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BIOPGRAPHICAL NOTE

Dr. Harriet Masembe was born in 1949 at Masaka, Uganda. A graduate of Makerere University, Kampala, Dr. Masembe has pursued her studies at Sheffield University, England, and at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she earned a Ph.D. in African Languages and Literature.

Dr. Masembe comes from a large family of four brothers and seven sisters—all of whom have graduated from Makerere University. She taught at Gayaza High School in 1973 and worked as sub-editor on the Voice of Uganda newspaper in 1973-74. In 1977 she worked for the Communications Department of Campus Crusade for Christ in Nairobi.

While studying at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Dr. Masembe gave performances of African folktales at several university festivals and at the Northlands Story-Telling Festivals in 1980 and 1981. Her stories have been broadcast on programs at radio stations WHA and WERN, Madison. She also performed narrations of African folktales in several elementary and high schools. Two of her performances have been featured on American television.

Dr. Masembe currently resides in Los Angeles, California, where she has given lectures/performances of African folktales at several universities including The California Institute of Technology, University of Southern California, California State University—Long Beach, Los Angeles Valley College, Los Angeles—Harbor College and Stanford University.

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THE USE OF PROVERBS AND SUPERSTITIONS IN J. P. CLARKÉ’S PLAYS

by Harriet Masembe

The use of proverbs in ordinary conversation is a common feature in African societies, particularly among old people. Chinua Achebe’s comments concerning the Ibos and their proverbs apply to a large number of African ethnic groups. In *Things Fall Apart*, he writes: "Among the Ibos the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe, 1958:28). Achebe highly recommends African writers should use proverbs in their dialogue to reflect this art in their society. The use of proverbs in African literature and drama is not unique to African writers since proverbs are used in fiction throughout the world. Nancy Schmidt notes, however, that "traditional proverbs, universal proverbs and western wise sayings are used in 80% of Nigerian fiction" (Schmidt, 1968:13). Proverbs, when employed, are utilized in Nigerian novels and plays in the following ways: in village settings, in reference to criticism of culture, and in traditional ceremonies, greetings, and rites (Schmidt, 1968:14). Berth Lindfors argues: "The real master of proverbs is one who is able to summon the entire cavalry at will and make them spontaneously perform precisely those tricks he has in mind. To do this he must be in complete control of their movements at all times, harnessing their versatile energies with such skill that they cannot bolt off in directions he did not intend" (Lindfors, 1973:105). John Pepper Clark’s use of proverbs reflects this kind of skill.

One of the striking features of Clark’s drama is the way in which he transforms superstitions — some of them extremely trivial — into significant paradigms that point to the main issues presented in his plays. In *Song of A Goat*, the central action is built on a family problem facing Zifa and his wife Nkbiere. Zifa’s impotence has created a tension between them that takes on tragic implications as the play progresses. The tragedy issues from the conflict between Zifa and Nkbiere regarding the solution to their marriage problem. They both seek counsel from the masseur*, whose suggestion they most violently reject. But Nkbiere’s sexual frustration begins to find expression in the way she treats her little boy and, more seriously, in her seduction of Tonye, Zifa’s brother. This seduction is a turning point in the development of the family drama. The deaths of Tonye and Zifa are the source of the tragic events which terminate the play. In the scene in which Nkbiere seduces Tonye, Clark uses two seemingly trivial superstitions in society to point to the approaching sexual act between Nkbiere and her brother-in-law. The first of these is expressed by Tonye in a simple disagreement between the two:

* a man who practices massage and physiotherapy
Tonye: What are you
Smacking the boy for, Ebiere?

Ebiere: Better be
About what you are doing. Don't splash
Me with water I told you, you scamp!

Tonye: That's enough; we don't allow our children
To be knocked on the head like that.

Ebiere: Don't you lecture me on how to beat my child.
What do you know of child-rearing anyway?

Tonye: Enough to know that knocking a child on
The head like that makes him prone
To attacks from small-pox. We simply forbid
It in the family. You may smack
Him on the backside if you please
But do not beat the boy on the head.

Tonye here assumes the voice of his society, echoing its beliefs and
trying to reinforce its values. Ebiere has no respect for what Tonye
has to say about children. She exhibits a superior attitude in regard
to this matter. Underneath this simple disagreement between them is
the frustration of a mother whose husband can no longer meet her sexual
needs. She complained of this to the masseur earlier in the play when
she went to consult him concerning the matter:

Ebiere: Oh, how I wish I'd die, to end all
This shame, all this showing of neighbours my
Fatness when my flesh is famished!

