

Towards a Universal Tragic Vision in J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat*

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Abstract

Often, attention is paid to the adjectives that modify some concepts rather than the concepts in themselves; African literature suffers from such a critical attitude. This is made worse by the lachrymal nature of African literature that repeatedly strives to defend itself against the alleged dominating influence of Western literary and critical hegemony. Saddled with such 'decolonizing' mindset, critics of African literature have always insisted that African literature is unique and distinct from the Western literary tradition, and as such should yield this African uniqueness at every moment. With that understanding, these critics incessantly search for those elements that differentiate, rather than unite, a work of African writing from the other literary works of other regions. Thus J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat*, for example has been labeled an African-oriented tragic work. This research therefore is focused, among other things, on debunking the Afrocentric positions on the said play to the effect that tragedy is of universal human impulse. This research will further examine the play; *Song of a Goat* using Arthur Miller's vision of tragedy as postulated in his 'Tragedy and the Common Man.'

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1. Introduction

In his 'History, Literature and Geography,' the postcolonial critic, Edward Said agrees with Antonio Gramsci that 'all ideas, all texts, all writings are embedded in actual geographic situations that make them possible' (Said 322). This critic seems to have agreed with Hippolyte Tanie's triadic literary factors that a literary piece is a composite of the message (it has), the moment (that produces it) and the milieu (where it has been given birth to). Similarly, Eunice Ngongkum succinctly enunciates it further by maintaining that literature must be situated within an 'identifiable geographical landscape' that creates it. This is the understanding that Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike have when they deprecate what they consider the Western imperialist tendency to generalize and homogenize both African and European literature as part of/legacy of the Western literary tradition taken almost to be a universal tradition. In an attempt to decolonize African literature which they believe is suffering from colonial hegemony, the troika insists that,

African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literature. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. (Chinweizu *et al.* xvi – xvii)

For its forthrightness, the above postulation is no less than a boon of 'Sophistry' from the perspective of this study. African literature, within the ambiance of this study, is of the universal tradition just like the literary outputs of other regions of the world; and *Song of a Goat* will be subjected to some critical appraisal to yield its *Africanness* which will not be found. The conclusion therefore is that a good work of art is that which fetches from the universal pool irrespective of its place of birth.

2. *Song of a Goat* and Markers of Africanity

The claim that the experiences of pain and suffering, some of the attributes of tragedy, are not universal and can be domesticated is such that is highly preened in the African worldview. Wole Soyinka believes so much in this, noting that the true meaning and experience of tragedy cannot be fully grasped using some universal literary principles. For him rather, 'cultural and private' experience of pain and suffering subsist in the full appreciation of tragedy ('Fourth Stage' 140). He locates a unique tragic form (Yoruba tragedy) in the mysteries of the Yoruba, a South-West tribe of Nigeria, cosmology. He maintains that the 'understanding of the Hellenic spirit, may mislead us, when we are faced with Yoruba art' (141). The Nobel laureate is succinct in proving how the Yoruba tragedy evolves and differs from the Western concept of tragedy in the areas of communion, music and language significantly.

If the endearing tendency of the above does not sway one away, it should be observed that the career of Obatala, the Yoruba god of creativity has a lot to share with Dionysius as Friedrich Nietzsche has observed. Similarly, Aristotle has identified plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle as the basic parts of tragedy which are not apparently 'different' from Soyinka's threesome above. Though Aristotle's postulations and study are on Greek tragedy, they have universal validity and appeal which can be applied even to Yoruba-oriented tragic works. Be that as it may, the presence of communion in the Yoruba tragedy is not new to western thought system either. Dionysius is a god of communion, which is even expressed in the nomenclature *Bacchus*, his Roman name. For once, Soyinka admits that 'suffering' is the constant, amidst other variables of tragic

experience(s). This suffering subsists in the hero's struggle to maintain his interior 'self dignity' that will imbue him with the 'true nobility of spirit' (154). This applies to Oedipus as it applies to Elesin Oba of Soyinka's *Death and the Kings Horseman* or Zifa of Clark's *Song of a Goat*. Hence Richard Sewall challenges us with his view of tragedy as 'the sense of ancient evil, the blight man was born for and the mystery of human suffering' (Sewall qtd in Akwanya 25).

