and death are given ritual significance. The community is a riverine one located in the water-logged areas of present day Delta and Rivers States of Nigeria. According to Egberike

Orua is the seat ... of the Ozidi legend. The town still exists today in Ijawland, situated along the bank of one of the lower tributaries of the Niger (River). Even at this moment of writing, Orua still maintains its legendary character, in spite of the social and historical changes which happen around it. Orua is the citadel of the traditional myths and esoteric customs of the Ijaws from that part of the world, and it continues to evoke these archetypal associations in the minds of the younger.¹⁵

Orua provides a perfect setting therefore for Clark who still sees in the community the extensive influence of ^{the} ritual imagination. Kalu Uka writes that "out of the mixture of rain-forest, delta jungle, riverine mangrove and water-spirits culture of Warri, Clark (Bekederemo) clearly brings a philosophy of man and his environment which informs his theatre"¹⁶. What this suggests is that Clark has never really been alienated from his home though he has spent a considerable part of his life outside the village.

In the community under reference, there is the belief in justice, controlled by the supernatural. Any abominable act which passes unnoticed by man will eventually be punished by the gods. Furthermore, such a belief is reinforced by tragic events which occur occasionally because of the 'uncertainties'

of life which dominate the environment. As a result, in one of Clark's plays, The Boat, for example, the tragic sequence is set off by an apparently insignificant incident - the struggle over a boat. In a community which depends on boats for transportation, in fact, for almost all human endeavour, the boat has added significance. It symbolizes the very meaning of existence. As a result, conflict over a boat is fundamental enough to cause tragedy.

The Ijaw believe that teme, which is the soul, determines one's fate. Teme can lead one to disaster or to glory. At the same time, the supernatural world is believed to play a great role in determining one's course in life. Fate and destiny are controlled by these unseen but powerful forces. Sometimes, characters play into the hands of fate. This usually leads to tragedy.

It is also in the traditional belief system of the Ijaw that justice must be done at all times. Justice can be obtained through vengeance, through punishment which is usually commensurate with the offence committed. Invariably, it is an eye for an eye. In this aspect, we find a parallel between the concept of justice in Ozidi, and that in Hamlet. The level of destruction unleashed in the latter is so high that one begins to question the concept of revenge. In Ozidi "Mosaic law" is fully dramatized.

According to this law, God told Moses:

And if any mischief follow,
then thou shalt give life for
life, Eye for eye, tooth for
tooth, hand for hand, foot for
foot, Burning for burning,
wound for wound, stripe for
stripe.¹⁷

This injunction was given by God to the Jews in order to ensure discipline and respect for human life. In the world of Ozidi, revenge is a means of keeping order. When the elders of the community in The Boat assemble to give the verdict on the murder charge against Biowa, Emonemua, the only sister of the two brothers is summoned to give her opinion. In her speech quoted below, she re-inforces the communal belief:

If he could kill in a quarrel my brother who was the head of our house, he would also kill me, a mere woman, when I as much as arouse his anger which will be often, as friction is most between those who are closest. That my brother's orphaned children may not suffer any hardship beside his own children, and none of us left behind live in permanent fear of this man who may fall upon any of us any day and take up the destruction he began today, I plead with you, my elders who own me that you do to him as should be done to anyone who takes life in this land.¹⁸

The verdict is death and the culprit is "buried" alive through drowning.

In Ozidi, the dead are closely linked with the living just as the people of the sea live in close proximity with those living on land. Attempts are always made to keep a harmonious relationship. In the opening lines of Ozidi, the narrator calls the attention of the audience to this belief. He asks for seven virgins to bear sacrifice to the gods:

Trouble is that, before we can perform for your pleasure and benefit tonight, we must first have a sacrifice to placate our hosts from the sea. Oh, yes, there are special spectators streaming all around you right now, even though you may not see or touch them. And the ~~seven girls~~ we ask of you, all virgins mind you, alone can bear offerings to our guests from the sea, and so establish between us a bridge.¹⁹

The world in reference is no doubt different from the one with which we are familiar in our day to day existence. The guests from the sea, water spirits, mermaids, etc, often intermingle with men during festive occasions.²⁰ In the example referred to above, the virgin girls are the vehicle of the sacrifice. The narrator emphasizes 'virginity' as a criterion for being a vehicle. It is believed that such girls are pure and easily acceptable to the supernatural world.

Clark's tragic vision derives from a society in which birth and death are interlocked and man is subject to the vagaries of supernatural phenomena. The society appears to be fatalistic, as we can deduce from Clark's plays. Redeeming moments are found in ritual. Yet, it is not a society perpetually on the 'boat of fear' and psychic disorder, as it were, cut off from the ordinary pleasures of the world. In spite of this fatalistic outlook, we see the characters enjoy the basic things of communal life such as child rearing, marriage, and ritual celebrations. While enjoying these, the characters are conscious of the influence of the 'other world'.

In discussing the Ozidi saga, Egberike observes:

We find crystallized the people's code of honour and heroism, their world views, belief and worship systems, their cosmology, their ritual, social and religious life - indeed, the whole culture of the people.²¹

A close examination of Clark's plays will reveal an ordered society in which the relationship between man and nature, between the natural and the supernatural is based on some transcendental laws.

Such is the world Ozidi finds himself in that the social, traditional, and psychological pressures on him to confront his father's enemies are re-inforced by ritual obligations. Egberike who has done an extensive study of the Ozidi saga, says in his article

"Orestes, Hamlet and Ozidi: A comparative study of the Posthumous Avenger-Archetype":

Vengeance is undertaken by the surviving son either as a demonstration of filial loyalty to his deceased father, or in defence of a personal or cultural heroic code, a family honour and name; or a funeral oblation or a purificatory rite to lay the restless ghost of the deceased to rest and cleanse the community of guilt and pollution.²²

Here, Egberike gives several reasons ^{why} the dead person should be avenged by the living. The last point about laying to rest the ghost of the deceased is pertinent to our study of revenge as a way of restoring harmony. With Ozidi lying in dishonour after the assassination, his son must perform acts worthy of restoring his father's pride. Once this is done, restoration of harmony is guaranteed. In such a community, if pressures from human beings are not sufficient to propel the hero into action, his knowledge of the consequences is enough to compel him to take up arms against his father's enemies.

As Ozidi takes on the conspirators one after the other, his heroic stature increases and the people turn out to cheer him on in his task. His first encounter is with Azezabife, the Skeleton Man. The fight takes place in the public square with supporters and friends ranged behind the fighters.

After Azezabife has been felled by Ozidi, we are given the following Stage Direction:

To the lines of his personal theme song Asaan yo yo Ozidi strikes down Azezabife. A great spontaneous cheer fills the air and the people pour into the square cheering and beside themselves with excitement (19).

Ozidi continues the fight, destroying all the enemies in the process.

Clark makes Oreame Ozidi's prop and mainstay. Ozidi confesses to the woman whom he attempts to seduce that his grandmother is 'the sea that fills his stream' (110). From this perspective, Ozidi is not responsible for his actions. He is simply an agent of a force beyond his control. The force is manifested in two ways. The first manifestation is the quantity of boiled charms thrown into the hero's bowels by Bouakarakarabiri. After asking Ozidi to open his mouth wide to receive the concoction, the Old Man tells Ozidi:

And this
Your bowels shall throw up boiling as did
The cauldrons each time
Another is thirsty enough for death!
He causes you to the pit of your belly
(47).

Any time he gets ready to fight, the boiling sound from his bowels goads him. For example, before Ozidi fights Azezabife, we are told in a Stage Direction that Oreame carries out a ritual and Ozidi 'wakes up, trembling visibly'. His horn blower calls him on the horn and

Soon there is a rush as of a
lizard, the shriek as of an eagle
hornbill and the cry as of a male
monkey, all against the background
of several huge pots boiling over
their lids. (77)

This is the 'mortar and pestle' charm which must take effect any time Ozidi fights.

The other manifestation of the force controlling Ozidi junior is Oreame's physical and supernatural presence which is usually just in time to rescue him from defeat. During the encounter with Ofe, Oreame's presence saves Ozidi (87). This also happens during Ozidi's fight with Tebesonoma. In this scene, Ozidi has been bound. Involuntarily, he calls his mother:

Ozidi: Ay, mother!

Tebesonoma: Call for her, poor suckling boy,
call for

Your mother and let's see
whether she can hear

And get you out of this

[Before he finishes his lines, there is a noise of an aeroplane coming in to land - with a surge and noise so close Tebesonoma drops his load to put his hands to ears (99).]

From this Stage Direction, it is clear that Oreame's physical presence is vital to Ozidi's revenge mission.

In a way, it can be said that the revenge is Oreame's, having plotted and schemed right from when she knows about Orea's pregnancy. The theme of revenge is referred to several times in the play.

Apart from the point made by the witch, when
Ozidi sets forth for battle, Oreame consults Oyin
Tamara:

Ay, Oyin Tamara, you who are mother
Of all mankind, moulder of earth, sky and
sea,
I beseech you, is my child in the right
In this matter?

But if it is your wish the falconers
Have long forfeited the hunt, then let
My eagle go, let him go now and pluck
out their eyes,
Pick the flesh clean off their bones
/ A clap of thunder without warning
breaks across the clear morning sky,
Hearing it, Oreame touches the ground
with her forehead and with outthrown
arms, jumps almost in one act/
There, did you hear it? She is with you.
The woman of all the world herself gives
the signal

We go forth to the fight, Ozidi (75-76).

In this speech and Stage Direction Oreame gets the
support of the goddess in Ozidi's revenge mission.
The sound of the thunder is a signal from the world
of the supernatural that the (slain) Ozidi must be
avenged. In her prayer to Oyin Tamara, Oreame also
stresses the disgraceful state in which Ozidi (elder)
is in. She then states the purpose of Ozidi's
mission:

He is a fledgling eagle flying
 for the first time
To call home his father forgotten
 in some dungpit
In the swamp, so he can take his
 seat among
The worthy dead and have served to
 him his own dish
at times of sacrifice. (75-6).

Thus, Ozidi's mission is spelt out clearly to call home his father from 'some dungpit' so that he might have his own dish served to him in times of sacrifice. As ~~earlier~~ explained, this is important in Ijaw community. This is an example of myth re-inforcing ritual; the myth that the slain Ozidi lives on in the world of the ancestors and must be served with food propels Ozidi's revenge mission.

So far, we can say that the revenge motive is hinged on three factors. The first is that until the murdered Ozidi is avenged, his spirit will continue to roam. Ozidi and Orea discuss this point:

Orea: It is for more fights you are famished, ~~yes~~
All Orua knows that, but I am not going
To let you feed fat again on such desire.
Your father is fully avenged,
And after second burial, sleeps well in
company of his peers.

Ozidi: Yes, my father sleeps well... (90)

The traditional rites of an avenging son are thus fulfilled. The father's spirit would no longer ~~rove~~.

The second point is that the family will be in dishonour, in conflict with the supernatural world.

before and all of them died in no time. An elder says:

I still think we should go easy
with electing another king.
Within the past four floods how many
have sat on the royal seat
of Orua?

Six in all, it requires
No elephant to remember: six kings in all
In that first year alone we buried
Three kings. The rest fared no better;
Each rose with the river only to fall
with it (7).

The vicious circle which the deaths of all six kings has caused is part of the dirt in the community.

The repeated occurrence of deaths is an indication of a dislocation in the society. As the conversation progresses, it becomes clear that too much blood has been shed. Ofe gives the reason why the land is in a state of turmoil:

On each mission,
What message was brought back to Orua
except that
We have enslaved too many,
Ravished too many lands? (7).

The evil wreaked on external enemies is extended to the Ozidi family. At this point, purification becomes necessary.

The third point is that vengeance itself is justice. The crime committed against the Ozidi family and the land is enormous. By killing the criminals, justice is executed.

Although Oreame serves as the main prop of the hero, she is not the central character, she is not

the protagonist. Ritual consciousness activates Ozidi to carry out his duty. Oreame is restricted by the fact that she is not a blood relation of the murdered Ozidi. Also, it is not in the tradition of the Ijaw (for) women to serve as avengers.

After the vengeance on the conspirators, there is a backlash on Ozidi. [redacted] This is the result of the polluting acts of Ozidi the avenger. In spite of the rites performed for him by Orea, he continues to suffer. He says:

for
I have only to close my eyes and
 heads of those
I have slaughtered tumble forth,
 rolling and
Hopping about my feet like huge jiggers
Screaming to suck my blood

and Orea asks him

After the purification
Rites we have done, you still have
 terrible dreams? (91)

This is a punishment for the blood he has shed in the land. Finally, Ozidi is attacked by small-pox, a disease which is meant to destroy him. Orea in her innocence treats small-pox as yaws. This angers the King of Diseases, so he leaves the land. It is significant that the actual purification of Ozidi is done by Orea, the innocent woman who has not participated in the blood bath. Oreame falls by the sword of Ozidi. She has also contributed

to pollution and so she must die. By a twist of fate, she had fortified herself against every other human being except her grandson. She cries:

Oh, what an end! What an end!
To fall by the hand of my own son here
I held up a shield for mine and myself
Against all-comers, but none for me
against him - my son, my son, (114).

Her death, as earlier observed, is one of the purificatory rites performed by Ozidi. However, by this action, Ozidi has complicated his ritual-status. He needs to be purified and the death of Oreame fulfills this. She had observed that 'by one stroke of the small-pox king, this whole place, constituting the seventh district of the city of Orua, was in one season of no rain, burnt to the ground' (57). Olu Obafemi observes:

Ozidi, his lineage, and the Orua community need cleansing. Oreame who perpetrates evil and violent excesses cannot be the source of cleansing as Okabou's narration of the saga indicates. That is why Clark allots it to Orea, the embodiment of naturalness, innocence and simplicity. She treats small pox with (sic) yaws to the anger and humiliation of the mighty small pox.²³

Orea's purification rite is one of Clark's artistic contributions to the plot of the story.

The level of destruction brought on the community questions the very idea of vengeance itself. Harmony is partially restored when we are

told that Ozidi's father now rests in peace. But violence continues. Ozidi is unable to stop his thirst for blood. Tebesonoma tells him before his death:

This is not the end, Ozidi,
This is not the end, I may die,
Unfairly killed between you and
 your witch of a mother,
But I shall be avenged (101).

Ozidi takes the hint and promptly searches for the would-be avenger. He slays the child at the prompting of Oreame. The cycle of violence has to be stopped. It is in this context that we appreciate the deed of Orea. Revenge is futile even if it serves as an instrument of justice. Izevbaye, in his article "The Poetry and Drama of J.P. Clark" has commented:

Revenge proves a sterile approach,
for it contains the germs of its own
destruction ~~since it sets~~ in motion
a terrible cycle of violence which
cannot be arrested until the
natural forces set in to restore
order after a ritual cleansing. ²⁴

Having acknowledged this point, we must bear in mind the context of our discourse which relates to the ritual imagination. Ritual imagination itself recognizes the two-edged nature of revenge. As a result, it sets up an antidote to the crisis which vengeance brings about. We have seen that restoration of harmony is not limited to the vengeful

acts of Ozidi. After he has executed justice by eliminating his enemies, another ritual is performed to cleanse him, and society returns to its natural state. In effect, therefore, restoration of harmony is at different levels.

The aspect of Ozidi as a play which needs a re-appraisal is its stageability. A question arises whether Ozidi was written for the stage where a director would be expected to harness both natural and supernatural forces in a live performance. Its challenges make Osofisan describe Clark as a writer who is "impervious to the profundity of dramatic essence".²⁵ In his own view, Nkosi dismisses Clark when he asserts that his 'works always seems to lack an organizing principle' because 'nothing gives it personal stamp; no obsession, no physical wounds, no vision of society beyond a tepid humanism', and so we are unable to derive a perspective 'from which to judge his writing'.²⁶ For the usually insightful Nkosi, this criticism appears harsh. We have examined the tragic vision of Clark both in a general sense and how it operates in Ozidi. One point we must acknowledge though is that staging Ozidi would task the imagination of the producer. It is at this

level that we can fault the artistry of Clark. However, our focus in this dissertation is on the world view which we have identified.

We shall roundoff this discussion of critical opinions about Clark's drama in this section by quoting two critics and observing how one seems to be a reply to the other. While the one says that Clarks' drama 'baffles many people' because the world appears to be different from contemporary realities, a world inhabited by a people who adhere to an (sic) heroic code apparently long forgotten and in which tradition is a law unto itself, the other opines that the drama of Clark reveals a world "with its moral certainties, its rigorous pursuit of justice, and inevitably, the severe punishment meted out for crimes which appear to us only forms of moral offences".²⁸ As we have seen, Clark has created this world from the Ijaw community where he grew up. In an interview which Clark's father granted a researcher, it was revealed that Clark spent a long time in the creeks of the Delta and that he still visits his native place in spite of his crowded schedule in Lagos (See Appendix I).

From the foregoing, it needs be emphasized that the world of Clark's drama is a reflection of a certain epoch in the life of his native place. In this

environment, revenge on behalf of the dead placates the supernatural forces in the other world, the home of the tragic spirit. This is based on the faith and belief system of the community so presented by Clark. Harmony includes being at peace within oneself, peace between an individual and the community, and peace within the community itself. Although revenge leaves destruction in its wake, it sets in process the machinery of restoring order which is very fundamental to a community that depends on nature to survive. All the characters learn the code of socio-cultural behaviour as they grow up in the society. As we shall see in the next play, ^{the} ritual imagination is not uni-dimensional because sometimes the will of an individual can be set against that of the supernatural world.

III

ARCHETYPAL STRUGGLE OF MORTAL MAN AGAINST SUPERNATURAL FORCES - A STUDY OF SONG OF A GOAT

In the first part of this chapter, we discussed Ozidi's heroic response to a ritual demand of his family and community. Ozidi is conscious of the demands of the world of the ancestors and the honour of his family. His response is indeed an embodiment of the religious and cultural obligation of his society, his immediate community and the micro-cosmos which Clark

is concerned with in his plays. However, the picture in Song of a Goat is different in terms of the protagonist's approach to the central issue in the play. The protagonist's ego and pride become major issues which affect the entire fabric of society. It is a challenge against the authority of the supernatural world.

Supernatural implies belief in another realm or reality that in one way or another is commonly associated with all forms of religion. This is different from the natural world of objective reality. Pickering makes a distinction between the natural and the supernatural:

We say of an event that is natural when it conforms to the appropriate known laws, or at least not at variance with them. When an event is at variance with them, we say it is supernatural.²⁹

Some of these principles (laws) influence man's attitude towards the seasons, towards harvest or farming. Conflict usually arises when man contradicts the laws. In this connection, A.J. Heschel states that "the problem of man is occasioned by our coming upon a conflict or contradiction between existence and expectation, between what man is and what is expected of him".³⁰

Zifa's character and the thematic pre-occupation of Song of a Goat have indeed received different forms of criticisms from when the play was first published in 1961. Adrian Roscoe describes it as a play which 'bears the mark of indecision' and 'clearly a work of low voltage'.³¹ He also sees the play as an attempt to marry some features of Clark's African heritage with those of the Western tradition which he had encountered as an undergraduate at Ibadan. The result, according to him, could have been better. Robert Fitzgerald offers a different view when he says that "Clark's plays would go well in production, especially Song of a Goat and The Masquerade, which have the form of 'little tragedy'".³² Fitzgerald fails to recognize the magnitude of the conflict in Song of a Goat; this accounts for his rather quaint expression 'little tragedy'. Domestic tragedy would have been more appropriate.