Masseur: This is terrible, my daughter, nobody
Must here of it. To think that a stout staff
Is there for you to hold too for support.

Ebiere: It isn't there, it isn't there at all
For all its stoutness and size.
There isn't just a pith to the stout staff.

Masseur: When did you discover it lacked the
Miracle to bring forth green leaves and fruits?

Ebiere: After my first and only issue in his house.

In the scene between Tonye and Ebiere, sexual frustration comes
to the surface when Ebiere loses her temper and beats her child. The
conflict between her and Tonye is expressed in yet another superstition
about the hissing of a snake. As Tonye is speaking to her, Ebiere
hisses like a snake. Tonye's surprise at this sound is expressed:

Tonye: From a snake such a sound is only to be
Expected; it is the signal of spite and
Sinister motives. But coming out of a woman
Like you with all the things a wife would want
In the world, I do not know what to make of it.
The belief that a snake's hissing foretells disaster is widespread in Africa, especially within the culture represented in *Song of a Goat*. As Tonye says, it is a signal for sinister motives. Through these two superstitions, Clark portrays the tension between Tonye and Zifa while pointing to the great disaster this relationship is about to cause. Ebierere and Tonye stand in opposition regarding these common beliefs — beliefs that pertain to the welfare of the family. Ebierere, in disregardng Tonye's warnings about these beliefs, paves the way for a great disaster in her family. The verbal conflict over common beliefs turns into a physical conflict as Ebierere challenges Tonye to take over the role of her husband. The "sinister motive" indicated by the hissing snake finds expression in this sexual act. It is a disaster for the family because it leads to the deaths of both Tonye and Zifa.

The two superstitions, therefore, function as paradigms for deeper conflict and tragedy in the play. Within the short dialogue surrounding these common beliefs, Clark develops a simple conflict between Ebierere and Tonye. This minor conflict foreshadows a more serious physical battle between them in which Ebierere forces Tonye into a sexual union with her. Thus, Tonye, like the child, becomes the victim of Ebierere's sexual hunger. The conflict between Tonye and Ebierere is symbolic of the basic problem permeating the play: Zifa's impotence and failure to fulfill his marital responsibility to Ebierere. In fighting Tonye, Ebierere is fighting Zifa.

Her victory is also her disaster. As she and Tonye are wrestling on the floor, Orukorere, Zifa's aunt, points out the fatal implications of their act.

**Dode:** Will you leave them to fight there? My uncle is the strongest man in all the creeks. He will kill my mother.

**Orukorere:** He will not, my son, rather it is she who may kill your uncle. Oh, my son, my son, I have seen a sight this dusk to make the eagle blind. I heard the cock crow as I woke up from sleep. That was sign of omen enough but little did I know it was this great betrayal of our race.

**Dode:** You won't separate them then?

**Orukorere:** 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 serious. Yet the hiss of the creature was up among the eaves, down under the stool. Last night I cried it had coiled itself into a pad to pillow my head but the house was full of snoring sound and as usual everybody snorted. [Clark, 1964:28-29]
Orukore not only confirms Tonye’s earlier fear of danger signalled by the hissing, but also pronounces the future death of Tonye. Her speech reflects a foreknowledge of this death conveyed through the cockcrow and the snake’s hissing in the house. Clark here combines the local beliefs of his society with the action in the play — a technique he further develops in The Raft. For Orukore, as for Tonye, it is the simple belief in the superstition about the snake which gives her a premonition about some disaster about to befall the family.

In The Raft, the superstitions incorporated in the dialogue between the lumbermen depict the natural surroundings of the swamp, the Sriver, and the darkness in which the raft is adrift. Nature, character and the tragic theme are thus blended in one image. The superstitions utilized in this play have a significant role in the unfolding of the plot but they are also used to express the fear of an imminent disaster that is foremost on the minds of the four men. It is the fear of the unknown, of the danger inherent in the darkness around them. Kengide’s superstitious interdiction in the very first scene of the play is loaded with such a fear:

Kengide: Young man, don’t
You shout my name in this dark!
Olotu: What if I did?
Kengide: I am the elder of your older brother.
And I have seen more life than you.