The Nigerian playwright J. P. Clark is rather known more for his poems than his plays. However *Song of a Goat* has always been a 'controversial' tragic work which has generated heated arguments, basically as to whether it is a full blown tragic work or not. To some critics, it is not a full-fledged tragedy. For instance, Oyin Ogunba considers the giving up of a man's sexual duties to his younger brother too trivial a subject to carry a tragic atmosphere (Ogunba cited in Nwabueze 176). Similarly, Emeka Nwabueze sees it that *Song of a Goat's* incessant misinterpretation comes from the play being wrongly situated. Therefore, the play, for him is about the first Nigerian bourgeois drama given that it portrays 'middle-class characters as victims of complex social structures and heredity' (177). Here, Nwabueze does not consider the *Africanness* or otherwise of the tragedy of the characters; rather he focuses on the characterization—the life of the common Ijaw people rather than the life of the nobles which has always characterized tragic works. He however likens the play to the Greek tradition found in *Oedipus Rex* since Zifa's disaster is configured by fate. But he ranks Zifa below classical heroes because unlike the Greek heroes, 'Zifa does not confront that fate with fortitude' (178). As urbane as this presentation is, it has rather linked *Song of a Goat* to world literature and not show it as a unique African tragedy.

Though Douglas Killam and Alicia Kerfoot do not analyze *Song of a Goat* in detail, they achieve in intensity all that the other critics achieve in immensity when they ruled that the play lacks cultural affiliation with African literary tradition. They consequently see it as 'a tragedy in the Greek classical mode' (50). A more edgy and piqued critical stance is the one taken by Barbra Goff and Michael Simpson who believe that the structure of *Song of a Goat* is Greek while its content is domestic African. Hence, '*Song of a Goat* is generally held to invoke Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but bears only a passing resemblance' to it (Goff and Simpson 48). This argument is somewhat akin to my thesis in its endorsement of the universal tragic stream from which both Aeschylus and Clark can be yoked. But unlike my thesis, it locates the sameness of the play with the European model in the sociocultural and political history of Africa while my study examines the resemblance with a psychoanalytic lens, particularly Carl Jung's 'the collective unconscious.' In their finding, the 'political and cultural' atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s in Africa necessitated that our writers should parrot the European model of art making. The new independent nations of Africa found little or no 'historical precedent' for the cultural expression of their new identity, just as there are no standard and pre-existing forms in which the said expression can be articulated (231). In the face of such historical and cultural fissure, our earliest writers decided to turn to classical Europe for their model. It is in this sense that Per Wastberg maintains that 'the [first] African authors have at most a historical role, and are not nearly as significant in African literature as earlier European authors are for European literature (Wastberg 135). Having said this, Goff and Simpson go on to note that the ingenuity of Clark's *Song of a Goat* is not in presenting an authentic African structure of tragedy but in not imitating a single identifiable classical work like Wole Soyinka's *The Baccahe of Euripides*, Sutherland's *Edufa*, Osofisan's *Women of Owu*, and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. *Song of a Goat* 'seems consequently less engaged with such antecedents, even as it can be seen to invoke elements of several' (Goff and Simpson 231).

Osita Okagbue takes a deeper and more thoughtful approach to his study of *Song of a Goat*. He does not see any affiliation between the play and the Western convention of tragedy, though his position will contradict his premise; in fact, Clark's distinctiveness, for him, lies in the playwright's ingenuity in creating African choric personages in the characters of Zifa's 'neighbours' and 'village gossips' who play roles of the Greek chorus. This idea is conceived on the premise that these choric figures are concerned neighbours, though unrepentantly cynical, and meddlesome which presupposes that Africa is such a world built on communalism and collective ethos, a world where one man's tragedy becomes a communal trouble. It will be quite uncritical to substantiate that the use of '*concerned neighbours*' to comment on the development of events in a work is an insignia of distinctiveness. Seeing that the above may not justify the regional peculiarity of Clark as a writer and *Song of a Goat* as a text, the critic further concludes, given that Zifa's impotence is a divine affliction, that the distinctiveness of Clark's *Song of a Goat* is the question of 'inherited tragic destiny' (Okagbue 161).

How autochthonous and African can the idea of 'inherited tragic destiny' be when it is equally expressed in Western religion, mythology and literature? The Christian bible, for instance, has an Old Testament myth of the father having to eat a sour grape and the children's teeth set on edge (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2). Similarly, Greek mythology has a similar motif of three notorious houses: the House of Atreus, the House Cadmus and the House of Thebes which are plagued by generational and inherited curses for up to four generations respectively. This is to say the least of the Necklace of Harmonia fashioned by Hephaestus the blacksmith god of Greek Mythology, this necklace is meant to bring misfortune to any one in possession of it and it manifests tragedy through inheritance for more than eight generations. As a consequence, claiming that

inheritance, whether of an auspicious destiny is uniquely this culture or that culture either exposes one's ignorance about other cultures or one's arrogance in admitting elements of alien culture in his own culture.