In his discourse on the ritual archetype, Soyinka refers to the post-production reviews of Song of a Goat in London when he states that the art critic, speaking for the audience, did not think impotence was serious enough to deserve tragic focus. This is because, in English society, a cure had been found for impotence.³³ But it is clear that the critic failed to appreciate ^{the} ritual imagination

which governs the characters' actions in the play.

Other critics have examined the underlying vision of Clark's dramaturgy, as pointed out earlier. Frances Ademola raises questions about the relationship between the text and African history as if all art must be located within historical context. She says that "there is no historical content or remembered legend, and no contemporary satire".³⁴ This critic does not see the relevance of the play to any period of African history. Strangely, in the same article, she offers what we consider a penetrating analysis of the world presented in Clark's drama:

man's predicament lies in the conflict between his own nature and established order; tragedy is the result of dishonour, shame, betrayal of kinsmen, cowardice, and a brooding, vengeful cure that propels men to inescapable doom.³⁵

One wonders if a world in which a 'man's predicament lies in the conflict between his own nature and established order' does not reflect the socio-political crisis of our time. Every writer has the liberty to choose his source material, be it historical, mythical, fictional or topical, so long as his artistic temperament and social commitments are well articulated through the chosen medium. He may decide to appropriate a mythical past or ritual in order to make statements on current events.

Eldred Jones has observed that

the contemporary writer in Africa is primarily concerned with the African present; but in getting to grips with it, he - like every social being around him - is heavily dependent on his past³⁶.

Song of a Goat may not be 'history' accurately recorded. But it does represent the ritual consciousness of a cultural group.

The title of the play has been linked with the meaning of tragedy, which literary historians have contended derives from 'goat-song' or tragos "believed to be closely associated with Dionysius, especially since a goat was also the prize won by the third-ranking poet".³⁷ If this is true, it shows how close Clark has been to Greek sources. Our study has shown that the framework of experience so depicted in Song of a Goat bears testimony to the central argument of this thesis.

In her study of tragic themes in a Nigerian ritual drama, Sofola identifies the causes of tragedy in the milieu depicted in her study. These causes of tragedy can also be found in other societies in Africa. What we shall attempt to do is find the relevance of these impelling forces to the tragedy of Zifa. Sofola contends that tragedy arises when there is an introduction of new items into one's book of destiny while still here on earth. This point suggests that one's

destiny can be manipulated by man or other forces. Sofola gives two other points which are not directly relevant to our study. She says that tragedy occurs when 'the incarnation of Uke (the devil) enters an individual' or when there is 'disorganization of the individual's destiny with evil charms'. The final point made is that tragedy can result from a 'stubborn assertion of an individual will against the common good'.

In the character of Zifa, we find that ^{the} first and last points combine to give the tragic focus. A 'new item' is introduced into Zifa's destiny, because he 'recalls' his father in haste. The item is negative - impotence. Zifa's plight is made worse by the fact that he has one child already, and in Ijawland, "it is a common-place saying among them, inspired by the uncertainty of human existence, that he who has one child has none".³⁸ The stage for tragedy is set when the protagonist asserts his stubborn will against the common good. Zifa knows that it is unhealthy to remain impotent and that to save the situation, a drastic action would have to be taken. This he refuses to do. So, a stubborn personal will combined with the introduction of a new item in Zifa's destiny brings about his fall. It should be noted that impotence itself is not considered

a tragedy in the community. This is because, the community has prescribed ways of getting around the problem. What makes Zifa an anomaly is the manner in which he reacts to his predicament.

Ebiere's encounter with the Masseur brings to light what for 'three floods' had been a secret. The discussion of such a sensitive matter is couched in loaded imagery, with reference to body parts as a 'room', 'house', 'door' etc. After interviewing Ebiere, it dawns on the Masseur that she is not the one with a problem. Contrary to Adrian Roscoe's opinion, the Masseur is not a 'confessor', though things might be revealed to him in the course of treatment.³⁹ The truth of the situation is forced out of Ebiere by the experienced Masseur. He first puts the matter across in the form of a question:

Well, he is not crippled in any way?
So you turn your face to the wall.
That is the sign of death ^{my}
daughter.⁴⁰

This conversation does not reveal any 'sinner-confessor' relationship.

True, the Masseur is a healer and a visioner of some sort. In the riverine area of the Delta State of Nigeria, there are men and women who are 'experts' in massaging women, either before or

during pregnancy. In Urhobo language, they are called 'Urelee', literally 'one who rubs'⁴¹. Some are so efficient and clair-voyant that they can predict the sex of an expected baby. When Ebiere opens up to the Masseur, it is out of frustration, and in consonance with convention.

The suggestion that Tonye can procreate through Ebiere in order to cover Zifa's impotence initially offends Ebiere. The Masseur understands the society and makes a suggestion which can keep the family together:

If both families
Cherish each other so much, a
good proposition
Would be for your husband to make.
you over
To another in his family.
I know
Such a prospect did not open out
to you
It is understandable
Afterall you are just stepping out
On the morning dew of life with mist
all prostrate
On the ground before you.
 He should make
you over
To his younger brother. That'll be
a retying
Of knots, not a breaking or loosening
of them.

Ebierre replies

That will be an act of death
It is what the dead forbid you speak of
(5).

Attention should be paid to Ebriere's reasons for rejecting the Masseur's advice. Her statement to

the effect that 'the dead forbid' the act shows that she is conscious of ^{the} ritual imagination. She believes that it would be a taboo for sexual union to take place ~~between~~ her and Tonye. But the Masseur suggests a way out, the way of ritual which is meant to give support to the action. After attributing her refusal to ignorance, he tells Ebriere:

Blood of goat
So large a cowrie may pass thro'
its nose
*A big gourd of palmwine and three
heads of kolanut split before the
dead of the land, and the deed is
done (5).

We had earlier on identified the need for purification as one of the functions of ritual. In the Masseur's suggestion, we find the idea of purifying or cleansing human ~~beings~~ for acts which otherwise would be sacrilegious. The dead of the land would be placated and harmony will be guaranteed through the correct ritual. This is the view of the Masseur.

Although Ebriere refuses the advice, the seed is sown in her mind already. She is desperate and at the same time tormented by lust. As a result, she breaks a ritual rule and contradicts the very essence of her community. When later she goads Tonye into having sex with her, it is as if she had bottled up ~~her~~ emotions for too long. Soyinka*

Recalling the dead as observed in the first part of this chapter is important in Ijaw world view. It is of great significance that the ritual should be performed at the right time. Although Zifa knows this, he does contrary to it. The Masseur tells him:

You did what every
Dutiful son would do when you brought
Him back home among his people
It may have been a little bit early
For one who died of the white ~~faint~~ (10)

The white taint is leprosy. Among the Ijaw, anyone who dies childless is denied burial. Ebiere tells Tonye that custom dictates those who died childless are usually cast off the company of the fruitful whose grace is interment in the township. Apart from childlessness, a dreadful disease such as leprosy can earn one burial in the bush. Talbot observes that "besides those who died in the forbidden month, it was ordained by natural law that the bodies of lepers and of men who suffered from elephantiasis might never be buried, but thrown into the bush".⁴³ Zifa's father had died of leprosy and for "recalling" him in haste, he is punished with impotence. Zifa refuses to accept the curse in spite of the proclamations of medicine-men. Although, he has been to 'all experts between swamp and sand', the advice had been that he should

accept his fate. But, he says:

What I want is
A way out, a way to lead me
Out of this burnt patch of
earth (10).

Here lies the germ of Zifa's conflict with supernatural forces - this refusal to accept the punishment and determination to lift the curse.

The name Zifa means 'barren woman'⁴⁴.

It is significant that Clark gives this name to the central character as a reflection of Zifa's destiny. In communities where ^{the}ritual imagination is dominant, such names are not given or taken without reasons.

In the play, Zifa, is individualistic, having had contact with foreign ships. This also contributes to his tragedy. Ogunba says that "part of the meaning of the incident is to be found in the complexity introduced by modernism itself, which is gradually making people and individuals important"⁴⁵. Zifa therefore is not concerned about communal health which ^{the}ritual imagination thrives on. In Zifa's community, the welfare of an individual affects the health of others. It is for this reason Soyinka comments that:

The interaction of man and nature pervasively rendered in the play demands a drastic redress of these abnormal circumstances, and it is a demand which cannot be pushed aside by the pride of one man... Thus the death of an individual is not seen as an isolated incident in the life of one man. Nor is individual fertility separable from the regenerative promise of earth and

sea. The sickness of one individual
is a sign of, or may portend the
sickness of the world around him.⁴⁶

This precisely sums up the world of Zifa.

At two levels therefore, we see Zifa
challenge forces held sacred by members of his
community. The first is that of "recalling" the
dead at the wrong time. The second is when his
impotence threatens the community, and his pride
ruins his family. When Zifa realizes the gravity
of the situation, it is too late:

My house, it has collapsed
In season that is calm to others..
My fathers built it before my time
That my children and theirs to come
May find a roof above their heads.
And now what have I done with it?
In my hands it falls into a state
Of disrepair (40-1).

It is not only Zifa who is affected. The family
according to him, is destroyed. However, the
community will become a better place after
purification.

Zifa's refusal to accept his fate, and his
determination to challenge forces greater than he
is, can be compared with the actions of archetypal
characters in the cosmic history of man. The
archetype, according to Jung, is that which
constantly recurs in the 'course of history and
appears wherever fantasy is freely expressed'.⁴⁷

In the Holy Bible, Lucifer is the archetype of a rebel against a superior Deity. His fall from grace is said to have led to man's myriad of problems.

The ritual imagination which governs the citizens of Deinogbo regulates personal behaviour in times of crisis and peculiar problems. It is in this context that the Masseur suggests passing on Ebriere secretly to Tonye. This is acceptable in some African societies. Akyea observes that

In the traditional Nigerian family, the housewife is a potential wife of all mature male relatives of her husband. For if her husband dies, she is passed on to one of these relatives who must be younger than the deceased. It is for this reason that these relatives call the woman 'wife' or 'our wife'. In Nigeria, sexual impotence is a humiliating social problem and what the Masseur suggests to Zifa still remains the only arrangement available to traditional people who suffer from the illness. It is a pragmatic suggestion which, on the one hand guarantees the continuity of procreation in the family of the afflicted, and on the other, covers up his shame, since the arrangement within the family must be kept secret.⁴⁸

The reason for secrecy is clear. An impotent man is likely to become an object of ridicule once his illness becomes public. Also, the children fathered by the brother may be taunted by playmates.

When Orukorere first cries aloud about danger lurking in the background, she uses the images of a crying goat and a leopard. She is not taken seriously because everyone believes that she has taken too much alcohol. As the conversation between neighbours reveals, there is a curse on her for resisting a supernatural demand:

Second Neighbour: And to think she was one time
The sweetest maid in all the creeks

Third Neighbour: She will have no man for husband.
Why, young men came from all over the
land

To ask her hand of her father.

Second Neighbour: They all got it from him,
Doubt that. He would as easy kill
inside the
Clan as outside it.

First Neighbour: Remember how the people of the
sea
Chose her for their handmaiden

Second Neighbour: Sure, but then she was so
proud she would
Not listen to what the oracle said

Third Neighbour: As a result, they have put
this spell on
Her. But although she has this
double vision
Nobody believes a word she says, even
Outside of the gourd.

The punishment on Orukorere for disregarding the instruction of the people of the area is that although she has the gift of prophecy, no one ever believes her. Her punishment is similar to that which befalls Cassandra in Agamemnon who, Vellacott

says, was given the power of prophesying by Apollo after "she had promised to return his love. When she broke her promise, Apollo in anger doomed her to be always a true prophet and always disbelieved".⁴⁹ It is for this reason Cassandra is not believed when she forsees Agamemnon's death.

To return to the character of Orukorere and her contribution to an understanding of the ritual imagination in Song of a Goat, we must observe that her images are indeed striking. The family is worried about her drunken state, yet nothing concrete can be done to help her. After Tonye and Ebieri get entangled in sex, she tells the bewildered boy, Dede:?

Why, boy, these are no leopard and
goat
Interlocked between life and death, but
Two dogs at play.

and later she adds:

Only the gods and the dead may
separate
Them now, child, And what is your
poor father
To do should he hear that the liana
has
Entwined his tree of life? I said
there was
A serpent in the house but nobody
as usual
Will take me seriously. Yet the hiss
of the creature
Was up among the eaves, down under the
Stool (28).

Her switch from one image to another without warning gives the impression of instability, though this in no way affects the profundity and consistency of her vision. Although she had earlier on cried out against the 'leopard and goat' in the house, she now says that Tonye and Ebieren are no leopard and goat. Rather they are 'two dogs at play! Two dogs at play suggests bestiality and it is Orukorere's way of showing disgust for the ill-fated action.

Our discussion so far has revealed that Orukorere and her late father share responsibility for the curse on the family. In his explanation of the role of Orukorere and her father, Ashaolu says that

Orukorere's arrogance and her father's tendency towards violence as the Neighbours reveal, would normally constitute a disturbance in the natural order of things in Deinogbo community, particularly when such hubristic behaviours have denied the people of the sea of their chosen handmaiden.⁵⁰

All the actions of the characters referred to above contradict the spirit of ritual.

Let us now return to the character of Zifa and the revelatory ritual which he embarks on in the guise of purifying the family. When Zifa suspects the incestuous relationship between Tonye and Ebieren, he prepares a live goat for sacrifice, giving his aunt the impression that the sacrifice

is meant to cleanse the family. In fact, he makes a categorical statement on the purpose of the ritual:

you
Said I should make sacrifice to
the gods.
These past several years we have
none of us
Followed your word. Being the elder,
I agree, I am to blame for this
But now
I obey you and will make instant
Sacrifice to the gods (36).

As it turns out, the exercise is meant to expose Tonye and Ebiere. Just as it is impossible for Tonye to force the head of a goat into a pot without breaking it, so is it impossible for him to sleep with Ebiere without facing the consequences.

At this point, it is pertinent to reiterate that Zifa's struggle against the supernatural is due to a personal desire to conceal his deficiency. He is not the heroic man who does battle against an unjust supernatural order.

The relationship between Zifa and Ebriere, bound by marital obligations, is similar to the relationship between Zifa and his community. As long as one partner recognizes the complementarity of the two, there will be progress. No individual can successfully isolate himself from the cultural currents of his community in the world of Clark's drama. Tonye's usurpation of his brother's role, is a moral offence and, no doubt, society provides sanctions against such offenders. Tonye commits

suicide when his crime is uncovered. He does this perhaps in shame, remorse and fear that Zifa would kill him. In all circumstances, he recognizes his offence. The suggestion therefore is that Zifa acts in haste, and in an individualistic manner which deprives the society of the opportunity to punish Tonye. By a twist of fate, Zifa becomes the man who brings doom to his family.

The intensity of the tragic focus is embodied in the matrix of cultural beliefs which attach a quasi-religious importance to child-bearing and man's fertility. A man's name can only continue to be known if he has children, if he maintains harmony with all the forces around him. By standing against the wish of the supernatural world, Zifa sets the ground for tragedy.

From the foregoing discussion, we may summarize the central idea in the two plays which we have examined. We have said the world in Clark's drama is governed by a ritual consciousness which attaches sacrality to all actions. While Ozidi maintains touch with the realities of this world, Zifa loses touch with it. In such a world, "life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent; in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos.

Once contact with the transcendent is lost, existence in the world ceases to be possible.⁵¹ Clark's close contact with his birth place as revealed by his father, shows that he studied his community and used same as source material for creating universal themes (Appendix I). These themes have provided Clark with an audience that is at once critical and appreciative of ^{the} ritual imagination. In this effort, Clark is not alone. Some writers have transplanted Greek stories and myths to a new socio-cultural milieu. This has been made possible by certain similarities to be found in the ritual-dominated society of 5th Century Greece and the Yoruba community presented in the works of Ola Rotimi, which is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE DRAMA OF OLA ROTIMI

I

ARCHETYPAL STRUGGLE AGAINST FATE AND DESTINY - A STUDY OF THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

the

In our discussion of the ritual imagination, we contended that ritual is employed as a vehicle for resolving conflicts both in drama and in real life. We also averred that such conflicts can be found in man's archetypal struggle against fate and destiny, against the will of supernatural forces as demonstrated in Chapter Two of this dissertation. In this section of Chapter Three, we shall examine Odewale's spirited attempt to escape his fate, prophesied just after his birth, and how this results in tragedy.

The microcosmos presented in The Gods Are Not to Blame¹ the thrives on the ritual imagination. In Kutuje where the play is set, it is customary for the parents of a newly-born baby to consult a Babalawo in order to ascertain the destiny of the child. In Yoruba custom, it is believed that through the appropriate ritual, fate can be altered, particularly fate which is referred to as 'A-kunle-yam', which means 'that-which-is-chosen-kneeling'². One fundamental issue which arises

therefore is why Odewale's fate is not altered by any ritual. We shall address this issue in the course of our discussion.

The Gods is Ola Rotimi's version of Sophocles' masterpiece, Oedipus Rex, adapted for an African setting. This adaptation has been facilitated by some similarities which exist between Yoruba and Greek societies. Such similarities are found in the areas of belief in a pantheon, in predestination, in myths, and in divine punishment or retribution. In fact, all of these can be summarized by our definition of ^{the}ritual imagination. In the drama-world presented in Oedipus Rex and The Gods, there is the belief in the link between man and the supernatural, and the need to maintain harmony between sacred and profane forces.

Michael Etherton discusses certain changes which are usually found in adaptations 'made in order to point to its relevance in the playwright's own society'. He identifies five types of changes which are summarized here. In the first type, the names of people, places and titles may be changed as in The Gods. In the second type, the period or the setting may be changed as we have

in 'the Osogbo Everyman where the late medieval European town of the mid-fifteenth century becomes a Yoruba town in the 1960's. In the third type, the framework, or context may be changed. An example is The Island (Fugard) in which Antigone 'becomes a play done by two political prisoners'. The fourth type of adaptation is that in which the story may be changed. An example is Soyinka's The Bacchae of Euripides in which the ¹¹~~nobel~~ laureate introduces the slave ~~leader~~ as an important character. The fifth type is when the theme is changed.³

Rotimi's The Gods is a combination of the first type of adaptation referred to above, and, to some extent, the last type. Odewale is the central character of the play, the equivalent of Oedipus, who struggles to alter his fate. Ola Rotimi exploits the dramatic irony in Oedipus Rex and uses it to sustain the story line in The Gods.