The conversation of these desperate men is strewn with superstitions about evil, death and destruction. The breaking up of the raft and the subsequent death of Olotu are preceded by Ogro’s premonition. When a flying bird hits his ear, Ogro’s immediate conclusion is that it’s a bat, believed to be an evil omen:

Ogro: May be. Now is that any reason
For hitting me on the ear?
Olotu: Nobody hit you.
Ogro: As my name is Ogrope, one of you here did.
Ibobo: Look at what probably hit him.
Obro: A bat? On the river and at daytime? Now,
What evil errand does it run?
Olotu: The salt in the wind must be affecting
Your sight, too. Don’t you see it is
A swift bird?
Kengide: Swallows, I think.
... A storm is here, that must be their one message. See
There flies off somebody’s hat! [Clark, 1964:110]

The "evil errand" that Ogro senses is soon realized when the raft breaks in two, one half carrying Olotu to his death. This accident does not take the audience by surprise since Clark has already announced it in the preceding superstitions. Here Clark blends the local superstitions with the main action of the play to build an
atmosphere of suspense and anticipation. This technique of using superstitions of society to prefigure the events in the play is a vital part of the plot movement in *The Raft*. The raft on the stage remains stationary, but Clark has to keep the audience aware that it is moving and drifting along between the lumbermen. The folk beliefs in their conversation provide a point of reference. What society believes is constantly compared with what the lumbermen are experiencing on the raft. In this link between superstitions and dramatic action, Clark achieves a chronological movement from morning to nighttime, as well as a physical movement of the raft along the river. The conversation between Kengide and Ibobo is a vivid example of this unity between local superstition and the events on the raft.

Kengide: I really must be getting old. I still
   Cannot see anything except the water.

Ibobo: You will see the lights soon -- when it is
   Darker ... I have often heard
   It said you could see the street lights of Burutu
   Far, far out from stream. I thought it one
   Of their stories -- like those about ghosts
   Who are never seen but by some person
   In distant parts who told it to a friend
   Who told it to another and so on 'til
   You feel in the endless coils of, the guinea-worm.
   But now I have seen it myself....
   They are lights, yes, they are! Come over here,
   You'll see several more break above the trees.

Kengide: Don't fall over into the waters in
   Your excitement. Indeed, ... they have all swum into
   full sight;
   Yes, they are street lamps or cook-out lanterns
   On ship masts at Burutu. [Clark, 1964:123-124]

The superstition in this episode pertains to the existence of ghosts who, according to Ibobo, are more often talked about than actually seen. The idea of seeing the lights of Burutu from a distance sounds as incredible to Ibobo as the phenomenon of ghosts -- hence, the terrible excitement at the sight of these lights. In this dialogue, the lumbermen convey a sense of the raft's progressive movement toward Burutu. Kengide and Ibobo begin to imagine themselves arriving at the port. By the use of dialogue to suggest movement, the raft moves nearer the port and day grows darker. The movement of time and the physical movement of the raft are simultaneously conveyed by the two men who now imagine themselves safely landed at the port and sleeping in a proper bed. The drift of their imagination corresponds to the physical drift of the raft.

Proverbs are the most commonly used features of folklore in Clark's plays. The form in which they appear varies from direct translation of a local proverb to a modified proverbial expression. When he uses a modified proverb, Clark conveys a philosophical statement
in a style reminiscent of the common proverbs. The following speech from *The Masquerade* is an example of this:

**WOMEN OF THE HOUSE:** A dip in bilge, especially if it is,  
As the elders say, out of a craft  
Too tardy to put to stream, may remove  
From the eye pus or sand too malignant  
For leaf or root. But brother, oh,  
Our brother, what proof have we  
Of the damnifying act you speak of?

This kind of proverbial speech is not as frequently used as the traditional proverbs such as:

a) "If eyes do not see, lips will not cry."

b) "One mother-salt does not season the stream."

c) "It is a foolish hen that flees her nest."

