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John Pepper Clark

Ozidi

United Kingdom (1966)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Ozidi
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1966
First Edition Details	John Pepper Clark, *Ozidi*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
ISBN	978019211375
Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



John Pepper Clark , b. 1935
(Author)

John Pepper Clark is a Nigerian poet, essayist, critic and playwright, whose writings mostly focus on mythology and African traditions, especially his Ijaw traditional practices. He studied at the University of Ibadan, where he obtained a degree in English in 1960. With this degree, he became a journalist for the Nigerian government. From there, he moved to Princeton University, on a grant. When he returned to Nigeria, he became a lecturer in the University of Lagos. He has written a number of works, amongst which are the collections of poems: *Collection of Poems* (1962), *A Reed in the Tide* (1965), *Casualties: Poems* (1967), *Decade of Tongues* (1981), and *Mandela and Other Poems* (1988). His plays include *Three Plays* (1964), featuring, *Song of a Goat*, *Masquerade and Raft*, and *Ozid*i (1966).

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Additional information

Summary

In *Ozidi*, J. P. Clark depicts a series of crises in the state of Orua. The play begins with the Story-Teller, who reminiscences the death of six kings in four years in the state of Orua. The Story-Teller also relates the need for a new king on the vacant throne. The council of elders of the land (Ofe, The Short, Azezabife, The Skeleton, Agbogidi, The Nude and Oguaran, The Giant) do not listen to the elders' plea that time be taken to select a new king. On their own decision, they proceed with the selection. Ozidi's family is selected but he contradicts the decision for two reasons: his mother is not ready for such tasks on her family and he cannot be the king, when his brother, Temugedege, is still alive. Opposing Ozidi's claim, Temugedege accepts to be king. Excited by his new status, he fails to notice that he is not given the respect due to kings and his coronation rituals have been truncated. However, Ozidi brings it to his knowledge. Given that he is short-sighted; he dismisses Ozidi's views. Although he dismisses Ozidi's view, he decides to heed part of Ozidi's observation and dissolves the council of the state and replaces it with a caretaker committee of seven virgins. At this stage, he starts exaggerating his behaviour as king: he asks Ozidi to arrange different tributes, yams, a hundred barrels of palm oil and hand-woven clothes to give him. With this, Ozidi laments what his brother has become and blames it on the family curse. As Ozidi is adamant to performing Temugedege's tasks, Temugedege warns him that he stands the chances of being punished for not respecting the king.

Still enraged by the poor coronation given his brother, Ozidi gets mad at the people of Orua and reminds them of his great deeds for the land, in different epochs. He warns them of what he might do to them, if they do not change. His intimidation creates fear in the state and Ofe, one of the members of the council of the state, plots with other councillors to deal with Ozidi. His plan is to heed Ozidi's demand and submit himself to the offering of a lion's head as a leeway to capturing him. He is certain that if they go for a hunt, Ozidi will follow and they will terminate him in the forest. On the day of the hunt, Ozidi's wife, Orea, warns him of the ill omen that she has perceived. She has seen a lizard moving out of their family shrine. However, Ozidi does not heed her advice and goes out for the hunt. In the forest, the members of the council surround Ozidi, in order to execute their plot. Ozidi tries to resist but submits himself to them. Consequently, they chop off his head.

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A messenger tells Orea that Ozidi has been injured but, sensing that her fears that Ozidi has been murdered may be true, decides to offer medicine for his injured leg. The messenger refuses. She sobs and sees the king, Temugedege, but he does not agree to her claims that Ozidi is dead. On the contrary, he thinks the hunters are to bring great tribute to him, under Ozidi's leadership. Soon, it comes to the knowledge of the whole state that Ozidi is no more. Orea is weakened by the news and plans to die. However, the king persuades her to spare her life. Further, an old woman appears and tells her to preserve Ozidi's son that she carries so that he may grow and avenge his father's death. As a result, she decides to flee the village to Ododama, Oreame's mother's home.

After seven days in the new land, there is thunder, rain, storms, and sunshine and Orea delivers a son. These natural elements that welcome the child, show that he is to become a great son of the state. The child, unlike other children, has strange powers and is good at archery. Such strange strength attracts neighbours' jealousy and they insult the young boy by referring to him as a bastard. Angered by provocations, he asks his mother and grandmother to explain his origin and why has he not been named. They tell him that his father will soon come and that he will soon have a name.