Rotimi's play starts with a prologue and tells us of how a son is born to King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola of Kutuje. The Ifa Priest divines that the boy will kill his father and marry his mother. Naturally, the parents fear the occurrence

of such a dreadful incident). The King and Queen decide to throw the baby into the bush where he may die as sacrifice. A messenger is given the task of disposing of the child. However, fate takes over the rest of the story. The messenger, moved with compassion for the child, hands him over to a hunter who rears the ill-fated child as his own. Odewale naturally and logically assumes that the hunter, Ogundele and his wife Mobike, are his parents, until somebody tells him that he is a butterfly calling himself a bird'. When he confronts his 'parents', he does not get a satisfactory answer. He then consults the oracle which further complicates his situation by playing dumb on some aspects of Odewale's fate. Although the oracle tells Odewale that he will kill his father and marry his mother, it fails to tell him that the hunter Ogundele is not his real father. In order to avert this curse, Odewale flees the home of his foster parents. Being a doomed man, he fulfils the curse on himself when he ignorantly murders his real father during one of his wanderings'. His wanderings also take him to Kutuje where the throne is vacant.

Odewale rouses the spirit of the people to great heights, so much so that they are able to defeat their enemies from Ikolu. In appreciation,

Odewale is made King. He follows tradition by marrying the widowed queen.

Life continues 'normally,'⁴ for a considerable period of time until a plague strikes the land. The oracle reveals that the land has been polluted by the deeds of a murderer whose name is not mentioned. Odewale swears to expose the murderer. Events later reveal him as the accursed murderer. His offence is dual. The first is patricide, while the second is an incestuous relationship, which is evil and has polluting effects. In reaction, he gorges out his own eyes and goes on self exile saying:

Let no one stop us and let no one
come with us or I shall curse him...
When
The wood-insect
Gathers sticks,
On its own head it
Carries
Them. The Gods, 72.

Since this play was premiered in 1968 in Ile-Ife town, it has received considerable attention from drama producers. This attention no doubt has been won by the playwright's handling of the story and the use of language. Dathorne observes that

Use is made of proverbial and of Yoruba daily life and customs. Throughout the play one feels that this is not a mere attempt at re-writing the Oedipus legend in Yoruba terms but a very successful recreation. The Gods Are not to Blame is the best of Rotimi's plays⁵.

In his own view, Ilori describes The Gods as 'Rotimi's most-acclaimed play to date'.⁶

Another critic has said that the play has proved to be one of the most successful modern plays in performance since its first production by the Ori Olokun Cultural Centre in Ile-Ife.⁷ The fate of Odewale and the artistic representation of the legend with all the accoutrements of dance, music and song, never fail to captivate the audience.⁸ In this regard commenting on a production of one of the plays of Rotimi's, Uwatt says that "the audience at times, became so emotionally involved in the overall suffusion of music that it became impossible to separate the audience from the actors".⁹

Our first encounter with the concept of fate in the play is when the child is born to the king. The Priest is cocksure when he says: "This boy, he will kill his father and marry his mother"(3). Although it is the boy's fate, it is a cursed one which must not be allowed to take its course and bring disaster on the human community. The Narrator

says: 'the bad future must not happen: This suggests that the people believe that what has been destined can be averted. The baby is adorned with sacrificial ornaments. We are told by the Narrator that the Priest of Ogun "ties boy's feet with a string of cowries meaning sacrifice to the gods who have sent boy down to this earth" (3). This also, is the first fight against fate. The parents attempt to thwart the prophecy by sending the baby as an offering both in order to save the child from taboo and to save them from suffering disgrace in the hands of their own child. Kutuje, the imaginary world in The Gods, therefore believe that fate can be known from birth and if it is going to be positive, there is joy. But if the contrary is the case, certain rituals are performed. We may also observe that once Odewale gains consciousness of his environment, the fight to influence his destiny commences.

The audience is appalled as the play progresses through the strong force of fatalism which pulls Odewale towards his destiny. The ruthless force behind his actions to avert disaster overwhelms one with dread and raises the question whether man has any say in the drama of his life. It reminds one of Shakespeare's line in King Lear

where he opines that the gods ~~kill~~ us for sport.

The playwright maintains the irony which runsthrough the play, using the prologue to implant certain information in our memory.

When the first Act opens, the two heinous crimes have been committed already. The King's mission, like Oedipus', is to discover himself, to rid himself of the ignorance which has governed his life. It is also a period in which he must pay for his sins.

Through the flashback technique, we are given a graphic presentation of how Odewale murdered his father. The action is presented at such a point in the play that it heightens our pity for him. It is during the visit of Alaka, the witty, Ijekun countryman who brings the news of the death of one of the 'parents' of Odewale that the truth begins to unfold. There is tension in the air, the king having accused his chiefs of treacherous cons~~piracy~~piracy. Odewale himself is in the heat of anger, smarting from Baba Fakunle's jibes at him. When Baba Fakunle speaks, he calls Odewale the 'accursed murderer'. The queen is worried. Alaka comes in with his slow and deliberate ways. After re-living their moments of childhood friendship, Odewale tells Alaka that

he once slew a man. At this point, there is a flashback and we come face to face with Odewale killing his father, sinking into the abyss of destruction dug for him by the gods. What strikes one is the ignorance, the painful irony that the 'tribe' for which he kills is not really his. Added to this is the feeling of the grim inevitability of fate which controls all his actions.

The conflict between him and his father is over a piece of land, a farm. After he fled from the home of his supposed parents, he set up a farm at a place "where three footpaths meet". He encountered a man whose servants called him a thief. According to Odewale, the final provocation was when the old man insulted his tribe. He tells us:

That is the end. I can bear insults to myself, brother, but to call my tribe bush, and then summon riff raff to ~~moch my mother tongue. I will die first-(46).~~

We see the hands of fate goading a man to doom in spite of spirited attempts to avoid what obviously is a disastrous act. By killing his father, he fulfils his destiny. Later, when the mystery

is revealed, his speech shows that he is indeed a doomed man, a man whose very fight against fate leads to the fulfilment of that fate. He says:

I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man laughed, and laughing, he called me a 'man from the bush tribe of Ijekun. And I lost my reason. Now I find out that that very man was my... own father, the king who ruled this land before me (71).

He is driven to fulfil his destiny as a result of the love for his tribe. In an interview which Ola Rotimi granted DEM SAY he identified the tragic flaw of Odewale as tribalism. He said:

We should, therefore, stop seeking scapegoats for our own faults. This theme is illustrated in the play which holds tribal distrust as the hero's major tragic flaw. Here is a man who feels uneasy because he has been made king of a community he does not consider his own, ethnically. This realization and sense of insecurity drive him to excesses.¹⁰

Although it is impossible to sustain this argument with available evidence in the text, we have quoted this paragraph to highlight what significance the playwright attaches to the issue

of tribalism in creating the character of Odewale.

Odewale says that we should not blame the gods for his tragic fall. However, close textual analysis makes it impossible not to blame the gods. By leaving Odewale in the dark, in a condition of ignorance and for making a self-fulfilling prophecy, the gods put themselves in a situation of blame. Etherton observes that

The gods are indeed the cause of Odewale's downfall, for his particular crimes would not have been committed if there had been no prophecy. He would have grown up in his family, hot-tempered perhaps, but there is nothing in his character to suggest that he would ever commit patricide and incest.¹¹

This is one of the problems we have with Rotimi's adaptation. He shifts the blame from the gods to Odewale, yet there is every indication that any rational being would fight against what obviously is 'bad' destiny.

While Odewale attempts to avert his fate, the gods appear as callous beings, committed to the destruction of the hero. For example, when a man referred to him as a 'butterfly calling himself a bird', he went to the oracle to inquire about himself. It is a question of identity of

his place in the world so that he can chart a course for himself. He runs into a wall of stone. Odewale recalls his encounter with an Ifa Priest:

Odewale: I went to a priest of Ife. I asked him. Am I not who I am?

Voice: You have a curse on you, son?

Odewale: What kind of curse? Old one?

Voice: You cannot run away from it, the gods have willed that you will kill your father, and then marry your mother.

Odewale: Me! Kill my own father and marry my own mother?

Voice: "It has been willed"

Odewale: What must I do then not to carry out this will of the gods

Voice: Nothing. To run away would be foolish. The snail may try, but it cannot cast off its shell, Just stay where you are ... stay where you are ... (60).

This dialogue reveals three things to Odewale. The original prophecy about patricide and incest is revealed to him. The second point which becomes clear to him is that his fate is willed. It also becomes clear that the oracle does not want him to run from his fate. This contradicts logic and reason. If he stayed put, he certainly would murder his father; if he escaped from the land, he would disobey the oracle. Caught in this fatalistic prophecy, Odewale decides not to

stay in the land and commit a tabooed act. He is a vigorous and dynamic person. This informs all his actions. In the Prologue, when he comes to stir the people of Kutuje to action, he tells them

'Get up, Get up' I said
to them 'not to do something
is to be crippled fast (6).

He is told that to do something is to suffer. His dilemma heightens the conflict which had been introduced just after his birth. He becomes impotent and helpless. Grossvogel observes that

The tragic nature of man derives from the fact that his absolute vision is tied to an impotent expression. That vision frustrates the visionary who is grounded forever and forever doomed to hope for more than he can attain, to see more than he can grasp, to feel more than he can explain, to fear more than he can control. Until the vision is cancelled out at last without ever having been achieved, the finite part of man pursues it in vain along an exasperating and vicious circle. 12

Odewale's search is a reflection of this tragic nature of man. At the end of it all, we realize that he has been caught in a fatal web.

The second part of the prophecy is fulfilled when he marries his mother. He proudly tells the audience:

For eleven years now
I, Odewale the son of Ogundele
have ruled Kutuje
and have taken for wife
as custom wishes
Ojuola, the motherly Queen
of the former king
Adetusa.
She is bearer
of all my four seeds (7-8).

This is an incestuous act which offends the spiritual ethos of the community. Odewale lives in this state for eleven years before the effects of his abominable deeds catch up with him. During this period, although unknown to the 'ordinary eye', Odewale is taboo. His deeds have ruptured the harmonious relationship between him and the supernatural forces, between the community and the world of the ancestors. The land would need purification.

Odewale goes about confidently performing his state and marital duties unaware of the terrible fate ahead of him. His sins have polluted the community. His punishment therefore is like that of a scapegoat. Francis Fergusson comments on Oedipus,¹² and his comment can be applied to the character of Odewale:

The figure of Oedipus himself fulfils all the requirements of the scapegoat, the dismembered king or god-figure ... Oedipus starts out as the hero, the triumphant human, adequate to rule, and ends, like Teiresias, a scapegoat, a witness and a sufferer for the hidden truth of the human condition.¹³

As King, Odewale is an embodiment of the collective spirit. As a result, whatever he does or fails to do has consequences for the community. He is the highest person in the land, close to the divinities, the deities and apotheosized heroes. Whenever he asserts his will against that of the people and the gods, he violates the moral order. In Greek tragedy, according to Wimsatt and Brooks, tragedy is not created by the flaw in the hero's character. Rather it is sent him by the gods as a punishment for having such a flaw.¹⁴ Rotimi developed his story line after the Greek's and we find Odewale being firmly manipulated by the gods. Rotimi creates a flaw in the character of Odewale and this the gods exploit. Having offended the ritual rule of his society, Odewale undergoes purificatory rites. The first step towards purification is 'discovery'. This refers to how he discovers the state of ritual pollution which he had been in. Ojuola commits suicide. Odewale gorges out his eyes and goes into exile. These actions are symbolic of purification. When Oedipus gorges out his eyes, he explains that he cannot face his parents with his eyes open. He also explains that his eyes have not been able to redeem him from ignorance. As a result, he does not need the eyes. Odewale

takes his four children with him into exile,
perhaps signifying that all the characters
touched by pollution have left the land.

The tension introduced by Alaka's casual
denigration of Odewale's parentage is one of the
most dramatic moments of the ritual drama. Alaka
is 'the old man who brings the supposedly good
news of the death of Odewale's 'Parents' to him,
and unwittingly reveals the horrific truth'. He
is 'half clown, half philosopher', a man of rural
wisdom, who reveals the true nature of the king's
parenthood through a performance that is tantaliz-
ingly slow.¹⁵ There is shock and silence when
Alaka says:

The hunter Ogundele and
his wife Mobike - you think
they gave you life? Anyway
let's not bring that up now (61).

After a brief interrogation, Odewale pounces on
the man and yells at him:

You ... must you shame me, too?
You an Iṣekun man like me.
Stand back everybody! Tribesman,
must you shame me in front of
strangers? (61-2).

This tension, loaded with irony builds up till
the dramatic question by Odewale:

I said who gave me birth?
and the Ogun Priest answers:

She. The woman who has just gone into the bedroom. Bearer of your children. She is your ... mother (68).

The impact of this revelation is shattering. Odewale is stabbed by the revelation that he had fulfilled what he tried to avoid all his life. The belief in rules governing taboos also affects Odewale's response to the news that he has fathered children by his mother.

According to Bolaaji Idowu, among the Yoruba it is believed that a person obtains his destiny from Olodumare in one of three ways. He says that the Yoruba "have a trimorphous conception of destiny, the sustaining motif of which is that the person who is coming into the world must kneel before the High Authority who is Olodumare for its conferment".¹⁶ The first way is called 'A-kunle-yan', which, literally translated means 'That-which-is-chosen-kneeling'. The second known as 'A-kunle-gba' means 'That-which-is received-kneeling'. The third is 'ayanmo', which means 'That-which-is-affixed-to-one'. Although it is generally believed that destiny is brought from heaven, the Yoruba also believe that with the aid of ritual and sacrifice, a bad destiny can be altered. In Etherton's view, the recurring idea that fate is irreversible in

The Gods 'creates the first major problem of Rotimi's play'. This idea of the immutability of fate found in Oedipus Rex is possible in a society where the capricious gods control fate and destiny arbitrarily. The Yoruba world view is different. The gods can be pacified through the appropriate placatory ritual. Etherton presents the dilemma of the playwright:

Rotimi finds himself trapped both within the story and within the Greek moral order; if the gods or 'fate', are to blame and not Odewale, then the Yoruba milieu of the play disintegrates. If, on the other hand, Odewale's hot temper and, as he says, tribalism, is to blame and not the Gods (sic) then the story of the prophecy has no rationale.¹⁷

Z.A. Adejumo lends credence to the view that among the Yoruba, fate is not irreversible:

It is against this background of an uncertain universe where 'life is a shadow of smoke and man a dream' that Sophocles depicted his Oedipus.

But this world view is almost an anti thesis of Nigeria's traditional world view. The gods are believed to be just, loving and appeasable when angry, and both christian and moslem religious views tend to agree with this. Through divination and the worship of ancestors, the traditional Nigerian can always see ahead into his future and avoid pitfalls. He believes in fate and also in the means of making it placable. So Ola Rotimi's

transposition of Oedipus has not taken note of the crux of this Nigerian world view. The play is an exercise in uncritical creative imagination which has given rise to a serious contradiction.¹⁸

The contradiction referred to in this passage underscores the significance of ^{the}ritual imagination in Yoruba society to which Rotimi transposes the Oedipean story. It would seem that in a bid to adapt the story to an African setting, the playwright lost sight of the fact that the words of deities are not final. Ritual is a tool which can alter the words of deities.

The issue of the playwright's failure to incorporate this essential Yoruba world view in his play does not invalidate our assertion that the playwright is conscious of ^{the}ritual imagination in The Gods. Apart from the reference to Odewale as a sacrificial victim, there is also the ritual cleansing which Odewale carries out after polluting the community. His action is typical of man's early struggle against the prison of doom to which man had been sentenced by supernatural forces. As a character living in a community that believes in the cycle of the universe, Odewale fails to avert danger through the appropriate ritual. He embarks on a struggle, a fatalistic struggle which makes man very vulnerable in the hands of the gods.

the
In our discussion of ritual imagination, we contended that it refers to the socio-cultural orientation found in the microcosmos presented in the selected plays which view all actions as transcendental phenomena. In The Gods, actions are governed by a belief that all communal disasters or tragedies are the result of a disharmony between the different worlds. This accounts for immediate consultation with the Ifa Oracle to determine the cause of plague in Kutuje. The oracle locates the cause of the communal crisis in the polluting act of an individual. It goes further to state that unless the individual is discovered and punished for his crime, the land would know no peace. It is from this perspective that we see the self expulsion of Odewale as an act of purification.

Although Rotimi argues that 'traditional Nigerian religions also acknowledge the power of predestination' and that "our religions appreciate the wisdom in personal submission - submission not only to the gods of the land, but also the memory of departed ancestors"¹⁹ it is also important to add that in traditional religion, god-world is an extension of man-world and that the gap between the two worlds is not as fearsome and as broad as what we have in Greek cosmogony which warned man to realize that the

'chiefest part' of happiness is wisdom and to hold the gods in awe.²⁰ According to Soyinka, Yoruba deities are "measured in human terms and such gods are placed under an eternal obligation of some practical form of penance which compensates humanity".²¹

There are some occasions where the community as a homogenous unit fights against anti-ritual behaviour. In such communities, the objective of the fight is to protect harmony and guarantee progress. It is believed that external forces can pollute the land and bring tragedy about. This motif sustains the conflict in Rotimi's next play which we have selected in this study.

TABOO AS A SOURCE OF DRAMATIC CONFLICT - A STUDY OF OVONRAMWEN NOGBAISI

In our study of The Gods, we noted, among other things, Rotimi's presentation of the central conflict in the play within the framework of ^{the} ritual imagination. In Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Rotimi 'comes home', as it were, to explore local material for the purpose of creating drama, just as he had done in Kurunmi.

In Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, the central character is the god-king, Oba Ovonramwen who embodies the religious and social values of his people. He is the central, unchallengeable authority over his subjects, crushing those who dare to raise their voices in protest against his highly exalted throne. He is semi-divine, being expected to combine secular and sacred functions in the daily affairs of the kingdom. He is aware of the dangers that lie before man, dangers which can be averted with the aid of divination. During one of such divinations, the coming of Whitemen is foretold. It is also foretold that the Benin Empire would witness bloodshed²².

Rotimi who has been described as one of the leading dramatists in Nigeria, gives a vivid picture of the cultural milieu of the Edo society and allows the central conflict to emanate from a fundamental aspect of culture and tradition. This technique is also noticeable in Kurunmi where the hero's refusal to be party to desecration of tradition impels the tragic conflicts.²³ It is not culture conflict, but the determination, the stubborn determination to insist on the dictates of tradition and custom which brings about the tragedy.

In Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, the conflict between the Benin people and the foreign forces is located in two factors. The first and more germane to our

discussion is the idea of ritual pollution, the concept of taboo which the Chief Priest warns the community against. The second is the determination of the Oba and his chiefs to control the activities of whitemen in the Oba's area of authority. These two combine to provide reasons for the outbreak of the war.