Such traditional-sounding wise sayings are used frequently in Clark's plays as in several other Nigerian proverbs and those acquired from the Western tradition as well. In some cases, however, Clark constructs his own "wise sayings" that are not recognizable proverbs of any particular culture but function as proverbs in his plays. An example is Diribi's statement to his daughter, "Where sugar is, there teems the flies." This statement is constructed in the style of traditional African proverbs and is an expression of an obvious truth. So it is, in this sense, a proverb -- but one that Clark himself has invented to suit his purpose. Since no Nigerian culture has had its proverbs fully recorded, exact analogues cannot be found in published collections for all proverbs. Nancy Schmidt has noted that, in many instances, it is possible only to indicate a similarity between proverbs in fiction and oral tradition and to suggest that oral tradition is the source. She says:

"Identification is complicated by the fact that all the authors have had some familiarity with the English literary tradition and its proverbs. In some instances, the proverbial wisdom of the two traditions is quite similar so that it is impossible to determine the exact source of the proverbs. For example, a well-known European proverb that appears in several works of fiction is, "Where there is a smoke there is a fire". However, it is very similar to an African proverb, "The Eye which sees the smoke will look for fire." [Schmidt, 1968:19]

My concern in this study is not to identify the sources of Clark's proverbs but to evaluate their artistic function in the plays in which they appear.

In both *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade*, Clark uses proverbs that serve to illumine the special context in which they are set. Clark's proverbs are part of the dramatic conflicts generated in the
plays. They are not used merely to add African flavor to the language of the plays, but serve to reiterate themes discussed in the plays. In *Song of a Goat*, Clark presents two dramatic reversals that are imbued with much irony. The first reversal concerns the relationship between Zifa, his brother Tonye, and his wife Ebiere. As the play begins, the marriage between Zifa and Ebiere is on the verge of break-up due to Zifa's impotence. In order to save the situation, Ebiere persuades Tonye to replace Zifa and she forces him into a physical relationship with her. This is a reversal in the roles, since the brother-in-law usurps the duty of the husband. The irony in this reversal is that Ebiere turns to Tonye in the hope of continuing her marriage to the family and saving it from dissolution. It is this very act of Ebiere that stirs up Zifa in anger against his brother and makes him vow to kill him. Tonye commits suicide out of shame and Zifa drowns himself in desperation. The relationship between Ebiere and Tonye is an unfortunate reversal for Zifa, who has entertained Tonye and looked after him over the years. In a soliloquy, Zifa reflects on Tonye's seduction of Ebiere and reveals a lack of suspicion of this brother, whom he took in as a small boy. Even at this point, there is still a note of doubt in Zifa's speech. This act of Tonye and Ebiere is the last thing he would expect from a small boy he has raised.

The second dramatic reversal lies in the character of Orukorere, Zifa's half-possessed aunt. She is dismissed by everyone as a lunatic whose speeches make no sense to her hearers. Yet it is this ostensibly mad woman who is endowed with special prophetic powers. This enables her to see not only the present reality of the marriage between Zifa and Ebiere, but also the tragedy that is about to befall the family. In her wild screams, she points to the future outcome of the Tonye/Ebiere scandal.

Orukorere: I must find him, the leopard
That will devour my goat, I must
Find him. [Clark, 1964:16]

Her repeated cries prefigure the events at the end of the play when both Tonye and Zifa meet death:

Orukorere: The leopard, I have missed the leopard
That will despoil the prime goat of our yard
But I do not hear the victor's cry.
[Clark, 1964:21]

Orukorere's disposition is itself a reversal of fortune. Like Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Orukorere bears a curse from the gods:

SECOND NEIGHBOR: That's a queer family.
THIRD NEIGHBOR: A curse lies heavy on it.
FIRST NEIGHBOR: Of the woman there can be little doubt.
SECOND NEIGHBOR: And to think she was one time
The sweetest maid in all the creeks.

THIRD NEIGHBOR: She will have no man for husband.

Why, young men came from all over the land
To ask her hand of her father.

FIRST NEIGHBOR: Remember how the people of the sea
Chose her for their handmaiden.

SECOND NEIGHBOR: Sure, but then she was so proud she would
Not listen to what the oracle said.