Still on the journey of the search for *Africanness* in *Song of a Goat*, Chinyere Nwahunanya sets a subjective dichotomy between the works of African dramatists that are pure adaptations of classical works –Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* which has adapted Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* (Euripides' *The Trojan Women*), Efua T. Sutherland's *Edufa* (Euripides' *Alcestis*) –and the African plays that are independent of the European literary tradition. Thus he notes that,

In African literary drama, the exploration and expression of tragedy does not in all cases necessarily derive from the influence of the works read by early African dramatists.... Rather, it is basically the consequence of the shared experience of man in the universe, arising from what Carl Jung calls 'the collective unconscious' of the race. (213)

Beginning with such profundity, Nwahunanya prods us to expect the subsequent arguments to justify the premise, but what we see is a seemingly false solemnity when he identifies Clark's *Song of a Goat* as a tragic work that is uniquely African because the spiritual and psychosocial realities in the play are all from the 'cosmological configurations' of the authentic African world view. He further explains these differences below:

In Europe, childlessness in marriage may be a non-issue, but in Africa, because of the premium placed on children and succession, a childless marriage, or one that produces no male offspring, may be seen in many African cultures as tragic. This is the worldview that informs the dramatic action in *Song of a Goat*. (214-5)

In other words, the tragedy of Zifa is his impotence which impedes the continuity of his lineage which is central in African sense of well being unlike in the European world view where such an issue as infertility or childlessness is no issue at all. There is no gainsaying that the pros and cons of this position are not considered nor is the position motivated by a similar position taken by other critics like Martin Esslin who insists that, 'the motivation of the tragedy, which is simply the husband's inability to engender a child, is far too simple and unoriginal to support the weight of full-scale tragedy' (Esslin qtd in Nwahunanya 215). A critic should do better than accept public opinion. Moreover, the history of human civilization has countless instances to show that majority, without any fear of overgeneralization, is not always right. The trial and crucifixion of Christ is one example; the geocentric-heliocentric arguments of the position of the earth is another example, and the geographic location of India to mention just three have all shown that the majority can always be wrong.

Nwahunanya and Esslin respectively seem not to realize that *Song of a Goat* is entirely enmeshed in the universal literary convention. From the title, we understand that the word 'tragedy' has its root in the Greek word *tragoidia* which is actually a blend of two Greek words—*tragos* (goat) and *oidos* (song) –meaning goat song. In any case, the connection between song and goat is still a bit controversial, a confusion that emanates basically from translation error not inherent in the concept. For some scholars, the song refers to a special song sung during the ritual sacrifice of a goat to Dionysius; to others, it is a song for the goat prize which is always what is given to the winning artist in City Dionysia and other public festivals (Sorkin 18); it could as well be the song of the 'goat chorus' –satyrs who perform *Saturikon*. Justina Gregory explains that this connection maybe because of the hairy nature of the actors' costume that seems like a goat or their prurient nature which reflects the creature being impersonated (28). Whatever controversy that translation has introduced into the interpretation of the concept is immaterial; the material thing is, as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz believes, that a sense of sacrifice is always present in every Dionysian ritual and festival. For Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood,

The word *tragodos*, which denoted above all a member of the tragic chorus (though it was also used for the tragic poet and actor), means, according to its most widely accepted and best interpretation, either "singer at the sacrifice of a billy goat (*tragos*)," or "singer for the prize of a billy goat" – or both together, since the prize animal would have been sacrificed to Dionysus. A singer at the sacrifice of a billy goat makes perfect sense, since in Greek ritual practice songs, hymns, were indeed sung at sacrifices. (15)

Now, Clark has adopted *Song of a Goat* as his title and it features affiliation with goat on three different levels.

- (1) There is a sacrifice of a life goat on the stage at the course of the play, a practice that subjective sources have revealed to be obtainable equally in the Ijaw culture of the riverine area of South-South Nigeria where Clark himself is from.
- (2) There is the characterization of the characters in the light of sacrificial scapegoatism that will pay for the sins of an iniquitous generation. Almost all the characters can be viewed with that lens.
- (3) The characters, particularly Ebere and Tonye, are equally presented in the randy nature of goats.

That notwithstanding, Kofi Agovi's 'The Vision of Tragedy in Contemporary African Theatre' shows what qualifies Clark's *Song of a Goat* as an African tragedy as not so much of Zifa's impotence as it is of his refusal to consent to the Masseur's solution. This opinion is informed by his idea that tragedy in Africa is engineered by the brawny respect that Africans have for human 'life, its continuity and survival' (24). For Agovi, the above idea is at the heart of African world view. To this effect, procreation is a serious matter in African tragic universe as long as it disrupts the African 'social sense of corporate identity' (Agovi 29). Thus if there is a

threat to family continuity –the rationale behind the emphasis Africans place on male children, then tragedy is promised not just for the affected family but for the community at large. Zifa, for him, is blind to his social responsibility which creates a discrepancy between the individual and social interest and ends in trifling with both his family and social integrity. In concluding the research work, Agovi insists that,