In writing this play, according to Asein, Rotimi seems to be interested in keeping the records straight by attempting to "recapture the pomp and pageantry that were part of the expectations of drama".²⁴ He portrays the Oba, contrary to historical accounts of the British, as a conscientious leader whose concern was stability in his empire. The Oba is pragmatic and reasonable, firm in his authority, though compromised by the presumptuous attitudes of some of his chiefs, notably Ologbosere.

The story of the play is an imaginative recreation of the tragedy which happened in January and February of 1897 to the Benin people which historians have called 'The Benin Massacre' and 'The Punitive Expedition'.²⁵ It was a punishment on the Bini for attacking and killing a band of whitemen led by Consul Phillips who had come on a trade mission to the Oba. Coincidentally, at this time, the Ague Festival was being celebrated, a time in which foreigners were not allowed on Benin soil.

In order to understand this, let us examine the history and person of the Oba of Benin. Up to the 19th Century, the Oba of Benin had a powerful, supernatural aura around him, much of which was derived from a process of evolution and growth. In such a situation, the king was regarded as an embodiment of supernatural power. He was, and is still, regarded as the father of all Benin.²⁶

As father of all, he was expected to combine character with the ability to rule wisely and justly. Character consisted of understanding his position vis-a-vis that of the gods, and the position of man. As a result of this understanding, he was expected to be able to maintain harmony among all the forces of the universe. The Oba's person was and is believed to be sacred and no one dared raise a hand against him.²⁷ Those who dared immediately faced the wrath of the power of the Oba. The extent of the power of the monarch was felt during the transition of Oba Akenzua II, when all inhabitants of Benin and all Benin indigenes were compelled by tradition to shave their heads.

In ancient Benin, as was in Ile-Ife, almost every day of the year, had a ritual significance. It was expected that on each of these days, sacrifices and rituals would be performed to special deities. On such days, certain practices were

forbidden; infringement necessitated punishment. The Oba, at the centre of it all, was regarded as an object of worship. Roth writes that

The King of Benin is fetiche, and the principal object of adoration in his dominion. He occupies a higher post here (Benin) than the Pope does in Catholic Europe; for he is not only God's viceregent upon Earth, but god himself, whose subjects both obey and adore him as such.²⁸

The Oba therefore is one who is worshipped by his followers, a man whose word was and is law.

Knowledge of the world view of the Bini has guided Rotimi's interpretation of and presentation of events which led to the tragic fall of Oba Ovonramwen. The play is written and dedicated to the Government and peoples of the Mid West State in recognition of their struggle for a progressive state²⁹ and written in such a manner as to have the distinctive audience actors rapproachment found in Rotimi's plays.³⁰

The play is set in Benin. As earlier stated, the events took place during the late 19th Century when some British officials attempted to enter Benin in order to have discussions with Oba Ovonramwen. The Bini chiefs are suspicious of men who are coming for negotiations with 'boxes' carried by porters.

The playwright firmly introduces the potential source of conflict. In a stage direction, the writer tells us:

The Ague Festival is at the ritualistic climax, as the Ohonsa of Akpakpava goes from one participant to another ceremoniously handing out crude little crosses from a bunch he is carrying. Suddenly a harsh peal of drums coming from a distance breaks into the solemnity of the ceremony, bringing the proceeding to a shocked stop (27).

The contrast between the ritual celebration and the incursion of the sound of the drums announcing danger is so dramatic that ^{it} does confirm the prophetic statement of the Ifa Priest:

Oba Alayeluwa, Lord of Benin ..
the shadows I see over your
empire are heavy. Too heavy.
Heavy and ... and dark (15).

After the message is delivered, all is not well anymore in the palace. Ologbosere the chief whom Oba Ovonramwen invests with more authority than the other chiefs, reads the message of the drummers from Itsekiri land:

The Whiteman! Your Majesty -
it says whitemen in large
numbers are coming! (27)

In Act One of the play, the playwright establishes the presence of the whitemen in the Oba's court. The point being made is that it is not the presence of the whitemen that offends the chiefs. The Oba had in the previous scene exchanged gifts with the Queen's representatives. The Chief Priest, Ohonsa warns against the danger of entertaining the whitemen:

Your Majesty! It is the custom that for seven days while this ceremony of Ague goes on, there must be no drumming in the land, and no visits to Benin by strangers. For two hundred years my fathers before me led this ceremony of Ague without trouble! Why, I ask Your Majesty, is it in my life time that the madness of drumming and strange visits should break up their solemn worship and so bring eternal curse upon my ageing head? (27-28).

The acts of pollution identified by the priest are two. The first is that of the sound of drums. The second is the presence of strangers in the land. It is believed that such an occurrence would bring a curse on the land. In effect, therefore, the Ague Festival would have no potency. Each community determines what constitutes a taboo in its environment, as we discussed in Chapter One. Generally, however, acts of pollution occur during sacred occasions, such as the Ague Festival. The

Oba wastes no time in trying to prevent pollution from taking place. He gives an order that trusted warriors should be placed on alert. This is a preventive measure which serves the purposes of assuring his subjects that the Oba can act decisively in times of crisis and also hold the whitemen in check.

In line with Rotimi's attempt to portray Ovonramwen as a reasonable and sensitive king, he presents the Oba as a man who recognizes the consequences of conflict between his men and the forces of the whitemen. He is not the blood-thirsty savage and racialist who does not want to set his eyes on whites. He gives a definite order to the Chief Security Officer of the kingdom that his men 'must not attack' (28). No doubt the Oba's mind is haunted by the prophecy of the Ifa Priest. This knowledge makes him advise the king to exercise caution.

When Okavbiogbe the Chief Security Officer comes face to face with the entourage of the whitemen made up of "a long line of African porters bearing boxes, mats, and waterpots of assorted shapes and sizes on their heads", (28) he remonstrates with the 'invaders' through Idiagha:

Perhaps the whiteman will listen better to you. Tell him yourself - the Oba is busy with the Ague ceremony, and custom forbids him to see strangers White or strangers Black (36).

This explanation emanates from Okavbiogbe's understanding of ritual practice. When he explains to Idiaghe, a fellow Bini man who is the Chief Porter to Phillips, Idiaghe advises the Consul-General to postpone the visit. At this point of the dialogue, Okavbiogbe's overzealousness takes control of his senses. When he is asked what time they can return to see the Oba, he tells them to come back after two months. This does not go down well with the whitemen.

It would then seem that although the Oba has the wisdom and vision to see that the whitemen would have to be accommodated, the chiefs do not. They use the Ague Festival as an excuse to murder stubborn visitors. The Acting Consul-General on his part has no respect for the ritual demands of the Bini. He is typical of white characters whom we encounter in African literature. They usually view African customs with high disdain. When asked by Boisragon why the unnecessary haste to enter Benin, Phillips gives 'commerce' as his reason and adds:

But for how long, gentlemen,
must British trade policy
remain crippled by the whims
and ritual taboos of a fetish
Priest-King (31-32).

Owing to his insensitivity, Phillips insists on entering Benin, only to be slaughtered. The irony is that the chiefs and Phillips are both overzealous. They do not stop to think about the consequences of their actions. In such a conflict, it is only the direct intervention of the gods that can avert disasters.

News of the coming of the whitemen split the Oba's council into two, with the Oba being on the defensive. He calls for caution to which Obakhavbaye responds with the question: "Must we welcome the Whiteman and offend the gods? (34).

It is a fundamental question on the issue of taboo in the play. The Oba understands the ritual demands of his society and so, suggests that the gods can be appeased when offended. He says:

The gods are a part of our existence ...
They feel with us our dangers; they
share with us the peace. The blood
of slaves spilled upon their altars
in prayers for wrongs done them is
enough to calm their anger and win
them back into our existence again.
Our gods do understand ... But the
Whiteman is ... a whiteman. My
people the word is caution (34)
(Emphasis Mine).

For giving this pragmatic solution to the problem, the Oba receives a response bordering on scorn and contempt. This advice is like that offered to Zifa and Ebiere by the Masseur in Clark's play

Song of a Goat. When eventually the Oba's chiefs meet the whitemen, they contravene the Oba's order. Ologbosere prepares us for this when he tells the other chiefs that the Oba does not expect to be obeyed. He asks rhetorically: "Now a foreign enemy threatens the whole empire, and the Oba says to us Defenders of the land - 'caution'. You think he truly expects obedience" (37-8). The whitemen are attacked and the chiefs return from the battle with 'macabre trophies' impaled on poles which they flaunt about in frenzied excitement. While the chiefs rejoice, the Oba receives a warning. It comes through a technical device introduced by the playwright:

Voices - that of the Ifa priest, chanting, mingled with the agonized group - singing of the prisoners of the prologue. Interspersing these, the dire apocalypse of one of the prisoners is intoned in a languid drawl: 'the whiteman who is stronger than you will soon come and conquer you'. The voices echo in over loudspeakers intimating Ovonramwen's thoughts. He begins to sway dizzily. Chiefs rush to him to stay him (37).

The voice of prophecy paralyzes the Oba. This itself raises a question about how convincing is the Rotimi's use of ritual imagination in this portion of the play. One would have expected the Oba to take immediate ritual actions. Instead he proclaims:

Children of our fathers, Benin
I fear, has this day swallowed
a long pestle; now we shall
have to sleep standing upright (37).

The metaphor works, that the Bini have indeed
swallowed a long pestle.

If Rotimi's intention is to cast the Oba in
the mould of a man more sinned against than sinning,
we do encounter a problem with the Oba's character.
The first problem is the Oba's stated ruthlessness
in dealing with his internal opponents (Act One) and
the contrast we find in a king so weak that his
chiefs disobey his orders, and all he does is to
whimper like a baby. It would seem that it is
Rotimi's view that the ruin of Benin was brought
about by the chiefs' intransigence and the weakness
of the Oba. It would also seem that this weakness
of character affects the Oba's sense of judgement
when the time comes to decide on the appropriate
ritual.

The second problem is with the prophecy.
After the divination, the priest fails to suggest
a way out. Rather events begin to unfold in such
a way that they cannot be controlled. In ritual
societies, solutions are usually proffered by the
priest so that a potentially negative incident can
be averted.

Etherton observes:

Some Nigerian critics, who comment on the basis of their understanding of the nature of the Ifa oracle, contend that in the end the oracle will always be able to suggest appropriate sacrifices, in order to change an unfavourable prediction ... Ovonramwen would have been advised what sacrifices were necessary to avoid the looming catastrophe within his reign.³¹

This failure to offer a solution to the problem in the play creates a loophole in dramatic conceptualization.

The central conflict in the play generated by fear of the consequences of a tabooed act is used as a framework for explaining several other issues in the play. The first and most important is that of proffering an explanation of the character of Oba Ovonramwen. He is in fact not a blood-thirsty ogre nor is he an 'abominable sadist'. Rather he is conscious of the flexibility in the affairs of the ritualist, though he does not have the will to impose this on his subjects during the crisis. He is also conscious of the need to exercise caution when dealing with a superior force.

The play dramatizes the exploitative tendency of the British explorers with their usual air of superiority. The Oba is aware of the tragedy that

has befallen other African rulers. In Act Three, during the trial of the Oba, Ovonramwen tells

Moor, the Whiteman:

For six years now Benin has
been gripped in fear. One
time we heard that a big
chief like Nana had been
seized by the whiteman and
carried away from the
Jekiriland of his fathers (59).

This is a deliberate attempt to make Ovonramwen utter nationalistic sentiments so that the audience may see him in a new light.

Finally, Oba Ovonramwen's society is presented in the play as one which is conscious of the efficacy of ritual and how ritual pollution can bring about disaster. We have noted that although the Oba understands the function of ritual, in the play, ritual is not actually used as a tool for warding off disaster. This, probably is due to the fact that the playwright is dealing with historical material. However, it is clear that the Bini people in the play strongly believe that custom must be preserved and strangers must not be allowed on Benin soil in order to avoid pollution.

III

From the foregoing analysis of selected plays of Ola Rotimi's, it is clear that ritual imagination

guides the actions of the characters. The two plays which we have studied have two peculiarities and these may have influenced the playwright's use of ritual to solve problems. In The Gods Are Not to Blame, the playwright's attempt to adapt the Greek story to an African setting has blinded him to the difference in the world views which exist between Greek and Yoruba communities. This is due to the playwright's determination to transpose the story into Yoruba setting. In the second play Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, because the playwright is dealing with historical material, there is a limit to which he can bend the story.

We have also pointed out the playwright's use of the oracle as self-fulfilling. Etherton clinches the argument:

Rotimi's use of the oracle is certainly self-fulfilling in both plays; once uttered, it causes the subject of the prophecy to act in such a way that the prediction is, ironically, fulfilled. This can reinforce a fatalistic view of the universe.³²

Ritual imagination as the conception of all actions having connection with the transcendental is dominant in both plays. It is for this reason that the characters look for the causes of problems from a ritual point of view. Within this form of approach, other playwrights have also created drama. In the next chapter, we shall examine how sacrifice is seen as a way of cleansing the community.

END NOTES

1. Ola Rotimi. The Gods Are not to Blame.
London: Oxford UP, 1971.
2. Bolaji Idowu. Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief.
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3. Michael Etherton. The Development of African Drama. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1982. pp. 102-3.
4. During this period, things cannot be said to be normal, although they may appear so, on the surface. In reality, the infamy and pollutions of Odewale's deeds are gradually working towards his destruction. Sophocles conveys the mood when he describes the situation in Oedipus Rex: "There passed some fifteen years of seeming prosperity. But beneath the deceptive surface a hideous depth of shame and incest lay concealed". The Theban plays. London: Penguin, 1954. p. 24.
5. O. R. Dathorne. African Literature in the 20th Century. London: Heinemann, 1976. p. 317.
6. Atanda-Ilori, Kemi. "Ola Rotimi". Perspectives on Nigerian Literature. Ed. Ogunbiyi. Lagos: The Guardian Press, 1988. p. 206.
7. Michael Etherton. Op. Cit. p. 206.
8. In 1986, ANANSA PLAYHOUSE has a production of The Gods which ran for four days in the auditorium of the University of Lagos. Each performance attracted a full house and one was amazed by the empathy showed by the audience, the majority of whom were secondary school students.
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10. Ola Rotimi. "Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers". DEM SAY, Ed. Beruth Lindfors. Texas, 1974. p. 62.

11. Michael Etherton. Op. Cit. p. 127.
12. D.T. Grossvogel. Four Playwrights and a Post script - New York: Cornell UP, 1987.
13. Francis Fergusson. The Idea of a Theatre. New York: Anchor Books, 1953. p. 39.
14. K. Wimsatt & C. Brooks. Literary Criticism: A Short History. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. p. 55.
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16. Bolaji Idowu. Op. Cit. pp. 173-174.
17. Michael Etherton. Op. Cit. p. 127.
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19. Ola Rotimi. Op. Cit. pp. 62-63.
20. Sophocles. Antigone. The Theban Plays p. 69.
21. Wole Soyinka. Op. Cit. p. 13.
22. Ola Rotimi. Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. Benin. Ethiope Publishing House, 1974.
23. In Kurunmi by Ola Rotimi, the Central character refuses to allow the late Alafin's son to succeed him. According to tradition, the first son of the late Oba must die along with his father. When Oba Adelu was about to die, he made a request that his son should be allowed to succeed him. All the other traditional rulers present agreed. Kurunmi refused, citing tradition as his reason. This is the genesis of the conflict that engulfed Yorubaland in the 19th Century and informed Rotimi's play titled after the Ijaiye hero.

24. S. O. Asein. "The Tragic Grandeur of
Ovonramwen Nogbaisi." Nigeria
Magazine. Nos. 110-112. 1974. p. 44.
25. A. Boisragon. The Benin Massacre. London:
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28. L. Roth. Great Benin. London: Routledge &
Kegan Paul, 1903. p. 3.
29. Ola Rotimi. Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. Op. Cit.
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30. E.B. Uwatt. Op. Cit. pp. 182-3.
31. M. Etherton. Op. Cit. p. 154.
32. Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMA OF WOLE SOYINKA

I

Since he started creative writing in the 1950s, Wole Soyinka has been persistent and consistent in his expressed concern for the state of affairs in his native country and in Africa generally, using images and metaphors which suggest a close link between the transcendental and the physical. In all his plays, whether of the comic or tragic genre, the insistent persuasion has been an abiding concern for the human condition and how the influx of socio-cultural currents have shaped the destiny of Africans, negatively or otherwise. From the early plays such as The Lion and the Jewel and Kongi's Harvest, we observe an orientation which is enriched by a close affinity with the cultural milieu of his immediate Yoruba environment. The consequence of this is that his themes are both timeless and particular, yet with a distinctive African sensibility found in his use of imagery, motifs, and above all, a profound and specific explication of ritual in his creative works.

Anyone who is familiar with the mystical excursions of the playwright would readily agree that his Yoruba background provides source material for his literary fecundity. As a result, we are confronted with such elaborate decor as we have in A Dance of the Forests and Kong's Harvest, not to mention the questions raised about 'death' in form of the abstract 'Word' found in The Road. In all these plays, the movement from one area of experience to another is fluid, and we recognize persons as credible characters whose foibles and virtues dominate the canvass of human existence. This therefore gives the works of the playwright a very broad thematic perspective, an approach which the Swedish Academy recognized in 1986 while awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Soyinka, stating that

in a wide cultural perspective,
and with poetic overtones, (he)
has fashioned the drama of
existence...¹

This drama of existence transcends the ordinary day to day, humdrum of human activity. Rather, Soyinka, is concerned with collective experience that leads the performers and audience to a higher state of spiritual thought.² In this context, Soyinka's ritual drama is like that of Artaud in which the

audience and actors meet at a spiritual level. But of course, the pantheon of gods, particularly one among these whose motif reoccurs in the works of the playwright, sometimes take possession of the characters as Demoke experiences in A Dance of the Forests. Spirit or god-possession then becomes one of the attributes found in Soyinka's ritual drama.

The drama world of Soyinka's, the world of nuances, chthonic realms and complex symbolisms, daemons and imps, bestial dictators and redeeming heroes, is at once familiar and distant. Familiarity is the result of the Africans' proximity to myth and folklore and how the playwright has consistently presented this world-view using different characters as symbols and dramatic persons. To be sure, such stories about heroic redemption, the return of dead ancestors, the failure to discharge socio-cultural duties are not alien to the sensibility of the African whose early environments were and are laden with close encounters with fairies, mermaids, and mischievous spirits. However, as Osofisan has observed:

The comprehensive repertory of myth and ritual, particularly of those primal rites of communal retrieval which survived as paradigm, and whose seasonal re-enactments helped to restore harmony in the race, face the prospect of attrition in the contemporary intellectual climate.³

As a result, he says,

The dramatic heritage available to us has simply proved to be inadequate.⁴

Ritual in the religious sense becomes distant and fetish, suggestive of superstition and backwardness. We are no longer intimately familiar with bridging gulfs with sacrifices and endless supplications to such gods as Ogun, Obatala, and the rest. In particular, the Western world has become alienated from the 'essence' the deep nature of things. Brian Crow puts it succinctly thus:

This awareness, in ritual or artistic theatre, of the presence of cosmic forces of immense power and complexity with which the human community is inevitably involved is based on a world-view which Soyinka believes the West has progressively departed from as it moved towards the dominant and characteristic outlook of scientific rationalism.⁵

In the African dramatic experience, there remains a close link with ritual, with nature and the deep structure of things. An example of this world-view is presented in The Strong Breed which we shall now consider.