THIRD NEIGHBOR: 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.
[Clark, 1964:18]

The curse that befalls Orukorere is the same kind of misfortune with
which Cassandra struggles. Both can look ahead and foresee death.
Cassandra foretells the death of the Protagonist, Agamemnon, in The
Oresteia; Orukorere foresees the death of Zifa in Song of a Goat. In
these dramatic reversals, there is an ambiguity based on the fact that
the truth is concealed from the drama's characters but not from the
audience. The tragedy in both The Oresteia and Song of A Goat lies in
the calculated delay in the revelation of truth. Agamemnon does not
discover his fatal error until it is too late for him to save his life.
Zifa, too, is totally unaware of his wife's infidelity. The truth
dawns on him only after the seduction scene. No one else in the play
has the ability to foresee what Orukorere sees: the imminent
destruction of the family. The dramatic reversals in Song of A Goat
are a key to our understanding of the play's tragic elements.

Clark uses two sets of proverbs to reiterate and emphasize
these two reversals. One set deals with the concept of perception or
the lack of it. The second deals with the idea of eating, consumption
and destruction. The use of perception to emphasize reversal is
evident when the author highlights the ambiguous role of Orukorere by
means of a proverb. The Third Neighbor points out to Zifa: "If eyes
do not see, lips will not cry." Zifa and Tonye do not understand the
significance of Orukorere's cries. The implication is that her cries
are not without cause. She has a deeper insight into the trend of
events and is capable of seeing what remains hidden to Zifa and Tonye.
The proverb throws some light on setting of an ironic situation. Zifa
thinks Orukorere is drunk and dismisses the neighbor's concern as
nonsense. Tonye echoes Zifa's attitude when he says:

Please, you know how it is with her
How then can you take her serious?
[Clark, 1964:15]

The Third Neighbor's proverb, therefore, contradicts the views of Zifa
and Tonye as it suggests that Orukorere might, after all, have seen
something.

Clark uses another proverb dealing with perception and recognition
to reflect the irony underlying Zifa’s lack of perception in reference to his impotence. The masseur, a special consultant in matters of this nature, advises Zifa to pass on his wife to another man. Zifa’s reaction to this counsel is expressed in a proverb:

Zifa: And is that all
The help you can offer? They say the crooked
Wood tells the expert carver.
Masseur: Not when the tree
Is blasted, my son. [Clark, 1964:12]

In quoting the "crooked wood" proverb to the masseur, Zifa implies that he, as a patient, is a better judge of his advisers and the solutions they propose to him. The proverb carries with it the rather contemptuous attitude Zifa has toward the masseur whose expert knowledge he seeks. Ironically, it is Zifa who is mistaken about the solution to his problem. Therefore, the proverb serves to reveal Zifa’s blind error in rejecting the tradition of his society as spelled out by the masseur:

Zifa: You lame thing, you crawling piece
Of withered flesh with the soul of a serpent,
... Shall I wring
Your neck of fiber? How dare you suggest
A thing like that to me? ...
Masseur: 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 days
Of old. [Clark, 1964:12]

Here, as in the proverb quoted above, there is irony in Zifa’s accusatory of the masseur. It is Zifa himself who is a "crawling piece of withered flesh," as he has lost his manhood. The audience cannot fail to note the reversal in Zifa’s statement. This is the root of his tragedy: the failure to acknowledge his impotence and to see the wisdom in the masseur’s suggestion.

When Zifa finally discovers the truth about Tonye and Ebiere, his shock is expressed in a proverb that echoes the theme of perception:

Zifa: 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.
[Clark, 1964:30]

To Zifa, the possibility of his brother usurping his bed is just as
remote and incredible as the idea of eyes seeing ears. The proverb graphically reveals his failure to realize the reversal of roles in his marriage. In discussing this reversal with Zifa, Orukorere mocks his lack of insight into a proverb which performs a dual purpose.

Zifa: ... Yesterday you
   Said they had a fight, is that true?
Orukorere: A goat and a leopard may as well wrestle.
Zifa: Now, look here, mother, I am tired of
   Being in the toil of parables.
   ... God knows I will not be violent
   With you. But why will you not tell
   All that you know? [Clark, 1964:31-32]

Orukorere's proverb of the goat and leopard keeps Zifa in suspense and intensifies his bitterness towards Tonye. In addition, it gives a subtle hint of a tragic result following the confrontation between Tonye, the leopard, and Òbiere, the goat. Throughout the play, the leopard is a symbol of destruction and the goat is a symbolic prey. In this proverb, Orukorere continues to sound a note of warning already introduced through her wild screams. Yet here, as in other instances, Zifa does not catch the tragic message in Orukorere's proverb. The two dramatic reversals in the play -- the one concerning the marriage roles and the second concerned with the paradox of Orukorere -- are both linked in this proverb.