A universal tragic vision cannot exist in a vacuum; nor is it an intellectual abstraction, unrelated to the reality of man's cultural life. Tragedy must always define those who espouse its vision; it must reflect their real life concerns and involvements; it must embody their fundamental assumptions about life and existence, including their attempts to preserve the integrity of their culture. (Agovi 38)

If this is Agovi's basis for discussing *Song of a Goat* as an African tragedy, then it is a huge contradiction because it is basically Friedrich Nietzsche's view of tragedy. In his *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche postulates the concept of *principium individuationis* (the principle of individuation) as a modality of tragedy. For Nietzsche, the development of art is tied to the dialectics of either the 'Apollonian and/or the Dionysian' elements respectively (*The Birth* 11) just as reproduction is tied to either the X or Y sex chromosomes. These two Greek gods are gods of creativity and 'artistic force' that emanate from nature itself. Dionysius, as the Greek god of wine, is known for 'collective unity' and revelry while Apollo, the Greek god of wisdom and prophecy, is reputable for his individuation. So every writer follows either the 'Apollonian dream' or the 'Dionysian intoxication.' Nietzschean tragic hero embodies the spirit of Apollo just as Agovi has also identified. A call for compromise is always made to such a tragic character; but his career is such that he must stand alone from the position of his community. By this, he makes himself vulnerable to calamity. Such a call is made to Zifa in *Song of a Goat* just as it is made to Pentheus the son of Cadmus in Euripides' *The Bacchae* or Eman in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, but because of who they are and 'the quality of soul' they possess, conformity is not to be found in them—of course the destiny of a tragic hero subsists in his being marooned in a fixed environment, be it the nascent capitalist American environment as is Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the dangerous man-eating Irish Island as is Maurya in Synge Millington's *Riders to the Sea*, and the 'metaphysical African landscape' as is Eman in Soyinka's *Strong Breed*, that cannot be altered despite his courage and struggle to change it. If Zifa's undoing is his nonconformity, I see no convincing difference between Nietzsche's *principium individuanis* and Agovi's *non-conformism to the integrity of his [Zifa's] culture*. All the reviews above have not been able to successfully displace the belongingness of *Song of a Goat* to a universal tragic vision or its unique existence as a work of African tragedy. We will then proceed to show how *Song of a Goat* belongs to universal tragic ideas wherein its *literariness* lies.

3. Song of a Goat and the Universal Tragic Ideals

The Greek tragedy has some modalities which are evidently structural elements that are identifiable and sometimes anticipated, or even correctly predicted by the audience since their theatre is communal in nature and the stories are common among the people. For classical tragedies, the chorus engages in an ode or in-between incidents; here the chorus reflects on the action of the characters, links it to the 'founding laws of the universe' and human world; they show man's helplessness in the hands of fate and gods; they lament also man's limitation especially in his (man's) inability to understand these laws or to alter the course of these laws or even to escape the consequences of violating these laws (Akwanya 22). In *Song of a Goat*, we see Zifa's neighbours playing that role of the chorus. When Orukorere alerts the community of the impending danger on her household, it is actually the neighbours who first foreground the potential tragedy when the first inquires if someone is about to die or if Zifa's house is on fire. And the third neighbor confirms the oddity of Orukorere's clairvoyance (SG 15). If we agree with R. B. Martin (as contained in Akwanya) that literature is a 'way of looking at the world' –not the world as it is in reality rather a vision of the world, then the universal tragic vision holds that,

The situation of man is imposed by forces or laws which are beyond his power to influence; and his tragedy is that he cannot get out of this situation, no matter what.... Tragedy sees the world in terms of the limitations inherent in its constitution, and notices the individual who, divided between acquiescence and struggle, takes his chance with the latter, even though it entails great suffering and perhaps death. (Akwanya 45/48)

He contrasts this view of the world from the comic vision of the world where the universe exists for man and responds to his needs because his situation is configured around 'man-made social reality.' Arthur Miller confirms this boundless limits to tragic occurrence in his 'Tragedy and the Common Man.' Although Miller is comparing tragic personages to the effect that both the noble and the common man are apt subjects of tragedy, I want to wrench it a bit to show that tragedy cannot be regionalized, hence fire hurts and ravages in the tiny village of Nigeria as it does in a mighty city of France. For Miller, psychologists pick their primary psychic assumptions from noble personages, so that we have such concepts as 'Oedipus complex, Orestes complex,' Electra complex or even Cronos complex yet they apply to both the common and the nobles (Miller 1).