II

PURIFICATION THROUGH SACRIFICE - THE STRONG BREED

If the purpose of Soyinka's theatre is to impart experience in order to provoke emotional response, spiritual or otherwise, then The Strong Breed offers us a platform on which we can examine redeeming actions taken on behalf of the collective whole by men who qualify to be 'supermen' in the Shavian sense. The purgatory experience of Eman on the one side and that of the community on the other provide a framework with which the human condition in relation to sacrifice and purification can be understood. For, the dilemma of Eman is not unique, having been created by the socio-cultural dynamics of his immediate community. As a result, the ritual significance of Eman's vicarious sacrifice touches the very core of human existence.

Set in an unnamed village, the plot revolves round Eman, a young man born into a family of carriers, men who are traditionally obliged to

perform annually a ritual that cleanses the community. Although the practice of the carrier is a universal one, each locality determines the mode of operation. For example, while in Eman's native place it is honourable to be a carrier, in the place where the action of the play occurs, the carrier is an ignoble person who will never be accepted socially in the community after the ordeal. It is this disparity in understanding the role of the carrier that misleads Eman. Ogunba observes that Eman's "tragic error is to assume that the festival operates in more or less the same way here as in his native village".⁶

In a series of flashbacks, Soyinka discloses the history of the central character in such a way that the present fuses with the past, giving enough basis for projection into the future. Through this technique we know that Eman rejected the carrier role in his native place, seeking peace and contentment in distant places. His father is a study in steadfastness and cultural regeneration embodied in his unflinching loyalty to his calling, and his determination to persuade his son to succeed him. Eman's escape from his birth place is the result of disillusionment and

loss of faith in the socio-cultural practices of his people. The Teacher in the school of initiation commits the unpardonable offence of doing what (he) warns the initiates against, showing immorality and disregard for the very custom he is guiding the young boys into upholding. He cannot be said to be opposed to sacrifice in principle because his sympathy for Ifada shows that he understands the need for such an exercise. This understanding is displayed when he dramatically takes the place of Ifada in the ritual exercise. Ogunba writes of Eman:

Eman is one of the 'new men' produced by the contemporary acculturation process and he seeks a life of contemplation. He is also dedicated to his own notion of public good, which takes the form of absolute liberalism, and he wants to achieve fulfilment through personal sacrifice, if need be. Such altruism is shown as new in the experience of this community and it is this 'strangeness' of the transitional man which produces the crisis in the play.

Esconced in the heart of an obscure village, he finds solace in loneliness: "Let me continue a stranger - especially to you. Those who have much to give fulfil themselves only in total loneliness... I know I find consummation only when I have spent myself for a total stranger" (25). Earlier on, when

he resolutely decides to leave his birth place, he talks to Omae about a long journey to a quiet place. Ogunba opines that "the long journey he talks about has therefore, a parable quality, meaning that he would abandon the human institution because of its corruption and stench, and concentrate on himself, hoping through self-exploration to discover the meaning of existence".⁸ Ironically, the consequence of his journey is paradoxical, in the sense that his new knowledge drives him away from a decadent culture into a crude and destructive society. By the time he realizes the futility of his exile, it is too late. Although we are not given a clear picture of the workings of Eman's mind, the fact that he escapes shows that he is opposed to the vulgar manner in which the ritual is pursued.

There is indeed a note of urgency in Sunma's voice when the play opens, an urgency which Eman barely tolerates perhaps in his high disdain for Sunma's attempt selfishly to possess him. Her ability to withhold vital information as to the danger of Eman's presence during the festival provides a dramatic vacuum, a suspense which makes Eman handle her anxiety with indifference. This may be as a result of a natural disposition towards suffering,

towards sacrifice on behalf of others. It is possible that his ritual-calling propels him into actions which are, ipso facto, sacrificial, lonesome and unselfish. For this reason, the last vehicle which ought to take him into temporary safety departs after alerting all would-be travellers of the imminence of its departure. When the vehicle leaves, Eman is doomed to fulfil his destiny.

Sunma herself does not foresee the gravity or the level of destruction which the festival would take. This accounts for such statements as "some day you will wish that you went away when I wish to make you" (125); and "Before it's too late, let him go. For once Eman, believe what I tell you. Don't harbour him or you will regret it all your life" (127). Her immediate concern is that Eman would be taboo if he as much as carries the sins of the community, an act which would completely rule out all possibilities of marriage. In the community, a carrier never returns to the village; he and his descendants will forever carry this social stigma. This much becomes obvious in the dialogue between Oroge and Eman:

Oroge: Mister Eman, I don't think you quite understand. This is not a simple matter at all. I don't know what you do, but here, it is not a cheap task for anybody. No one in his senses would do such a job ... (125).

Later, he tells Eman:

But you ought to know that
no carrier may return to the
village. If he does, the
people will stone him to death.
It has happened before. Surely,
it is too much to ask a man to
give up his own soil (129).

Sunma's anxiety therefore, is to keep Eman from
taboo, for herself in order to enter into a per-
manent relationship with him.

One issue which arises out of the conflict is
that of the actual requirement of the festival,
and what eventually occurs. When Eman is being
prepared for the ill-fated festival, Jaguna expresses
concern about the level of contamination which
has occurred owing to Eman's 'misbehaviour':

Don't worry. We have him now.
But things have taken a bad turn.
It is no longer enough to drive
him past every house. There is too
much harm done already. The year
will demand more from this carrier
than we thought (135).

In previous festivals, the carrier did not (lose)
his life, though he became 'persona non grata' in the
community. However, owing to the level of pollutions
which Eman's resistance has caused, Jaguna ominously
predicts a gruesome denouement. Although the villagers
reject this sad ending, Eman's life is lost already.
There is therefore some ambiguity in the minds of

the villagers on the acceptability or otherwise of the sacrifice. From this perspective, one can say that The Strong Breed is a commentary on the waste of human resources. Eman's death is a waste, a great loss much like Dele Giwa's death in October 1986. Eman's life was a positive force, a life of benevolence and selfless sacrifice. Although he is initially in a dilemma as to what must become his fate, "Ifada's helplessness and appeal to Eman who he sees as a kind of father and protective, saviour - figure have all combined to help restore Eman's own existentialist dilemma".⁹ This mode of resolution involves suffering for others, surrounding oneself with characters who indeed need one form of help or another, physically or spiritually. Sunma ~~Needs love; Ifada needs protection~~; the Girl needs a dress for her effigy, and above all, the community 'needs' his blood. He is an enlightened man who runs an educational as well as a medical centre in the community. "Eman is, as it were, in the midst of prevailing darkness and this has an effect on his ~~soul~~ soul. If we see him as a light, then it is a light that is snuffed out at the end of the play at midnight when the darkness is complete".¹⁰

On this level therefore, the tragic essence extends to Eman as a character and to the community as a collective unit. Eman is misunderstood and he is eventually wasted. By this act, the community loses a beacon of light, an initiator whose expanded vision would have brought progress to the community.

The purpose of the ritual-sacrifice by the carrier is to purify the community. Edde Iji says that his "ritual job as a heroic carrier of the community's excesses or the evils hanging in the air" is mandatory.¹¹ In connection with such objectives Gerald Moore has commented that "if death has no meaning, then life can have none either, if death can be made into a total gesture of being, then a man's end can sometimes have a dignity that was never apparent in his life".¹² Although Eman's life is not dignifying, his death cannot be said to be undignifying because it strikes the chord of guilt in the minds of the villagers. What this means is that although the people need purification, they reject the ultimate sacrifice which the over-zealous Jagun and Oroge have imposed on the community. The people do not waste time in showing their displeasure. On realizing this, Jagun says:

We did it for them. It was all for their own common good. What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died. But you see them? One and all they looked up at the man and the words died in their throats (146).

This contradiction in the reaction of the villagers to death for purificatory purposes is absent in the next play Death and the King's Horseman in which death itself becomes a vehicle for transition. Death in The Strong Breed negates the very ethic of the community in question, raising doubts about the efficacy or otherwise of such heroic acts. But the blame would seem to be on Jaguna and Oroge, whose 'prosecution' of the ritual procedure is rebuffed ironically, by the very community which it attempts to purify.

As earlier on discussed in Chapter One, purification is one of the ends of sacrifice, an end which we recognize as the guiding principle behind the literary and structural constructs in The Strong Breed. First, we are presented with Eman in a hostile environment which, though needs to purge its evils, has the peculiar custom of using strangers for this purpose.

A further insight is given into Eman's background as a man whose existence is ritually connected with redemptive acts; in fact, redemption is the very basis of Eman's life. When he attempts to follow another course, his father tells him: "Your own blood will betray you son, because you cannot hold it back."

If you make it do less than this, it will rush to your head and burst it open" (134). To be sure, Eman's required heroic role is meant to provide the human community with hope, with regenerative potentials and to bridge the gulf between worlds. Haney observes that "the threatening reality of the gulf that separates a fragmentary society from an ideal state of communal integration and psychic unity is diminished by means of dramatic rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies".¹³ This concise view is in summation, the villagers' expectations of Eman.

Purification is at both individual and communal levels. Each family purifies itself while the community employs a unifying figure for the same purpose. At the individual level, the Girl in the play refers to her own carrier, an effigy which is dragged and flogged as a vehicle of purification. In response to a question by Eman, the Girl says: "Do you mean my carrier? I am unwell you know. My mother says it will take away my sickness with the old year" (118). The Girl with the inscrutable and ominous look however does not want to share her purificatory ritual with anyone. Her portrait is one of evil, and Sunma echoes this: "Just the same don't give it to her. She is not a child. She is as evil as the rest of them" (119). She requests for clothes

for her carrier. Much against the advice of Sunma, Eman obliges her mysterious request. By giving her the clothes, Eman pollutes himself, an act "symptomatic of Eman's spiritual contact with evil medium or self-betrayal and sell-out: the contact would prove harmful later. The Girl is an embodiment of evil in the play. Therefore, the more Christ-like a figure Eman becomes as the play progresses, the Judas-like and Mephistophelian the Girl becomes".¹⁴ She is selfish with her effigy, vigorously denouncing Ifada's attempt to share in her ritual purification. It is the same way she treats her effigy that Eman is treated later. In a telling manner, she abandons her effigy in the premises of Eman's house, as if to say that it is Eman who must bear her sins.

In a flashback in the play, we are presented with Eman's father as a bearer of the evils of the tribe in a symbolic canoe, a ritual which he has performed for twenty years. According to him, only the strong breed can perform such tasks, men who are specially born and bred for the salvation of their communities. Such men kill their mothers while being born, as it later happens to Omae while

giving birth to Eman's child. It is possible that such women die because as long as they live, they symbolize the weakness of the strong breed, the fact that they came into the world through women, and possibly, no woman would want to see her son condemned to be a carrier all his days. It is also possible that the spiritual and physical strength of the strong breed is too much for the woman, and this may account for her death. The death of the mother of the strong breed deprives him of post-natal care, thereby making him an uncared for independent youth. He is not sentimentally attached to anybody, not even to the woman he loves.

We see this trait of insensitivity in him when he abandons Omae and scorns Sunma's anxiety. The result is that life itself holds no special significance for him; it could be sacrificed for others at short notice. This trait elevates Eman, making him a strong breed, in fulfilment of his father's prophecy earlier on referred to. His death is positive in the sense that "it looks as if something carrying a permanent effect has happened to the conscience of the people and that the community will never be the same again in respect of the treatment of carriers, strangers, idiots, and artists. It is

at this point that the element of the redeemer in Eman becomes most conspicuous".¹⁵

In The Strong Breed, the death of the carrier generates mixed feelings owing to the sudden twist in events. However, in Death and the King's Horseman, the protagonist's failure to commit mandatory suicide is the genesis of the conflict.

III

THE RITUAL-PERSON AS A HERO - A STUDY OF DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

Returning to one of the recurrent themes in his dramaturgy - the need for sacrifices to facilitate communal growth - previously explored in The Strong Breed, Soyinka builds a complex dramatic structure in Death and the King's Horseman, drawing freely from both history and myth to feed ritual imagination. The 'threnodic essence' of the drama is heightened by the poetic dialogue, evocative imagery, dance and music which give the play the framework of a rite of passage, with Elesin serving as the protagonist.

As a mark of artistic and ideological consistency, we encounter the now familiar central concern of his world-view, namely, the link between the various

levels of experience - the living, the dead, and the unborn, which is very active in the consciousness of the characters in The Strong Breed and A Dance of the Forests. In his exegesis on the African world view published in Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka refers to this link when he observes that "The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn".¹⁶ In Death and the King's Horseman, the bridge between these levels of existence is the carrier, the man whose fate affects the collective whole. In The Strong Breed, there is a difference in the demands of the carrier in Eman's birthplace and the community where he takes refuge. In the drama of Elesin the objectives, practice and mode of operation are clear to all the African characters. A balance is achieved by the presence of Pilkings, the white District Officer whose ignorance of, and disdain for, the carrier-custom, amplifies the conflict.

In the level of discourse, both in terms of style and content, we discern the craft of the playwright, and though Yoruba conversation does not sound poetic at all times, the playwright has indicated that he is concerned with "eliciting the play's threnodic essence". As we read on, we notice

that "the dominant cadence in the play is unmistakeably, Yoruba, not of Yoruba everyday speech but of Yoruba poetry. In its measured utterances, the play belongs in the same tradition as esa the poetry of the praise-singers, all wrapped up in the tonal echoes of the talking drum".¹⁷

The drama of *Elesin* takes its source from an historical occurrence in Oyo, when the Alafin, Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu I, died after reigning for thirty-three years. The Horseman, Olokun Esin Jinadu, was expected to follow his master, having been born into such a role, a privileged position during the reign of the Alafin. In 1946, when the Oba died, Jinadu was said to be delivering a message at Ikoyi, near Oyo. About three weeks later, he returned to Oyo, dressed himself in ritual costume and paraphernalia, and danced through the streets as a prelude to committing suicide. This dance, as an aspect of rites of passage, is used as Soyinka's opening spectacle in Death and the King's Horseman.¹⁸

It was traditional for *Elesin* to end his life either by taking poison or having himself strangled by a relative. It was at this point in the ritual that the British Colonial Officer intervened, ordering that Jinadu should be arrested and taken to the Residency. The order was effectively carried out, leaving Jinadu in the hands of foreigners,

much against the will of the people. What followed the District Officer's action was unexpected. The Elesin's son who had been in Ghana returned and in a dramatic manner, committed suicide in place of his father.

This is the skeletal framework of the dramatic material explored by Soyinka to re-create the ritual drama we have in the play. For reasons of both ideology and dramaturgy, Soyinka takes liberties with the material at his disposal, an approach which James Gibbs erroneously considers as a lapse saying that "it is difficult to determine how well informed he (Soyinka) was about the details of the story" and that although some of the alterations are for reasons of dramaturgy, "others may be the result of ignorance, or misinformation. The dating of the event in 1946 in the 'Author's Note, for instance, is an inaccuracy which serves no purpose".¹⁹ The writer himself explains the reasons for such alterations: "The changes I have made are in matters of details, sequence and of course characterisation. The action has also been set back two or three years to while the war was still on, for minor reasons of dramaturgy".²⁰ The purpose of such alterations is clear. As for the exact date of the incident, other sources seem to corroborate the writer. Biodun Jeyifo has

isolated what he terms the play's 'dramaturgical supports' as the main 'fabrications' of the playwright's. These are "Elesin Oba's marriage to the young maiden; the visit of H.R.H. the Prince; Olunde's sojourn in, and timely return from Britain, and above all, the suicide of Elesin".²¹ The purpose of this fabrication is to elevate the conflict from the level of cultural differences to a much more profound experience, which the author refers to as 'largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind - the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition'.²² All actions are given spiritual undertones in order to highlight the 'essentialist' dimension of the drama.

As said earlier, the play opens in a market place, where the carrier is expected to do his 'leave-taking' dance. The dance is accompanied by music which the playwright uses to ease the movements in the rites of passage. Egged on by the women, led by Iyaloja, he denounces cowards, men who abandon their responsibilities, using the image of the Not-I bird:

Ah, but I must not forget
my evening
Courier from the abundant palm
whose green
Became Not I, as he
constipated down
A wayside bush. (13)

While this dance is on Elesin Oba comments on the importance of honour, castigating those who lose their honour for trivialities:

What elder takes his tongue to his
plate
Licks it clean of every crumb? He
will encounter
Silence when he calls on children to
fulfil
The smallest errand! Life is honour
It ends when honour ends. (15)

Ironically, this statement becomes prophetic, when he loses his life-long honour.

It is while the leave-taking dance is on that he notices the bride, the potential source of his laggard will. Much against common sense and ritual practice, he demands for and gets the bride he claims would enable him to travel light. His action is improper for two main reasons. The girl, a bride to Iyaloja's son, is already one foot in marriage and the mention of such a committed relationship ought to check Elesin. The second reason is that sex in this great task, is a ritual-prohibition and the Praise-singer had earlier warned Elesin Oba against women:

They love to spoil you but beware
The hands of women weaken the
unwary. (10)

But Elesin's sense of responsibility is clouded
by lust.

The dilemma of Iyaloja in this peculiar
circumstance is an indication of the effect of
a changing society on the characters. The first
anomaly is that it is unusual for Elesin to ask
for a woman at that point of the ritual. When
told by Iyaloja that the girl is already betrothed,
he says "Why do you tell me that?" (20). By this
very action, Elesin contaminates himself, thereby
depriving himself of the will-power to terminate
his life at the appropriate moment. Another point
worthy of consideration in this ritual is the demand
of tradition that a man whose life is near its end
should not be denied anything. Iyaloja says "Today
is your day and the whole world is yours" (20) and
"The voice I hear is already touched by the waiting
fingers of our departed. I dare not refuse" (21).
In other words, Iyaloja is bound by custom to accede
to any requests of Elesin. She reacts promptly
because "every member of the community is conscious
of the peculiarities of the type of world in which
he has found himself, and is anxious to comport

himself in a manner that allows him to leave that world as wholesome as he has found it by not offending against that pattern of life and the spirit of our ancestors".²³ In very clear terms, Iyaloja reiterates the guiding principle in such matters:

But who will remedy the blight
of closed hands on the day
when all should be opennes and
light'... You wish that I burden
him with knowledge that will
sour his wish and lay regrets
on the last moments of his mind.
You pray to him who is your
intercessor to the other world -
don't set this world adrift in
your own time; would you rather
it was my hand whose sacrilege
wrenched it loose? (21)

Her position is delicate. While obeying tradition, she also gives Elesin as it were, a noose to hang himself. Although Elesin does not rise to the tragic grandeur of Shakespeare's King Lear, in terms of sowing the seed for potential tragedy, there is a correlation between the action of Elesin and that of the senile King. Elesin's main source of pleasure while on earth also serves as the final cause of his tragic fate. Edde Iji observes that "Elesin's faltering determination and commitment have been profanely faulted by his sexual gratifications and other worldly pleasures".²⁴

Iyaloja is a spokesperson for the morés and social values of the community, if we are to take the central role she plays in the drama as a yardstick. In all Soyinka's dramas, Iyaloja rises above the rest female characters, both in what she has to say, and how she says it. She warns Elesin:

The living must eat and drink.
When the moment comes, don't
turn the food to rodents'
droppings in their mouth.
Don't let them taste the
ashes of the world when they
step out at dawn to breathe
the morning dew. (22)

But as a man hopelessly doomed to die in disgrace, Elesin allows the words to go unheeded.