In the meantime, his grandmother, Oreame is happy about the young boy's skills and decides to further strengthen him with magic. She takes him to the forests, trains him and gives him powers that can help him to incapacitate his foe. The young boy is built into a tree-like form, and a mortar is used to cover him. Oreame, through the help of a wizard in the forest, Bouakarakarabiri, prepares him for battle in a way that no spear or bullet would pass through him. Here, Ozidi's grandmother narrates the story of Ozidi, and how his grandson will avenge. From her account to the wizard, the young boy understands that his name is Ozidi and his mission is to avenge his father. Very convinced that the young Ozidi is ready to face his father's murderers, Oreame and Orea set to Orua with the boy. There, Temugedege is now old and is happy to see Orea with a son. He ascertains that the young boy resembles his father. Ozidi is ready for avenge but does not know his enemies. Soon, the conspirators are informed by Owiri about Orea's arrival with a powerful son. The return poses a threat to the plotters and they decide to get ready to face Ozidi.

A day finally arrives when Ozidi knows about his enemies. On the way to the market, he lies under a tree in a transformed state. The wives of

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the conspirators meet him there, match on him, taking him for a tree; later, for a stranger and a python and pirate. They threaten him by declaring that they are wives of the warriors that killed the mighty Ozidi. Enraged by the information, Ozidi strips them. When they get home, their husbands prepare to meet Ozidi for vengence. The conspirators have different days to fight Ozidi and he defeats them progressively. They are Azazebife, Akpobrisi, Oguaran and Ofe, respectively. The play continues with Ozidi' fight with the monster with seven legs, limbs, and heads, Tebesonoma. Due to his mighty powers obtained from the same forest where Ozidi was prepared, he captures Ozidi but the latter calls his mother for help. She implores that help of Oreame and adds more strength to Ozidi's. With this support, he cuts the monsters seven heads, limbs and legs. Upon dying, the monster curses him that his sister's son will avenge his death. Fearing that the curse may come true, Ozidi and Orea go the monster's sister's house to hunt the son. When they arrived there, she is resistant and Ozidi's mother and Ozidi kill both of them.

The play ends with Ozidi's last battle with Odogu, whose wife is under the captivity of Ozidi. Odogu is powerful in a way that Ozidi cannot defeat him in a single match. During their fight, women support them but Odogu's team is stronger. This results from the preparation he has received from Bouakarakarabiri, just like Ozidi had. At this level, it is the magic leaf that helps both men. Oreame, on Ozidi's side and Azema, the sky-face, on Odogu's side run to look for the magic leaf and Oreame returns with it. She squeezes it into Ozidi's eyes and he cuts Odogu with his sword. Oreame, Orea and Ozidi offer prayers to Tamara, the goddess of Orua. Later, Engarando, the Smallpox King visits Orua, alongside his attendants, Cold, Headache, Cough, Spots, Fever, and his brothers Engirigiri and Okrikpakpa. Sometimes later in Orua, cold, fever, and headache affect Ozidi and he lies on the bed with rashes on his body. His mother, Orea weeps and calls for help. After crying, the Smallpox King arrives, with his attendants and discovers that Ozidi's neighbours are afraid of being infected by the disease. Orea invokes Tamara to help her son and the Smallpox King leaves Orua with his attendants.

Analysis

Ozidi by J.P. Clark dramatizes the oral past of the Ijaw of the Niger River Delta in Nigeria. In the play, heroes fight to bring honour to the dead, in order to diminish the gap between the dead and the living.

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	Ozidi junior, the hero in *Ozidi*, possesses epic personalities. He has outstanding looks, supernatural powers, fights with monsters, and is an embodiment of bravery and patriotism. The play ends with a positive note where justice is made and conflicts are pacified. The moral undertone in *Ozidi* has necessitated its introduction to secondary and university curricula in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Coming of age Conflict Individuality
Further Reading	Adepitan, Titi, "Between Drama and Epic: Toward a Medium for *Ozidi*", *Research in African Literatures* 33 (2002): 120–132.
Addenda	The second edition was in October 1st, 1988 by Oxford University Presss, USA, 1966 with the title *Ozidi of Atazi*. The review: J. P. Clark: *The Ozidi saga: collected and translated from the Ijo of Okabou Ojobolo*. xxxvii, 408 pp. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press [and] Oxford University Press Nigeria, [1979] is available here (accessed: June 14, 2021).

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