Song of a Goat's small fishing Deinogbo community is both a 'stable cosmos,' and an 'unchangeable environment' (Miller) that promise no salvation for anyone marked out for destruction by divine will. Here, Zifa

is marooned in the middle of this harsh situation of impotence by forces beyond his influence. This is not to exonerate Zifa from being responsible for what has befallen him. Of course the ‘fundamental contradiction’ which subsists in the philosophy of monism holds here equally. In this philosophical view, like the Greek world, there is an apparent lack of primordial distinction between good and evil; this is part of Zifa’s fixed reality. His father is a wicked man who kills within and without the community. In African ethical standard, killing is never allowed, but to a reasonable extent, killing outside the community or killing a stranger for a justifiable reason like appeasement of the gods for the preservation of the life of the entire community is not unethical. But the killing with grave consequences is the shedding of one’s clansman’s blood. In the time of war, human dignity is forgone; the killing between Okperi and Umuaro in Achebe’s *Arrow of God* is out of it. Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* returns home with five human heads, it is never counted for him as murder. Okonkwo, against the warning of Ogbuefi Ezeudu, kills Ikemefuna. Umuofia people still do not count it as a murder case against him because it is actually a retributive kind of killing, given that Ikemefuna is actually the scapegoat that will propitiate for the daughter of Umuofia killed by the Mbanta people, Ikemefuna’s people. But it is counted as a female murder, *ochu* for Okonkwo when he inadvertently kills Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s son. He is sent on seven years exile in Mbaino and all he has is destroyed to appease the land. It would have been life exile had the murder been intentional (male murder). This is to show the extent to which Africans regard the death of a clansman in the hands of a fellow clansman, especially for no justifiable course. Zifa’s father kills both within and without the community with reckless abandon. For this he has been inflicted with the swelling of the stomach by the gods. Whether his illness has a link with his nefarious activities or not is impertinent, the important thing is that the people believe this ailment to be a punishment from the gods. Given that he is a wicked man, the people see it as good riddance. He is just good for the evil forest where he ought to belong as such he deserves no funeral rite; but Zifa goes and recalls his spirit home to give repose to his wandering spirit.

Zifa’s action is motivated by the fear that the spirit of his father may be angry with him if allowed to roam *unreposed*. But like every tragic victim in such a society where monistic philosophy reigns supreme, Zifa’s action is neither good nor bad since that single action brings good and evil consequences. So Zifa is both innocent and guilty in Northrop Frye’s vision. His woe is not so much in the impotence imposed by some spiritual forces but in the fact that he cannot wriggle out of it no matter his attempt and he cannot accept it either because of the social stigma that will come with it. His greatest conflict therefore is not just the quandary of either accepting his sexual weakness or struggling against it, but also the inevitability of not struggling against it, even if that will destroy his life and that of his household which he has consciously worked to preserve. The option of not being passive and going with the social norm at this point in time is not much of Zifa’s strength of will and character, in fact Zifa is almost a ‘weakling’ when the will and courage of ideal tragic characters –even in African writings –are considered. Zifa is not anywhere close to Okonkwo or Elesin Oba in Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* in courage and quality of soul but what is driving him is his reputation, dignity and self-image before his community not necessarily his courage to overcome this inevitability. This society and her opinion constitute a major factor in the shaping of the characters’ consciousness. The characters are more interested in how the community perceives them than how they actually are. Ebieri’s worry initially is not so much of her sex starvation or her having to cope with just a child, Dodo. It is more premised on her image before her polemic community represented by her neighbours and other village gossips that play judgmental roles just like the chorus in the classical Greek plays as earlier noted. She laments her misery after the certitude of her wholeness by the crippled healer:

Oh, how I wish I’d die, to end all
This shame, all this showing of neighbours my
Fatness when my flesh is famished. (SG 4)

Ebieri considers death a milder option than the shame of being robust and complimented by all only to be mocked by the same admirers for the bluntness of her husband’s ‘beak.’ There is no sanity in washing one’s dirty linen outside but the case here is beyond just some whimsical laundry analogy. Even her own family is not a trusted ally when her self-image and dignity are at stake. At this point, Masseur feels that Ebieri has gone extreme, especially as the dignity she is trying to protect has been ruffled already. The healer feels that Ebieri should inform her people, given that one person’s problem is considered the problem of the entire family owing to African kinship system of existence. And so he cautions sagaciously:

...you ought to have let your people know.
There is no shame in that. Worse things
Have been seen before. Why, even leopards go lame. (SG 4)

In most African world view, the individual’s public image drives the consciousness and disposition of the individual; this ideal is a general rule to which many exceptions which may not be obvious to me may exist. Thus in Ngugi Wa Thiong’O’s *The Black Hermit*, Thoni, the inherited wife of Remi will not remarry majorly because of what the neighbours will think of her, yet Remi is not ready to endorse and consummate his

traditional betrothal with Thoni, the wife of Remi's deceased brother. Even when Nyobi, Thoni's mother-in-law has given up the hope of waiting for her son to return, following her son's cultural apostasy and has consequently endorsed that the young widow should remarry, Thoni cannot still face her highly critical community. In fact death for her is a softer option than the derisory attitude of her community; she tells her mother-in-law, in response to the latter's insistence on her leaving Remi and marrying another man:

A woman without strength or learning...
I cannot now go to a third husband.
I cannot roll from hand to hand,
A public ball, or a common whore,
Making myself cheap before the world.
Rather than that,
I shall die and have the grave for a bed. (*TBH* 4-5)

I'm not unmindful of Richard Dowden's postulation that 'every time you say "Africa is..." the words crumble and break. From every generalization you must exclude at least five countries' (Dowden 10); however, I want to risk claiming that in the traditional African world view, the individual's image as perceived by his/her community is a strong benchmark in molding the consciousness of that individual. Hence Zifa's fear when Masseur warns him to go to Ebieri with caution because she is in deep fury, confirms that he is afraid of the implications of the healer discovering his sexual weakness, though the Masseur is the one to correct the anomaly. By implication, Zifa wants to deceive the community, including Masseur to direct their accusing finger at Ebieri while he tries to sort out his inadequacies, if not, why does he not come for treatment first in Masseur's place? Masseur assures him that his secret is intact but proves that the facts are obvious for all to see. He in fact proffers an option that will seal the secret perpetually from their community. But this latter suggestion will dishevel Zifa's self-esteem more than anything in the world. At this moment, Zifa's individual whim and egotistic nature becloud him from the implication of his refusal to accept Masseur's option. This reaction is only expected of a man whose rearmost machismo is soon to be mortgaged. Why does Ebo in Achebe's *Arrow of God* go as far as killing one of the Umuaro's emissaries when he (the man killed) tries to make fun of the former's impotence?

One may be tempted to saying that Ebieri's rash and tactless execution of Masseur's injunction, which she considers abominable initially, is an act of revenge on her thoughtless husband who will send her to be cured of an illness that he, not she, has just to massage his ego before his community. And then that her sporadic and brazen infidelity is the only way to prove her case that she is not the cause which is the hypothetical accusation that every African society will level on a woman in any instance of infertility. But it is even more objective not to imagine that Ebieri is saddled with the burden of continuity when he seduces Tonye to bed, what critics use to account for her rude act. Perhaps that is another way, though a very remote way to look at it. I will rather agree with the psychoanalysts that Ebieri's outburst is an outward response to a psychic stimulus, which is the return of repressed drives. She has repressed her sexual desire to an extreme because of her social image. Consider Ebieri's fixation and hypersensitivity in the third movement, the scene she baths Dode her son. The composed Ebieri epiphenomenally becomes cantankerous: hits the lad Dode unprovoked, snaps at Tonye wantonly. Ebieri is already traumatized, torn between loyalty and personal satisfaction. In most cases, the repressed returns with 'a carryover effect.' This is to say that she has become a maniac at this point. So it doesn't matter what the character does; he or she is capable of any irrational act at that moment because s/he is no longer in control of the action embarked on at that time. Thoni's repression returns in *The Black Hermit* in the form of suicide. She hangs herself after Remi openly jilts her who has waited fallow for him for donkey's years. Ebieri's own repression returns as infidelity. This repression also returns with a plan of elopement with Tonye, her brother-in-law. For Ebieri, nothing matters in the whole wide world any more. The much craved-for-seed has been planted in her. The sexual starvation she has been suffering has been gratified. The future then shrinks into a tiny ball that can house just Tonye and her, and the story will supposedly end with: *and they lived happily ever after* like one tale in the Arabian legend, *One Thousand Nights*. Ebieri's filial duties as a wife is beside the point now, whatever happens to Zifa makes no difference now, whatever happens to Dode is immaterial, after all he has his big mother, Orukorere. Because of the extended family system in Africa, biology is a tiny gauge to measure motherhood. Adjectives of size, age or place are equally strong benchmarks of motherhood; a child grows up to know of many mothers: big mother, small, old mother, village X or Y mother, especially in a polygamous or extended family setup. So Dode, like everyone in that household calls and sees Orukorere as his mother though she is Zifa's aunt. So it won't be of strong consequence if Orukorere should nurture Dode in Ebieri's absence.

Amid the two ominous signs that portend the inevitability and in fact the imminence of tragedy, Ebieri cannot wake up from her revelry. The first sign is Orukorere falling down in the second movement during her usual chimera. In African cosmology and ethnophilosophy, when an elder falls down in his compound, it is a harbinger of doom; such a person rarely survives whatever injury he sustains from that fall. It's a symbolic thing seeing that Africa is beyond a mere 'geographical description'; Africa in this sense is a 'metaphysical landscape' (Achebe). Here, the neighbours who play choral role are very sensitive to the symbolic action of Orukorere's fall

than Zifa who is supposedly the father of the house. While calling the attention of all to the imaginary goat being devoured by another hallucinated lion, she falls. The neighbours sense the danger immediately:

TONYE: She has fallen, she has fallen!