The next upset in the elaborate ritual practice is the intervention of an external force, represented by the District Officer. With an obvious air of cultural superiority, Pilkings sees the custom of sacrifice as barbaric. In the process, he shows insensitivity to the yearnings of the community. It is possible that Soyinka's presentation of the District Officer is a reaction to close contact with whitemen while in Cambridge. To say the least, Pilkings is largely a comic figure. It must have been artistic pleasure for Soyinka while creating such a character as Pilkings.

Without realizing it, Pilkings provides Elesin with a potion of death because Elesin 'dies' from the moment he fails to honour a life-long pledge.

Rufai Olusegun notes:

It is clear that Elesin's betrayal is dishonourable, the implication being that his failure to die literally means that he is dead figuratively, that is, he is one of the living dead. It is his realization of this fact that makes him finally strangle himself.²⁵

Even before the body of his heir is spitefully presented to him, he is denounced by the community, through Iyaloja. The Praise Singer makes a jest of his acclaimed eloquence. But the most poignant of all denunciations is that which he experiences in the hands of his son, thought to be lost in the cultural milieu of the English. It is a moment of intense humiliation for the man who had cursed the whiteman for sending his son away to Europe in order to thwart his plans. Here is a graphic presentation of the encounter:

(For several moments they hold the same position. **ELESIN** moves a few steps forward, almost as if he's still in doubt).

ELESIN: Olunde? (He moves his head, inspecting him from side to side)
Olunde? (He collapses slowly at **OLUNDE'S** feet) Oh son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!

OLUNDE: (He moves from the first time since he heard his voice, brings his head down to look on him): I have no father, eater of left-overs. (He walks slowly down the way his father had run. Light fades out on ELESIN sobbing into the ground) (60-61).

The confrontation is particularly excruciating for the disgraced Elesin and the mortified Olunde, the former having protested vehemently against Olunde's journey to England. No doubt, while Elesin's protest may have been justified, it eventually turns out that Olunde's stay in England educates him further on the need for certain forms of sacrifice and the meaning of courage and tradition. Rather than spout anti-tradition rhetoric which an English-trained doctor would like to do, he shuns Mrs. Pilkings when he says "I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand" (50). The statement "It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him (35), finds fulfillment in Olunde's courageous act. In every sense therefore, Olunde is of the strong breed, men born to carry the burden of others in spite of themselves. Eman's character in The Strong Breed and Olunde's are built on the same redemptive foundation. This unity of vision and consistency in artistic objective is underscored by Eldred Jones's assertion that

Soyinka sees society as being in continual need for salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save... The salvation of the society then depends on the exercise of the individual will.²⁶

Olunde's messianic disposition is not tainted by contact with and exposure to, foreign values and mores. This is obviously the playwright's statement to the effect that the Pilkinges of this world cannot claim superiority of their culture to the culture of the Olundes. The benefit of close contact with English soldiers, nurses and doctors provides enough education for Olunde to defend his father's sacrificial act. Sacrifice, to him, is an affirmative commentary on life (51), and his father's 'tremendous will power' (57) will affirm the need to grow.

While in custody, Elesin attributes his paralysis to several factors, a sad reflection of a confused mind whose sharpness has been blunted by carnal desire. He is like a common prisoner, though he realizes that there would be "no sleep in the world tonight" (62). He hits the nail on

the head when he tells Pilkings "You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it"

(63). Pilkings fails to understand the import of Elesin's statement since his mind is clouded by illusions of racial superiority.

When alone with his young bride, he acknowledges how sunk he has been by first blaming the whiteman, then the gods for deserting him and finally, the young bride for 'the mystery of the sapping of my will' (65). He confesses that his "weakness came not merely from the abomination of the whiteman who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs" (65). His mind is still glued to earthly pleasures which he had enjoyed as the Alafin's horseman, as he testifies:

In all my life
As Horseman of the King, the
juicest fruit on every tree
was mine. I saw, I touched,
I wooed, rarely was the answer No.
The honour of my place, the
veneration I received in the
eye of man or woman
Prospered my suit and
Played havoc with my sleeping hours.
(18).

In spite of the life of luxury, comfort and veneration he had led, just one piece of earth misleads him.

When Olunde's body, wrapped in a mat is brought on stage, the stage is set for the final humiliation of Elesin. The message sent to Elesin and the District Officer is that the favourite horse of the king has been slain, and by custom, Elesin should send a message through it to the other world. Iyaloja precedes the procession, sparing no effort at reminding Elesin about his betrayal of the race. She aptly visits the image of the sap and shoot which had earlier on been evoked in the dialogue between the Praise Singer and Elesin. Her sarcasm deals a terrible blow on the psyche of Elesin, who obviously is unprepared for the exchange of witty barbs. To Iyaloja's "How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon when it was the eagle itself he promised us he would confront", he replies rather lamely "I don't ask you to take pity on me Iyaloja. You have a message for me or you would not have come. Even if it is the curses of the world, I shall listen" (67).

In a contemptuous manner she recalls all the issues necessary for the regeneration of the community. She questions Elesin's right "to open a new life when (he) dared not open the door to a new existence" (67). Elesin is "the self-vaunted

stem of the plantain" which has lost its pith in the parent stem, what will become of the shoot? She continues her tirade, asking: "Who are you to bring this abomination over us?" (68). Elesin finds no convincing answer, thereby drawing more contempt from Iyaloja. While waiting for the burden to arrive, Iyaloja castigates both Elesin and Pilkings when she refers to the presence of the visiting prince, asking whether Pilkings' folks would leave his spirit to roam restlessly on the earth when he died. When Pilkings replies that his people 'don't make chiefs commit suicide', Iyaloja dismisses him thus:

Child, I have not some to
help your understanding.
(points to Elesin). This
is the man whose weakened
understanding holds us in
bondage to you. (71)

When the burden arrives, the sight of Olunde's body petrifies Elesin for a moment, causing in those moments, all the regrets of failure of inadequacy. He immediately terminates his life. The Stage Direction is lucid.

(Elesin has stood rockstill,
his knuckles taut on the bars,
his eyes glued to the body of
his son. The stillness seizes
and paralyzes everyone, including
PILKINGS who has turned to look).
(75)

Elesin's laggard will is spurred into a belated action for which he will not be honoured. According to Iyaloja,

He is gone at last into the passage, but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the king's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung. (76)

Elesin, born into a heroic role, dies a coward, a man sunk in communal debt.

It remains to be said that the heroic dimension of the conflict is highlighted by Iyaloja and reinforced by the Praise Singer as soon as the body of Olunde is revealed. The community recognizes the heroic action of Olunde, after the failure of Elesin, though it is an anomaly for the 'young shoot to pour sap into the parent stalk'. Referring to Olunde, Iyaloja says:

There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums (75).

The action of Olunde restores honour not only to the family of Elesin, but also to the race, having been jolted by Pilkings' presumptuous intervention.

Olunde's death, being sacrificial, has meaning because it restores the health of the community, the world which had been plunged 'over the edge of the bitter precipice.' Obviously, there is a marriage of different worlds, a union which makes such interpretation possible. The cosmos is viewed as a unified whole, with a disruption in one unit necessarily and automatically affecting the whole. It is this view of the world that underlies Olunde's action, an action which Pilkings never expected.

The tragedy in the play is not limited to the individuals involved, whose lives are terminated in the process of change in the community. For, in the real sense, the tragedy of an upturned, assaulted world, is collective, having upset the entire race. Significantly, the Praise Singer says:

Elesin, we placed the reins of the
world in your hands yet you
watched it plunge over the edge
of the bitter precipice ... Our
world is tumbling in the void
of strangers (75).

The heir, Olunde becomes the hero, having poured his 'sap into the parent stalk'.

In concluding this chapter, it is pertinent to reiterate that the general belief that life is worth preserving and protecting sustains all the actions

of the characters, particularly the man whose role it is to perform the ultimate sacrifice. Soyinka has observed that

The community emerges from ritual experience 'charged with new strength for action' because of the protagonist's Promethean raid on the durable resources of the transitional realm; immersed within it, he is enabled emphatically to transmit its essence to the choric participants of the rites - the community.²⁷

The Promethean courage of Olunde is an affirmation of life. The main motivation therefore, writes Edde Iji,

is that if the world is really so good and life is worth living, then all efforts should be made to perpetuate it through conscious acts of sacrifice and, particularly, the ultimate self-sacrifice signified in expiation suicide by those fated to affect this potential.²⁸

In both The Strong Breed and Death and the King's Horseman, the concept and role of the individual carrier of communal burden provide the central motif in the prosecution of plot. It would seem from the works of Soyinka that the lone act of the individual can redeem society from chaos. On the other hand, the failure of an individual to meet with the demands of his community could result in tragedy.

In the next chapter, all these views are studied as metaphor for contemporary experience, an interpretation which becomes apposite, considering the decimation which ritual is undergoing in Africa of today.

CHAPTER FOUR

END NOTES

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27. Wole Soyinka. Myth, Literature and the African World. Op. Cit. p. 33.
28. Edde Iji. Op. Cit. p. 139.

CHAPTER FIVE

RITUAL AS A METAPHOR

In Literature this would mean that, where (there) is a mystical element, it should be made either to subserve human needs or else act as sustaining metaphor for the spiritual factor in human consciousness!¹

Ritual could be a metaphor, a metaphor for the re-occurring, the perrenial and the repititive cycle of human action, for tragedy, and paradoxically for the celebration of life. It could be a metaphor for evaluating present existence with a view to apprehending any cultural or historical legacies bequeathed from the constitutions of ritual itself. According to Grossvogel

the tragic nature of man derives from the fact that his absolute vision is tied to an important impression. That vision frustrates the visionary who is grounded, forever and forever doomed to hope for more than he can attain, to see more than he can grasp, to feel more than he can explain, to fear more than he can control.²

If we accept Grossvogel's views, then it is possible to find a resolution of the crisis by interpreting ritual as a metaphor.

Each new day emphatically stresses the need for a re-evaluation of old values, mores and conceptional perception of progress in order to

forge a foundation for the emergence of an 'egalitarian society'. The great literary tradition started by the early Greek writers and now so articulately pursued by contemporary writers, has been a recorder of changes and possibilities of re-interpretation. The dynamics of human society make it imperative for ritual to be radically reviewed and made subservient to the burdens of modern concerns.

No doubt, ritual drama, guided by a world-view that is invariably transcendental must find a place in the present age, considering the fact that issues and ideas are subjected to the test of objective reality. Rituals, as transcendental phenomena, did provide a workable, if irrational framework for traditional societies where gods freely mixed with men and the acts of heroic individuals were judged by their spiritual significance. However, in terms of creating a new society, as Osofisan has aptly pointed out, "the dramatic heritage available to us has simply proved to be inadequate"³. The way forward is to find a befitting status for ritual. That status is provided by an interpretation of ritual as a metaphor. It is in this light that we shall presently examine selected plays of Clark, Rotimi, and Soyinka.

In an essay titled "Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos", Osofisan examines the contradictions in an animist play such as The Road and concludes:

this dialectic between the real and the imaginary, between the forces of tradition and the modernist consciousness is the contribution that the theatre can usefully make to the process of social transformation⁴.

As we witness the clash of wills and interests both on the surrealist and concrete dimensions, we are reminded that the real conflict, the real battle lies outside the theatre, outside the control of gods and deities in the religious sense. Osofisan concludes his discussion on such conflicts:

And I believe that the mythic personage who incarnates this tension between the existing and the visionary, between the past, the present and the future, not as deity now but metaphor, is the god Orummila⁵.

As a metaphor therefore, the supernatural and the physical can be reconciled. Instead of models, we see archetypes from whom certain virtues, redeeming features, can be borrowed. Also, from some of such characters we could see despicable actions capable of ruining nations.

Metaphor as a literary concept dates back to the earliest literary times, arresting the interest of Aristotle in the 5th Century. Metaphor originated from the Greek word 'meta phora'; 'meta' means 'over' while 'phora' means 'to carry'. Literally, the word means to carry over. Explained further, it means to carry over the meaning of one object to another. Terrence Hawkes defines metaphor as a "set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of the object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first"⁶. It is also defined as the 'use of words to indicate something different from the literal meaning'. Although the discussion thus far seems to refer to associated meanings of words, it is possible also to conceive of meaning in terms of a whole text, an anecdote, or a story. The possibility of recognizing literary links between two apparently unconnected subjects is one of the distinguishing features of a literary mind in contradistinction with a literal mind. In his Award Winners' lecture of the Nigerian National Merit Award (1986), Achebe vigorously makes the point:

The literal mind is the one-track mind, the simplistic mind, the mind that cannot comprehend that where one thing stands, another will stand beside it⁷.

The entire process elicits various images which by their very nature convey meanings and levels of association, making it possible for one thing to stand beside another.

Aristotle gave a general definition of metaphor, seeing it as

the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing; the transference may be from the genus to the species, from the species to the genus, or from one species to another or it may be a matter of analogy⁸.

It is evident from Aristotle's definition that comparison is invariably achieved each time a metaphor is employed. Ortony says that Aristotle believed

metaphor to be implicit comparison, based on the principles of analogy, a view that translates into what in modern terms is generally called the comparison theory of metaphor⁹.

Our application of metaphor in the context of this study is both analogous and comparative, finding parallels between ritual and contemporary

experience, and comparing symbolic ritualistic actions with day to day actions. In doing so, we necessarily transcend the given information, using words and texts as codes for extended meaning. Ortony opines:

Knowledge of reality, whether it is occasioned by perception, language, memory, or anything else, is a result of going beyond the information given. It arises through the interaction of that information with the context in which it is presented, and with the knower's pre-existing knowledge¹⁰.

The very nature of reality creates room for deductive reasoning and analogy, especially when we consider the object-subject relationship of reality and its perception. A critical or creative mind has the potential to travel across the gulf of meanings, eliciting new information which the literal mind cannot perceive. The original creator of a work of art may not consciously infuse words which suggest amplified meanings. However, through an interpretative study, the critical imagination envisions a wider horizon of thought and experience, freely associating the given information with the realities of life.

The language associated with ritual is esoteric and symbolic, depending largely on association of meaning. A symbol represents and communicates a coherent whole by means of a part.

This ability to communicate a broad message by using a part ~~imbues~~ ritual drama with the quality of extended meaning, which can itself be said to be metaphorical. In essence therefore, we are concerned with the total message of ritual and the particular messages which different expressions convey. Raymond Firth says

symbolism lies in the recognition of one thing as standing for (representation) another, the relation between them being that of concrete to abstract, particular to general. The relation is such that the symbol by itself appears capable of generating and receiving effects otherwise reserved for the object to which it refers - such effects are often of high emotional charge¹¹.

This intrinsic quality of ritual makes associated meaning possible. In this context, the symbolic actions of characters, like when Odewale desperately searches for his identity, or when Zifa compels Tonye to force the head of a goat into a narrow pot, or when Eman offers himself as sacrifice in place of Ifada, are capable of generating new and different meanings.

Archetypal images do occur and re-occur, yielding possibilities of explication, either in a narrow context or in the broad view of the collective human experience. Maud Bodkin once commented:

When a great poet uses the stories that have taken shape in the fantasy of the community, it is not his individual sensibility alone that he objectifies. Responding with unusual sensitiveness to the words and images which already express the emotional experience of the community, the poet conveys these so as to utilize to the full their evocative powers. Thus he attains for himself, vision and possession of the experience engendered between his own soul and the life around him and communicates that experience, at once individual and collective, to others, so far as they can respond adequately to the words and images he uses¹².

Familiarity with associable images, ideas and symbols bring extended meaning and relevance within the mental reach of the writer or the interpreter. The poet, or the writer is the custodian of the mores and social values of his epoch, his environment, thus providing him the material with which he represents the collective wish and thereby make projections into the universal.

It is evident therefore that literature has the capability of recording profound human experience by using an elaborate framework of either fiction or psychological realism or historical representation to translate acceptable and egalitarian values into written form, which in the context of our discourse, concerns drama. Peopled by humans

whose foibles and strengths re-inforce a central pre-occupation, drama, in fact art generally, transmits both the particular and the universal, the mythic and the realistic, the sacred and the profane. On a very broad spectrum, drama is concerned with the vast canvass of human conflicts and experience. The mystical element, according to Okpewho, must be made to serve as a metaphor. Such elements in Ozidi, The Road, The Gods Are Not to Blame, Death and the King's Horseman, for example, can serve modern consciousness, a possibility which we have found in the works of J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, and Wole Soyinka.

With Clark, we are on firm ground if we make bold to say that although he uses a ritual framework, different layers of meaning can be found in such plays like Ozidi, The Raft, and Song of a Goat. In Ozidi and The Raft, there is explicit reference to issues of the modern state.

While reviewing Clark's plays in 1962, Ulli Beier observed that Clark's inspiration was "always nourished by immediate experience"¹³. If this observation is used as a means of locating Clark's source of inspiration, Ozidi, though rooted in a traditional folktale, may have been inspired by events of the Second Republic of Nigeria. Reference to the 'state of the nation', 'body politic' suggest contemporary purview which is broader than

that of the fantastic saga. In fact, in Ozidi

the myth undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis. Clark skillfully creates a contemporary political play out of the traditional saga. The latter was conceived with ritual rebirth and the need for succession and moral growth; the contemporary play describes the coups of a modern African state - the corrupt politicians who are ousted, the new rich who inherit their place¹⁴.

In the drama, Ozidi's ritual revenge obligation is very much like any social obligation in modern times which is meant to restore honour to a family, a community or an individual. Before embarking on such an exercise, the hero must rise above others, prepare himself psychologically and morally, and attain a profound understanding of human motive, character, and needs. Clark's view, therefore, is that the purifier, the social reformer must have a main-stay, like Oreame, who would propel the hero into action and serve as a source of strength. The playwright's moral concern about good and evil is evident in the death of Oreame, the woman who had imbued the hero with spiritual strength.