THIRD NEIGHBOUR: This is strange.

FIRST NEIGHBOUR: More than strange.

SECOND NEIGHBOUR: Zifa, you really must do something.

ZIFA: Do what? Put her in a room with goats.... (SG 17)

This sign is the forerunner of the big thing that is to happen in the third movement. After Ebiere's act of adultery, a cock crows in the noon. In a traditional African society, such a cock will not be allowed to live because it is not customary for cocks to crow in the day. It will be caught and killed with the resolve that the death of the cock has a redeeming dimension toward whatever tragedy that would have originally happened. In the midst of these unusual occurrences, Ebiere is interested in having Tonye again that night on the premise that Zifa's other ship will arrive that same day. She consequently talks carelessly including suggesting that they elope:

I am so happy. Tonye, let's fly

And set up house in another creek. You'll

Cast your net and I'll hold the stern until

We have our child. (SG 35)

Ebiere is happy that she has been forbidden from going to the market that day though she does not know why; she sees another avenue for her illicit affair to go on once again.

We have established that Zifa's tragedy is not so much of his impotence but in his inability to conform to the solution that will keep his weakness perpetually sealed from people's knowledge or his inability to live with that which he cannot change. Again from Arthur Miller, we understand that the tragic feeling is promised when we confront an individual who is willing to lay down his life for a course he believes in which he can neither surmount nor leave uncontested. Zifa is assured that the usurpation of his sexual roles is morally wrong, but ethically right provided it is done in accompaniment of the necessary rituals and purificatory rites –if only he will not mind the concomitant infamy. The Masseur wants to alter a fixed situation but Zifa is ready to lay down his life for this course even when he has been assured that the practice can be legitimized with the necessary rituals. Masseur cautions him:

You are eaten up with anger but although

You crush me, a cripple, between your strong

Hands, it will not solve your problem. What I

Suggest our fathers did not forbid even in the days

Of old. Why, the hippopotamus wants

A canoe, it also wants paddles. (SG 12)

Orukorere pleads with Zifa to let his brother be since they will ritually cleanse the house of the seeming adultery. Zifa is not just ready to lay down his life; he is also ready to claim another's life for this course. During the experimental sacrifice of a goat, which for Orukorere is meant to purge the house of Ebiere's adultery and incest but for Zifa is meant to ascertain the veracity of his suspicion as to whether his younger brother Tonye has in earnest usurped his sexual role or not, Zifa psychologically convicts his brother of adultery by asking him to force the large head of a goat into the small pot. It may be a symbol of the younger Tonye (being represented by the tiny pot) taking over the sexual responsibility of his elder brother (also represented by the large goat head) which results in the destruction of the pot and metaphorically the destruction of each other and the entire household. But Zifa thinks more of his personal dignity than the consequence of an attempt to reclaim an already lost dignity, and so goes after the fleeing Tonye ignoring all the plea and restraints by Orukorere. He swears,

Now, he is fled in and barred the door.

I shall not let him escape me. I will

Break open the door, break it and get at

This monster. Now will you come out, thief,

Noon-day thief. (SG 38)

For Zifa, and for every tragic hero found in any culture, his life is not as important as his 'sense of personal dignity' (Miller). This lost dignity is what drifts this individual from his rightful place; so that the attempt to reclaim that shattered poise is the attempt by the character to gain his rightful place in the society that is bent on keeping this individual displaced. Zifa laments to his brother, his shame as a result of his windswept decorum before the neighbours since it is now an open secret that Tonye ravages his elder brother's wife. Tonye has the residing knowledge that he is not a noon-day thief as Zifa paints him to be. He is only an opportunist, if not a concerned brother, saddled with the burden of a messiah who will save the immediate family and safe guard posterity threatened extinction. To that, he retorts that if Zifa should leave his piece of cloth carelessly in the open at night, that there is endless possibility to it as to what will become of the cloth. The wind may either carry the cloth, rain may fall on it or some nocturnal creatures will frolic with it. Zifa's misgiving is just his

insulted stateliness which is what he is out to avenge nothing more:

And I'll tell you the sun although
It dries the cloth, never assumes it. But
You have, you have, and left me naked
Before our enemies. (SG 38)

One will think that Tonye is responsible for Zifa's impotence the way he is berated by his brother. Zifa will rather prefer that Ebieri wait for his weakness to be cured, though that is most unlikely. In any case, even if his cloth (wife) is left in the open at night, must his own brother usurp him to the point that he is left naked before their enemies, these enemies who dare not look at their household when their father is alive will now make him a subject of mockery. When Zifa thinks of the implication of this to his public image in the community, he feels pervasively displaced. Miller insists that this displacement need not always be a struggle for the individual to maintain his rightful place, as in Zifa, Elesin Oba or Okonkwo, but also in the struggle of the individual to attain this rightful place in the first place as is the case with Willy Loman in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