Clark's political vision, his concern for political stability and continuity is mirrored by the nature of the attack on Ozidi senior,

murdered in spite of his commitment to state development. Such a paradigmatic construct which is very apt to Nigeria's socio-political experience, it seems, is Clark's call for the armed forces to give democratic forces a chance. Furthermore, the manner of the presentation of the destructive consequences of revenge suggests that the doctrine of revenge cannot be prescribed for the modern state. The playwright causes a backlash of evil forces on Ozidi. The modern state has an efficient machinery at its disposal for punishing those who commit crimes against the state, whether political or social. The equivalent of Ofe's and his cohorts' crime against the state of Orua is treason, an offence punishable by death. The instructive lesson is that such actions as that of Ofe wreak havoc on the state. The point that revenge is negative is emphasized by the Liberian experience where Samuel Doe's execution of the President, William Tolbert, is avenged by Prince Yormie Johnson after Doe fell from power. We are still witnesses of the consequences of such actions and counteractions in Liberia.

If we view the central concern of Song of a Goat, as that of Ozidi above, the tragedy, though domestic, applies in several ways to modern man, namely,

the anguish which a man suffers when he loses potency in any sphere of life; in the rejection of fate imposed by some undefinable super-being; or in the level of pride and ego at stake when a man is asked to make his wife over to another because he is impotent.

In spite of himself ritual concerns still bother the 20th-Century African man who still clings to self-regenerative means of procreation as an extension of himself, as a social and cultural antennae with which he can reach a wide range of experiences. Lost potency still produces the intense anguish and shame which Zifa feels in Nigeria today. In most cases, it has led couples to medical doctors, unorthodox doctors (babalawos), prophets, and 'Alfas' who claim to have the power to restore potency. Marriages have been known to break up in Nigeria of today because the couple could only get female children. In other cases, a man with one child never feels secure even in modern Nigeria.

The symbolic act of compelling Tonye to force the head of a goat into a pot parallel's Man's attempt always to establish the guilt of the other man. There have been several newspaper reports of women locked with a type of juju

popularly referred to as 'Magun',¹⁵ (literally, 'don't climb) when such women are suspected of infidelity. The belief is that the trespassing man would lose his life as soon as he mounts the unfaithful woman. Such action by an offended husband portrays lack of faith in the community's ability to punish justly an adulterer, especially when the trespasser is socially higher than the husband.

Furthermore, Zifa's ritual - the recall of his father from the land of dishonour, finds a parallel in the modern Nigerian tradition of second burial, usually held well after the deceased had been buried. In some areas of Ondo State of Nigeria, such a practice is referred to as 'turning' the body of the dead from one side to the other. In some families there is opprobrium when a man fails to perform this ritual. The underlying belief, though gradually losing its spiritual significance is that the dead person will be appeased and so would offer protection to the living. Finally, it can be said that Zifa's rejection of fate, with the consequence of his action, is the lot of any man who challenges what has ^{been} marked out as his fate on earth. A man who challenges what modern demi-gods have decreed could either succeed or fail. Zifa's action in

this context transmits a message of course in the face of the greatest odds, of fight against an imposed condition from any quarters.

If Ola Rotimi has made no pronouncements on the metaphorical possibilities of ritual, it may be due to his penchant for artistically and aesthetically presenting history and ritual behaviour on stage mainly for the purposes of entertainment. This is not to say, however, that his ritual plays do not have relevance to contemporary society. In fact, during a production of Kurunmi, the audience was reported to have jeeringly referred to Kurunmi as Ojukwu. This of course, is in reference to the intransigence of Odumegwu Ojukwu before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war.

It is possible to interpret and equate the travails and tragedy of Odewale with the uncertain destiny and direction of the 20th Century man. In fact, Odewale's fate, like Oedipus', is universal metaphor for the disparity between what is apparent and what is real. Unuagbo Williams observes:

In Nigeria today, too many Odewales are being born daily. And several tragedies, reminiscent of that which Ola Rotimi painted in the play are being physically acted here and there. The only difference as it seems is that the gods have swapped roles as in the ever changing phenomenon of musical chairs. Those gods of yore have simply changed into human demi-gods. These demi-gods now determine the destiny, success or failure of fellow human beings, just as it was the duty of the gods of yore to divine the destiny of the people¹⁶.

The Gods Are Not to Blame also yields possible metaphorical allusion on the question of identity, the archetypal search for self which has straddled the gulf of world literature, spilling into the 20th Century in such movements as the Theatre of the Absurd or in the existentialist philosophy championed by Jean Paul-Satre. Not to know one's self, one's roots, is to remain in darkness, which could lead to a futile existence, contrary to the desire for self fulfilment, one of the fundamental aspirations of man. Within this context is the desire of human kind to explore the unknown in an attempt to know more about his environment.

The nature of the search is symbolically like Man going into space, knowing that there are dangers lurking about. The search therefore becomes representative of the collective ritual, a collective ritual replete with both dynamic actors

and choric supporters - the astronauts hurtling into space and the public watching and applauding. In other words, the actors represent, stand for, the ordinary man who would like to know more about his environment.

When Odewale murders his father because the latter insulted his tribe, the playwright introduces the Nigerian factor into the play. This incident so imaginatively infused by Rotimi, locates the drama within a specific cultural milieu, a milieu in which the defence of one's tribe supercedes respect for fellow human beings. Such a behaviour has given birth to war and destruction in the Sudan and the former Yugoslavia. It also contributed to the Nigerian Civil War. No doubt, this tour-de-force in dramaturgy and thematic concern greatly domesticates the Nigerian, (Yoruba) adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex.

In Rotimi's other play, the resistance of Oba Ovonramwen is an enduring metaphor, suffused with cultural and political innuendoes which are pertinent to the current efforts to contain neo-colonialism. The vast canvass of experience represented by the confrontation includes politics, economics and claims to racial superiority, issues which still

plague relationships between African countries and the superpowers. In Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, the Oba's resistance and eventual subjugation is similar to the experiences of such heroic figures like Samoure Toure of Guinea, King Jaja of Opobo, and King Nana of Itsekiri when colonialists were preceded by commercial officers and priests sworn to establishing trade links, either by cunning or by coercion, with the states and mini-states of pre-partitioned Africa. Such trade officers left their marks either in terms of a symbol of foreign authority or through the establishment of a trade post. When the play opens, the Chief Priest issues a prophecy about an impending doom. In modern societies such seers have been replaced by para-psychologists, prophets and socio-economic analysts who, on the basis of current market trends, can predict the direction of commerce in the months or years ahead.

Such a prediction was made by Obafemi Awolowo during the Second Republic in Nigeria when he alerted President Shehu Shagari on the precarious state of the economy, adding that unless urgent steps were taken, the 'ship of state would sink'. Although he was villified and called a prophet of doom, two months later, the President declared a period of austerity.

The Oba's refusal to allow whitemen to enter Benin during the Ague festival, the period of purification is forcefully countered by the British resulting in the Benin massacre of 1897 and the subsequent punitive expedition. Just as they claimed that trade was their objective, so do the () current world powers coercively introduce () market reforms into African countries, even though such reforms have brought only pain. In Nigeria, the rejection of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) facility by the Nigerian public in 1985-86 did not stop the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme. While its originators applaud its necessity, African countries are groaning under the yoke of such an internationally-sponsored economic programme. It is clear then that current African leaders are not as committed as the Ovonramwens who stiffly resisted () efforts to colonize their people.

Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, therefore, as a ritual drama based on a historical incident, translates into a universal statement on the heroic efforts of Africans to check the socio-cultural and political life of the African continent. When the Oba finally surrenders, ritualistically removing his crown, he still retains his dignity, preferring to save the empire from further bloodshed and wanton destruction. Contemporary

African leaders obviously lack this vision of statesmanship. The Late President Samuel Doe of Liberia was an example of a leader who preferred to sacrifice his people in order to remain in office. When at last the nation's capital was deserted by the citizens, he stubbornly remained within the Presidential Palace, causing great loss of lives in the process.

Through the mirror of the ritual dramas in Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and The Gods Are Not to Blame, we have traversed territories from the past to the present, encountering archetypal motifs and actions which make such dramas true and valid statements on the human condition. That spiritual essence, the mystery in the universe, which man from earliest times had been concerned about, remains a potent force in the evaluation of human character and action. Eliade has observed that

Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent, in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos. Once contact with the transcendent is lost, existence in the world ceases to be possible.¹⁷

Though this is a strictly ritualist perspective, it summarizes the world view to be found in the drama of Wole Soyinka. In Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka identifies this deep-rooted need for some profound meaning to existence:

The persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a re-definition in terms of cultural or private experience is, at least, man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories.¹⁸

Our study of Wole Soyinka's plays is indeed a revelation of how social vision cannot be hindered and mythopoesis, a conclusion underscored by both the creative and critical works of the playwright. Lewis Nkosi once referred to A Dance of the Forests as a "many-layered play, with different levels of meaning"¹⁹. Soyinka has remarked that "the truly creative writer knows when to appropriate ritual for ideological statements"²⁰.

In responding to criticisms from the left, Soyinka has made definite statements on ritual and metaphor. In his reply to Osofisan's assertion that Soyinka fails to apprehend the deity Ogun as metaphor, he says: "The acknowledgement of the possibility of mythic metaphor for the contemporary writer - if he so wishes - is at least a beginning. Osofisan's failure to see Ogun also as a metaphor is extremely puzzling"²¹. He also graphically captures the lonesome Fidel Castro, tasting the ashes of failure after the aborted attempt to overthrow the Jean Batista regime in 1959 Cuba, and concludes:

My social temperament does not permit me to accept this curtailment of the process, hence my adoption of Ogun, and the reason why I point out the continuing cycle of this human experience, using contemporary figures like Castro²².

This therefore is a clear acceptance of metaphorical possibilities and deliberate manipulation of motifs, images and ideas to create room for extended meaning, for a unity of vision between what constitutes myth and ritual, and how these can be relevant to a writer concerned with the living conditions of 20th century man. Biodun Jeyifo vigorously takes exception to Soyinka's holistic view of the universe (the past, present and the future as being organically linked) when he says:

it should be noted that these constructs are encountered in myths and rituals as mysteries of nature and reality and indeed it is as something of a mystagogue initiating his readers into esoteric cults that Soyinka writes of them in this essays and creative works. This indeed is the crux of the matter: the Marxists expect that a 'contemporary' writer would write of myths and 'essences' with a view to 'explain' them, to relativise them historically by showing how they are transformed by historical forces but the unrelenting mythopoiest in Soyinka refuses to oblige²³.

Also, Adebayo Williams, has been blunt on Soyinka's use of ritual, suggesting that the playwright's perspective is irrational. He says "while

Marxism preaches ~~an~~ ultimate classless society, Soyinka's ritualistic route, apart from being undialectical, is at best a lapse into reactionary romanticism and at worse a recourse to irrational mysticism"²⁴. However, the critical attention which Soyinka's art has received cuts across all shades of ideology. Gerald Moore sees the metaphoric levels at which Soyinka can be studied. Referring to the social concern of the 'playwright, Moore notes:

it is the best of these ideas, together with the ritual and mythology which embody them that have provided his richest store of metaphor and dramatic symbols, but they call out for re-interpretation in terms of ever-changing values and conditions²⁶.

Criticism, both as a mirror and a lamp, impels and propels, apart from shapening the nature of art, could also guide a writer's development. So, it is possible that the level of critical attention which Soyinka has received has helped to shape the form of his drama, giving the ritual dramas some contemporaneity. Olabimpe Aboyade comments on

Death and the King's Horseman:

One is even tempted to see beyond the play some relevance to the wider society at large... Does the lament for a world wrenched from its course, through the ignoble acts of Elesin and the meddlesomeness of foreigners also not extend to the realities of our times?²⁶

The question of failed leadership is raised by the treacherous action of Elesin Oba. In Nigeria today, there are many who have been entrusted with honour and privilege by their communities in order to be of service. However, there have been several cases of men who betrayed the trust.

To the characters in the play, Elesin's failure to honour a life-long pledge 'dislodges' the world, leaving in its wake bewilderment and apprehension. The beauty of the statement 'we placed the reins of the world in your hands, yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice' can better be appreciated with a detailed background knowledge of the culture of the people of Oyo. Among the Yoruba, the horse was used to designate the aristocracy or heroic leadership. In equestrianism the reins are to horse what the steering is to the car. In Death and the King's Horseman, reins is a transferred epithet investing Elesin Oba with the distinctive attributes of a heroic leader, charged with the responsibility of steering the ship of state. It uses the image of a horse rider's reins to depict Elesin's role in the universe. We are immediately reminded that most of our economic and political problems are the result of failed leadership. As a result, the Nigerian world has been

tilted off its course by undigested economic policies, leaving Nigerians helpless and hapless. The trauma increases when one sees the 'grand-children' of the likes of Pilkings manipulating both the elected and imposed leaders of African nations.

The polarity of the cultural values represented by Pilkings and Elesin respectively deserve to be seen from the perspective of one race feeling superior to another. Such a biased view sometimes affects the relationship between the black and the white people in the world today. Olunde's redemptive mission in spite of his sojourn in England is Soyinka's statement on the issue that the white man's culture is not superior after all.

The theme of vicarious sacrifice reoccurs in The Strong Breed, a strong indication that the playwright believes in the idea of an individual emerging to redeem society from itself. Eman's sacrifice can only be acceptable at the symbolic level. In other words, the importance of his death is in the sense that no one will expect a carrier to die on behalf of the community anymore. The sacrificial act of Eman is commendable at this level. It shows courage, a characteristic which we need in our country currently, to save the nation from plunging into the edge of the

bitter precipice. Nigeria needs effective leadership as Achebe has opined in his book The Trouble with Nigeria, the type of leadership that would be devoid of selfishness and greed. Soyinka does not suggest that human beings should be slaughtered annually or once in a decade to create new values. It is the symbolic nature of the act of Egan that he commends. In a statement which he issued in 1986 after Major General Mamman Vatsa was condemned to death for being part of a plot to overthrow the Babangida regime, he decried the cyclical waste which seemed to have plagued Nigeria once in a decade since 1966.

It is for this reason that we contend that The Strong Breed is an affirmation of life, a statement on the need to retain the balance between such forces that govern the cosmos in order to satisfy a psychological wish that efforts are being made to validate life. As a strong breed, his physical death is a waste, a waste of talent, vision and tenacity of purpose which modern heroes need to transform society.

As a metaphor therefore, ritual has relevance to the issues of our times. It is this relevance that we have highlighted in this chapter using the selected texts of the playwrights to demonstrate how parallels can be found between the ritual actions found in the plays and the activities of contemporary man in his daily affairs.

CHAPTER FIVE

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A THEORY OF RITUAL IMAGINATION

The ritual experience of theatre is a collective interaction between performers and audience, and among members of the audience itself.¹

Our discourse thus far has showed us that writers and poets play a major role in the creation and dissemination of myths as part of their unusual sensitivity to the sacred², a characteristic which places writers themselves as 'chief priest' in the ritual of transition from one age to another; from one system of beliefs and values to a new one. This priestly role finds expression in different forms, from poetry to fiction and drama. In this study, we have focused on drama in order to create a definite perspective for our study of ritual. For this reason, in making concluding observations, it is apposite to recapitulate the fundamental issue of our discourse, namely: the ritual imagination in selected plays of J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, and Wole Soyinka.

The aesthetic concerns of the dramatic works of these playwrights are determined by a world-view which presupposes all actions to have transcendental meaning, a world in which "the harmonisation of

human functions, external phenomena and supernatural suppositions within individual consciousness emerge as a normal self-adjusting process..."³. Although their specific cultural backgrounds are not all the same, yet this world-view is shared by all three playwrights as a way of explaining the world, providing motifs for their creative endeavour, and motivation for their characters. It gives coherence to actions and ideas, resulting in our understanding of the characters' peculiar apprehension of cultural and social phenomena. Such imagination makes it possible for us to perceive the cosmos, the spatial venue for ritual, as being physically broad, yet spiritually narrow, closely knit, and easily upset. Physically, the cosmos accommodates millions of human beings. Spiritually, it accommodates legions of beings, both spirits of ancestors and those of deities. However, the gap between these levels of existence is reduced by acts of sacrifice. At all the levels of existence, beings are conscious that singular and individual actions of men can cause a temporary dislocation in time and space, a dislocation which can be corrected with the appropriate ritual.

Within the context of our discourse, we have said that ritual imagination refers to the making of a peculiar world view which considers all actions as transcendental phenomena. In other words, the communities presented in the plays consider all actions to have symbolic meaning in relation to the sacred. The world is perceived as a whole, a continuum that can be stable only with perpetual acts of appeasement and purification. The spiritual needs of such communities are satisfied by both individual and collective actions, usually done with communal approval. Lisbeth Grant isolates the constituents of ritual theatre thus:

First the emphasis is off the idea that there is a "story" to tell ... The question is not supposed to be, will people respond, but how. And ideally, it should be a flowing, spiritual one that allows them to feel a bond of some kind. The spectators are definitely supposed to take part in the ritual ... Third, there must be a message. Here there's a complete break with the notion of 'art for art's sake. The Art is used to set people thinking in a certain way for a certain goal. Fourth, usually certain phrases or words come up again and again, setting up some sort of rhythmic pattern. This may vary from a complete chant to a chorus ... built upon and re-influenced to a crescendo and finale⁴.

In our study of ^{the}ritual imagination, we have observed that certain features so articulately expressed by Grant occur and re-occur. These features - restoration of harmony between natural and supernatural forces; the struggle of mortal man against fate and destiny; the breaking of taboo; purification through sacrifice; and the Ritual-person as a hero - make up the ritual experience which Lisbeth Grant discusses.

The ritual imagination rejects profane interpretations of actions and events. Eliade's study of ritual society divides the world into the sacred and the profane, dwelling extensively on the ability of man to invest an object with sacred qualities, thereby transforming the objects from a secular to a sacred state. In our study of Greek drama, we are usually awed by the overwhelming presence of divine forces and their absolute control over fate and destiny. The ultimate lesson is that man must strive to maintain a balance between the world of matter and the world of spirits. For example, when Creon forbids the burial of Polynices in Sophocles' Antigone because he (Polynices) had committed a treasonable act against the state, he exercises his authority as King. However, this action is an affront on the gods prompting Antigone to say that 'justice that rules with the gods below knows no such laws'. Within the world of Antigone and Creon, such knowledge is meant

to guide the actions of man. Creon's tragedy is caused by his failure to acknowledge the supremacy of the gods in such a world. The closing words of the chorus in Antigone convey this view:

Of wisdom
The crownest and chiefest
Part is wisdom
And to hold the
Gods in awe (96).

the
This is ritual imagination.

The tragic story of Prince Hamlet is propelled by factors beyond the natural. Shakespeare's vision of the tragic is made more profound and awe-inspiring in Hamlet by the presence of the ghost. In Hamlet, we are awed by the ghost.

as the representative of that hidden power, the messenger of divine justice set upon the expiation of offences which it appeared impossible for man to discover and avenge, a reminder of a symbol of the connection of the limited world of ordinary experience with the vaster life of which it is but a partial appearance⁵.

The ghost commands Hamlet to avenge his death in order that the ghost may rest in peace in the ancestral world. According to A.H. Walter, it is this same understanding of the world which governs the actions in Macbeth. By usurping the throne, Macbeth disrupts a natural order thereby leaving the state in anarchy. King Duncan is God's own representative.

His death is therefore a challenge to the spiritual powers, Macbeth's torture after the incident and his death are punishment from the divine world. Walter states further that as a usurper, Macbeth's fate is no different from that of Claudius in Hamlet⁶.

This awareness and apprehension of cosmological forces is also present in the Biblical account of the Jews while they journey from Egypt to Canaan. Acts of pollution were either expiated for or punished by Jehovah. Any anomalous situation was immediately interpreted to mean displeasure incurred from Jehovah. An example of the manifestation of God's anger is when the Jews lose a battle to the men of Ai. When Joshua and his men cry to God for help, God instructs Joshua to 'sacrify the people' because there is an accursed man in their midst. Achan is later found to be the culprit who had incurred God's wrath by tampering with war spoils. Achan is killed in a ritualistic manner by being stoned to death. Only then is purity restored to the camp⁷.

The ritual imagination implies that any chaos or dislocation in the cosmos is the result of man's negative actions. In religious communities, such actions are referred to as sin. This awareness

compels man to perform acts of appeasement, and purification in order to restore harmony. Harmony with one's environment is necessary for human survival, hence mankind had always attempted to make his atmosphere conducive to growth and prosperity.

This awareness of man, this determination to divest his environment of evil forces relates to his view of the world as a source of potential conflict, of tragedy. Tragedy refers to a fatal dislocation in the world arising from man's failure to appease forces of the supernatural world. It refers to a dismemberment of the concatenated cosmos arising from acts of omission or failure, capable of destroying man. At such times, the world comes to a standstill and man's peril is further exacerbated by failure to save the situation by redemptive acts. By the law of collective pollution and responsibility, an individual's negligence is capable of throwing an entire community into chaos.

If, as we have observed, the ritual imagination aims to avert the tragic, then the tragic must lie in forces beyond man's control, forces which cannot be predicted and manipulated without resorting to some definite action. Sophoclean

tragedy puts fate and destiny in the hands of the gods, just as the tragic in ritual drama can be located within the capricious hands of supernatural forces lurking in the background of the selected plays of Clark, Rotimi, and Soyinka. In the consciousness of a ritualist therefore, there is always a greater force, a deity to whom acts of appeasement are directed.

The ritual imagination takes us into the inner and profound levels of experience, into man's cathartic state, his deep, spiritual consciousness in which material things are discarded. Elesin's leave-taking dance for instance exemplifies this state. Odewale's self-expulsion from Kutuje is another example; and Ozidi's thirst for fights reveals a mind more preoccupied with restoration than mundane things. It is the state in which sacred laws, laws of taboo and pollution govern such actions as waking up in the morning, giving birth, planting and harvesting. Finally, it is a world of nuances, of symbolisms and redemptive acts.

We had earlier on identified certain thematic strands which have provided us with a focal point in our study. Using these as a framework, we shall summarize the central ideas in our

discussions of the plays. Under the sub-title "Restoration of harmony through Revenge" we have examined Clark's Ozidi as an example of ritual drama, a drama whose plot is guided by the ritual imagination. Just as in Elizabethan drama, revenge in Ozidi is not private. Walter says that in Elizabethan times "private revenge was stigmatized as cowardly" and that "it was blasphemous in that it usurped God's power"⁸. Ozidi's action is meant to restore harmony at two levels - the level of the family and that of the community. When he pollutes himself while carrying out revenge, it is his mother Orea who purifies him as prescribed by the elders.

Ritual imagination is sustained in Song of a Goat which we have studied under the title "Archetypal struggle of Mortal Man against Supernatural Forces". In this play we find ingredient for dramatic irony and tragedy. A man, fully conscious of his duties to the ancestor-world restores his father's lost dignity and for this he receives punishment which makes him a laughing stock. Zifa defies all the soothsayers, firmly believing that the curse can be lifted. This act amounts to hubris, a challenge to the supernatural realms. His enactment for the annual family purificatory ritual soon becomes a catalyst for the tragic death of Tonye and himself.

Clark's drama-world therefore is one in which ritual forms the basis for a resolution of conflict. We had observed that this world appears remote from contemporary experience with all its fixed rules for moral and social conduct; it is indeed a practical world, closely knit, a reminder of the patterns of communal life in past African societies. But Clark extends the lessons to be learnt from such communities to contemporary life, by portraying actions and time-tested modes of behaviour.

We have also seen that in the plays of Ola Rotimi, there is the belief in the symbolic nature of actions and in an enduring concern for values which are transcendental. We have studied The Gods Are Not to Blame under the title "Archetypal struggle against Fate and Destiny", focusing on man's futile attempt to alter what the gods have decreed. Throughout the play, we are conscious of the gods operating in the background, manipulating men and achieving their goal.

"Taboo as a source of dramatic conflict" has provided us with a perspective on Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Rotimi's historical play which presents the Benin monarch's point of view in the cataclysmic events of 1897 in Benin. We have seen that the period when the white traders try to enter Benin is sacred

a time when the Binis are in communion with the ancestral world. "Since the well-being and prosperity of Benin people depended on this ritual, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi had a duty to ensure that it was correctly performed"⁹.

Rotimi seems to say that the collective wish and security of a people transcend individual concern because individuals cannot be at peace unless there is communal harmony.

We have seen, in selected plays of Wole Soyinka's that there is indeed a gulf between the different levels of existence. Under the title "The Ritual-person as a Hero", we have examined the role of Olunde and concluded that he is the hero in Death and the King's Horseman.

In The Strong Breed, the central concern is the annual purification ceremony performed in an unnamed village. Under the title "Purification through Sacrifice" we have seen that the community where Eman is born believes in a symbolic annual ritual which annually cleanses the community.

The drama-world of Wole Soyinka, the world of nuances, chthonic realms and complex symbolisms, daemons and imps, bestial dictators and redeeming heroes, is at once familiar and yet distant.

Familiarity is the result of the Africans' proximity to myth and folklore. The playwright has consistently presented this world-view using different characters as spokespersons. It is Soyinka's view that the Western world has become alienated from the 'essence', the deep nature of things. Brian Crow puts it succinctly:

This awareness in ritual or artistic theatre of the presence of cosmic forces of immense power and complexity with which the human community is inevitably involved (is) based on a world view which Soyinka believes the West has progressively departed from as it moved towards the dominant and characteristic outlook of scientific rationalism¹⁰.

Soyinka's drama, therefore, is a return to the roots.

In our discourse on ritual as a metaphor, we have argued that ritual does have relevance to contemporary experience. The central argument is that ritual could be a metaphor, a metaphor for the re-occurring phenomena in human affairs. From this perspective, we have found parallels between ritual actions recorded in the plays and contemporary experience.

Our study of the ritual imagination has taken cognisance of the three principal functions of ritual-propitiation, purification, and rejuvenation. All actions of the characters in the selected plays

perform one of the above stated functions.

The vehicle used to convey all the ideas in the plays is language, the language of ritual which is symbolic and esoteric. At different levels of meaning, we have seen images which are used to convey profound messages.

Two issues stand out clearly from this study. The first is that the protagonist who fails to perform the appropriate ritual action cannot be referred to as a hero. The protagonist in religious rituals is the priest, the man who is the human representative of a deity or the ancestral world. He presides over the ritual. Soyinka refers to his act as a 'loss of individuation', in order to bear the collective burden. In ritual-drama, the protagonist whose actions are meant to purify, propitiate, and rejuvenate emerges as a hero. If the protagonist fails to meet communal expectation, heroism cannot be attributed to him. Consequently, such characters as Olunde in Death and the King's Horseman, the Oba in Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and Eman in The Strong Breed, represent the heroic ideal. In contrast with these characters are Zifa in Song of a Goat, Elesin in Death and the King's Horseman, and Odewale in The Gods Are Not to Blame, characters whose actions or inactions pollute the community. Thus, in spite of the lead roles played

by these characters, they are no heroes within the
the
context of ritual imagination.

The second contribution of this study is that ritual indeed provides a framework and content for the works of these writers. In other words, the form of the plays is ritualistic in the sense that actions have transcendental relevance.

Any critic of ritual-drama whose work must be taken seriously has to penetrate the labyrinth of meanings, the sociological and environmental factors that have guided the playwrights' artistic vision, as we have done in this study. Such an understanding would also entail apprehending the characters' perception of the forces of the cosmos in order to successfully expand the frontiers of dramatic criticism. In other words, the structure of mind common to the playwrights must be understood in order to develop a theory which would guide critical perspectives. This structure of mind is what constitutes ^{the} ritual imagination. No doubt, if all human beings remain conscious that individual acts of deviance are capable of creating chaos, disharmony, and tragedy, the cosmos would be a more habitable environment for mankind.

END NOTES

1. W.S. Haney 11 - "Soyinka's Ritual Drama: Unity, Post-modernism and the mistake of the intellect". Research in African Literatures. Vol. 21, No. 2. (1990) p. 35.
2. We are of course, conscious of the different artistic temperaments of the writers.
3. Wole Soyinka. Myth, Literature and the African World. London; Cambridge UP, 1975. p. 122.
4. Elizabeth Grant. "The New Lafayette Theatre". The Drama Review. Vol. 16, No. 4. (Dec. 1972). p. 57.
5. A.C. Bradley. The substance of Shakespearean Tragedy. London: Macmillan, 1951. p. 141.
6. J.H. Walter. Hamlet: The Players of Shakespeare. London: Heinemann, 1972. p. 150.
7. The Holy Bible. Joshua Chapter 8, Verses 1-26.
8. J.H. Walter. Op. Cit. p. 325.
9. Kemi Omole. "Shifts in the Image of the Protagonist". M.Phil. dissertation, Department of English, University of Lagos, 1986. p. 12.
10. Brian Crow. "Soyinka and the Romantic Tradition". Before Our Very Eyes. Ed. Dapo Adelugba. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987. p. 152.

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APPENDIX I

Interview* with Chief Bakederemo of Kiagbodo,
Western Ijo, Bendel State, Nigeria, July 18th, 1978.

Preamble:

In the summer of 1976, my sponsors, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, enabled me to travel to Nigeria to participate in the inaugural Conference of Critics and Authors on African Literature, taking place on the Ibadan University Campus. After the conference, I seized the opportunity of my visit to Nigeria to travel to Kiagbodo in Western Ijo to interview J.P. Clark's father, the Bakederemo of Kiagbodo. This was part of my effort to gather biographical information on Clark which might be of help to me in the study of his plays.

An overnight stay at Warri, on the journey from Lagos turned out to be useful for my purpose as it afforded me the opportunity to visit Warri port which Clark recreates in The Raft as the elusive destination of the lumbermen. What immediately caught my attention here was the morning traffic on the river. There were rows of canoes coming into port carrying, I was told, goods from foreign ships which had been berthed at Forcados, on the Atlantic. There were also rows of canoes in mid-stream, carrying dried fish

and vegetables, bound down stream for Forcados, and there were many other canoes being loaded, in preparation for their journey to the various parts of the Niger Delta.

I told my friend who was taking me round the port that I admired how everybody I saw was very happy doing what he or she had to do. Then he explained: "These people you see - the canoe pullers, the load carriers and the semi-literate clerks who supervise the boys are all employed by local traders. These traders themselves buy the fish and vegetables cheaply from the adjoining villages and hire these labourers to carry them here on their heads. Now the fish and vegetables are being sent by water to Forcados, Burutu and Bomadi where they will be sold. In return the canoes will bring goods from these ports for the traders' shops".

But the lively atmosphere at the port unmistakeably showed that the wage-earners were happy people. In addition to their cheerful disposition, the effect on their appearance of toiling to survive in a society where even menial jobs are hard to come by, marks them out as the counterparts of Clark's lumbermen whose lot it is "to sow for others to reap". What further made The Raft real to me at the port was the sight of

logs strapped together in threes, waiting to be lifted one by one into a big enclosure where they were to be sawed into planks. My friend told me that the raft consisted of six to eight logs strapped together to form something like a float on the river. A makeshift tent is built on it to provide shelter for the lumbermen. All the logs I saw at the port had arrived there as rafts.

Travelling from Warri Via Ughelli to Kiagbodo, I was surprised by the similarity between Clark's setting in his plays and the human geography of the area, especially between Ughelli and Kiagbodo. Within the distance of twenty miles which separates these towns, there are ten villages. As close to one another as these villages are, each is securely out off from the other by thick forest. Before the British outlawed head-hunting, the traditional form of revenge of the Niger-Delta people, such forest between two villages must have been the scene of the head-hunting or ~~raid~~ that brings the anger of the gods on the Orua people (Ozidi). The experience also enabled me to visualise better what Clark's "Neighbours" in Ozidi mean when they say "Between them (Oreame and Ozidi the younger) they have emptied towns untold". Each of the towns must be imagined to be a village of between twenty to thirty houses, and all the 'towns' clustered within a small

radius, most probably smaller than that between Ughelli and Kiagbodo.

1. Question: Sir, why is it that your family name is English when, in fact, you are an Ijo?

Answer: Neither the name of my fathers nor that of my grandfathers was English. Let me tell you the history of my family from the time of our founding ancestors. His name was Maine, a brave warrior from Benin-City. He founded Gobi in Western Ijo where he begot Kor; Kor begot Oge; Oge begot Kalanema; Kalanema begot Mgbile; Mgbile begot Ogbolu; Ogbolu begot Aza; Aza begot Ozide, Ogide begot Aka, Ngbile founder of Kiagbodo begot Ogbenikiri; Ogbenikiri begot Ogben; Ogben begot Ayagba; Ayagba begot Apolo; Apolo begot Badey (a girl); Badey begot Ogbein; Ogbein begot Ambekederemo, shortened into Bakederemo (It means I laugh in my belly); Bekederemo begot Fuludu my father. So you see Fuludu is my name.

2. Question: How then did you come to be Clark?

Answer: As a child, I was said to be sickly. My father tried all he knew to cure me but he failed, He went from native doctor to native doctor, but none of them could cure me. Then a juju priest told him that I was not an Ijo,

that I came from overseas and unless my father gave me the white man's name, I would return to where I came from (meaning \odot he would die) and my father gave me Clark, the name of his European friend.

3. Question: Did you then get well?

Answer: Oh yes, immediately, and my father made sacrifice to the water deity in the creek (pointing to the back of his house).

4. Question: Talking about your father, was he a chief?

Answer: Yes! My father was a chief. He inherited his title. He was also a great trader; the first Nigerian to use an engine-powered boat in the Niger Delta. He was a rich man and well known in the whole of the Niger Delta.

5. Question: Did you then inherit your title?

Answer: Yes. Nobody can buy that.

6. Question: Then, Sir, what are your responsibilities as a chief?

Answer: My full title is Pere Bolokorowe of Ngbiler, that is "The strong man in front of the King". Without me the king cannot move. I am called "The huge rock that stems the flood of the mighty river".

7. Question: Coming from one end of Kiagbodo to the other, that is, to your house, I found that there were many shrines in the village. What are they for?.

Answer: They protect the people here from danger. The one in the hall is for the village deity. He is the most powerful god in Kiagbodo. In the olden days, whoever touched the shrine must be killed. But white men stopped that practice. Now we ask the person who commits the ritual pollution to appease the god with a cow.

8. Question: What about these images hung on the walls?

Answer: Aha! They are gods. They are household gods. But each has its own responsibility. They protect all the children in the house. The shrine for my father is at the back of that river (pointing). I go there in a boat once a year to give him sacrifice.

9. Question: How large is your family?

Answer: I have ten wives. Clark's mother is the most senior of them. I have thirty-five children.

10. Question: Seeing you now, Sir, I find that you and J.P. look very much alike. Have you noticed this?

Answer: People say all my children look like me. But J.P. is like my father.

11. Question: Reading through your son's books, one is easily convinced that he knows Ijo culture and that he has a great deal of admiration for that culture, and that he draws a lot from it to write his books. Could you, Sir, let me how he happens to know so much about Ijo culture?

Answer: Don't forget J.P. is born in a Royal Family where rituals and ceremonies are often performed. As a little child J.P. used to watch many of these. The masquerade is Ijo's most popular festival, and J.P. liked to watch it. Even as a big man in Lagos, he and Ebun (J.P.'s wife) used to come and watch it here. Masquerade festival takes place once in a year. But Segben is a powerful god whose worship takes place twice in the year. The celebration lasts for two weeks, within which time nobody must go to the bush. J.P. liked it very much

12. Question: Your son wrote a poem in which he expresses a great affection for his grandmother. Do you know about this?

Answer: I don't know about his book, but I know he was very much attached to my mother. The reason is this; when a child is born in Ijo his grandmother takes him away and cares for him. It was

my mother-in-law who took J.P. away when he was born. Unfortunately she died, and my mother had to assume responsibility for his care. Those were the early years of J.P. before he went to school so he grew up to love my mother instead of his own.

13. Question: I see, Did your mother ever go to hospital, because J.P. wrote about this in his poem?

Answer: Oh yes, I remember the time. I was then a Customary Court judge, and I went to Bomadi to preside over a case. J.P. came home and found that my mother was sick, then he took her to hospital. I was surprised to hear this when I came back from Bomadi. Many of us used to the hospital to see her. This is what you are talking about in J.P.'s book?

Answer: Yes Sir, it must be.

During my interview with Chief Bakederemo, he spoke about his father's shrine in Kiagbodo creek, and how the water-way merges with the great Forcados river which flows into the Atlantic Ocean. I asked if he could kindly let somebody take me to see the creek, and, to my surprise, he got up went into the room and came out within a few minutes, dressed for the walk. At the creek he showed me two boats, securely

• tied to two strong poles. He told me about Clark's boyhood truancy of slipping out of the house, and paddling a canoe from the creek as far way as where the creek and another meet and form a fast-flowing river.

14. Question: What did you do to prevent him from doing that?

Answer: Nothing. There was no need. His, He is an Ijo born. The Ijo does not die in the river.

15. Question: Why?

Answer: Because that is where he has his Great mother. She will take care of him. (Immediately my mind went to Ogro's words in The Raft, (page 117) and I said to myself "That must have been Clark himself talking about himself and the river").

The Chief took the opportunity to reveal to me that a child had been missing since July 16 (I was there on the 18th) and none had bothered to search for him in the river, because the Ijo people trust the river and not the bush.

• We returned from the creek, about five minutes walk to the Chief's house. I got his address and bid him goodbye and started back on my journey to Lagos.

*This interview was conducted by Dr. Z.A. Adejumo, who has kindly made the manuscript available to me.