Zifa's struggle is to take back his place, his place as the first son of the family, the man of the house in the absence of their father, and above all the husband of Ebieri which his younger brother seems to be rapidly taking from him. The first son of every African family assumes the father figure once the father is dead. Prior to his ailment, Zifa has perfectly fit into all of those paradigms and more. But here, once usurped in one respect of these sets of duties, he is displaced in the rest. He is displaced in his sexual duties to his wife; he loses out in the traditional deference that his wife and younger brother ought to show him, which is important to every male African adult. He returns from the sea to meet his brother sleeping not just at odd hour of the morning but on his bed. At first, Zifa suspects many things but lacking in the evidence to advance any of his suspicion, he decides to ignore the anomaly. But his wife's uncouth disposition that morning confirms Zifa's suspicion to a large extent. She forbids Zifa from waking Tonye up and consistently refers to Tonye as 'the man.' Zifa's confusion is that Ebieri has always called Tonye a boy, and a bad one at that. In Zifa's bewilderment we have a musing that reveals the internal conflict going over the mind of a confused husband, which for elucidation sake, I will recreate in detail:

I cannot believe it, I just cannot;
Eyes may as well see ears and night, day. My
Own brother who I have looked after
As a son, if it is true, I'll cut off his
Neck with my cutlass. Yet there he was sprawled on
My bed when I thought he was still out
Inspecting hooks in the bush.

Even at this point in his despondent soliloquy, he is yet to accept the fact that he has been cuckold. Yet every evidence seems to announce that. He goes on worrying:

And when I would call up the boy,
She comes between us holding my hand
With the injunction, oh let the man sleep
.... The man!
When did he become man to her?
With her, he was always the bad boy to
Be bullied and scolded....
Now she stands
Guard over him in my bed against me.
I'll kill them both if it is true. (SG 30)

Zifa's situation is best described in the African proverbial antelope that audaciously comes to the lion, the king of the jungle, to demand its money that the lion owes it just because the lion suddenly has gone lame and potentially harmless. Zifa has found himself in such a state as the above lion; he tries to control his temper, even swears to Orukorere that he will not do anything rash so that the sacrifice of the goat can go on. Although the tragic hero is always marred with a flaw which varies from character to character –inordinate ambition for Macbeth, blind non conformity for Julius Caesar, self delusion for Willy Loman, and so on –these flaws according to Arthur Miller are nothing compared to the characters' inherent 'unwillingness to remain passive.' For all the caution of Orukorere who is like a mother to the whole household, Zifa drives his wife to miscarriage and perhaps death through profuse bleeding; and his younger brother to suicide and finally drowns himself –the kind of thing we see in William Shakespeare's bloody tragedies like *Hamlet*. To this, the Canadian-theologian critic, Northrop Frye will conclude that Zifa is a victim of exclusion. For Frye,

The root idea of pathos is the exclusion of an individual on our own level from a social group to which he is trying to belong. Hence the central tradition of sophisticated pathos is the study

of the isolated mind, the story of how someone recognizably like ourselves is broken by a conflict between the inner and outer world, between imaginative reality and the sort of reality which is established by a social consensus. (Frye 39)

If this is the case, then the tragedy is Zifa's as it is Ebiere, Tonye's and Orukorere's respectively. It is Zifa's tragedy seeing that Zifa is excluded from the community of his wife that he wishes to belong to. It is Ebiere's tragedy because she too has been excluded from the community of her dreamed numerous children for which she has undertaken the 'ambiguous adventure' that devastates her. The tragedy is equally Tonye's since he too is excluded from the family he wishes to belong. It is even more tragic for Orukorere who is an invalid and a social misfit. She is not married; she cannot interact very well in the community because everyone sees her as either deranged or possessed. Now there is nobody to take care of her and the little lad, Dodo

4. Conclusion

We have looked at tragedy from different traditions and different cultures. We have seen that art, especially tragedy is more universal than domestic hence the tragic modalities we identified are able to account for works of art across cultures. We saw J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* and some nuances peculiar to its tragedy. The thesis of this work is that those things identified in the play are peripheral to the identity of the play as literature. The hallmark of the play's literariness is its identification with other tragic works one some universal models like sacrifice and so on. This leads us to conclude that those universalizing models belong neither to the Western world nor the African world, rather to humanity in general. To this, the African critics reviewed and the outcome of the reviews show that one has to be very careful in carrying out classification, to say that this artifact belongs to this or that culture. Culture, no doubt, may vary but that is only at the peripheral level; the underlying principle that establishes every society is similar, if not the same. Above all, if the critics of African literature still maintain that *Song of a Goat* is uniquely an African tragedy, then it has gone beyond literary criticism into a political affair.

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