The theme of destruction carried through Orukorere's speeches is reiterated in proverbs that focus on the destructive forces inherent in Zifa's family. The family background is revealed in the comments of the neighbors, whose role in the play is to provide information necessary to our understanding of the drama. In reaction to Zifa's ravings, the neighbors comment:

Third Neighbor: Do not ask me. In
   A family like that there always will spring
   In their midst one may as well go
   And seek eggs among cocks.
Second Neighbor: She is grown very queer of late, too.
   See how she carries her wood?
Third Neighbor: Bring up a chicken among hawks
   And if she is not eaten she will eat.
   [Clark, 1964:18-19]

It is in this proverb about a chicken among hawks that the elements of consumption and destruction in Zifa's family are stressed. Orukorere has repeatedly emphasized this idea of a leopard about to devour a goat. Both the leopard and the hawk are beasts of prey whose survival requires the death of their victims. Similarly, Tonye's sexual act with Òbiere is soon to bring about such deaths in the family. Zifa is a victim not of an invading beast but of a brother for whom he has provided as a guest. The destructive forces that consume Zifa stem
from within his own family because of the curse the family bears. The staggering irony of the tragedy is expressed by Zifa himself in another proverb of consumption:

Zifa: A guest, after being fed looks up
At the sun. But these many years I have been host
To a guest that will not return. [Clark, 1964:31]

This proverb of a guest illuminates the context in which it is set while simultaneously commenting on Tonye's behavior. The proverb states the expected gesture -- the norm from which Tonye deviates. Zifa recalls the proverb because it provides for him the values by which his brother's act is to be evaluated. According to Zifa, neither Tonye nor anyone else in the family is entitled to take over his wife. He takes the opposite stand of the masseur on this issue. The masseur is the voice of his society, whose advice to Zifa is supported by tradition. During their hot debate, the masseur uses a proverb that indirectly comments on Zifa's desire:

Zifa: ... I am strong and
Alive still and dare you open your filthy
Mouth to suggest I pawn my land?
Masseur: 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 days
Of old. Why, the hippopotamus wants
A canoe, it also wants paddles. [Clark, 1964:11-12]

Zifa is quick to identify himself with the hippopotamus in the masseur's proverb, but would rather die than see his wife passed on to another man:

Zifa: Oh, Ebiere,
My wife, my wife, has it come to this?
And what is to become of me?
Of course, they will have to kill me first.
Masseur: Do not think that way, my son. Some till, but others
Must catch bird or fish. Each is a lot
With its own song.
Zifa: I will die first. [Clark, 1964:12]

In Ozidi, the proverbs have a more complex role than in any other of Clark's plays. They illuminate their dramatic context and reiterate themes. Additionally, they function as meaningful metaphors that link various parts of the play. In Song of A Goat, the proverbs comment significantly on the action of the major characters. In Ozidi, Clark develops this technique a step further by making the proverbs function as vehicles for the progression of the plot in the play. This new dimension in Clark's use of proverbs makes them a vital part of the
dramatic design and a vital part of the physical confrontation between Ozidi and his enemies.

This play features the rise to power of the young Ozidi who, with the aid of his grandmother, avenges the death of his father. The drama falls into three main divisions. The first deals with the events that lead to the murder of Ozidi, King of Orua. The second division describes Ozidi's preparation for the powerful and challenging combats which form the third section of the play. Death is, therefore, the central theme which links all three parts into one continuous drama. It is significant that Clark's use of proverbs in this work is limited to the third section of the play when Ozidi confronts his enemies. Yet, in these proverbs, Clark recalls the first division of the play, which forms the basis for Ozidi's vengeance in part three. The proverbs are a means by which the wide span of time in the drama is crystallized in one moment. Part one is brought into a dynamic relationship with part three. Temugedege's proverb is a prime example of this technique.

Temugedege: She is our wife, she is our wife still. As
  The eldest of my family, I may not
  Inherit my brother's wife, but she is
  Our wife still. She had no right to run out
  Of the house. Now it is a foolish hen
  That flees her nest. [Clark, 1966:59-60]

Here the old man is referring to Orea, Ozidi's mother, who has accompanied her son on his mission of revenge. In questioning Orea's right to flee the kingdom at the time of the elder Ozidi's murder, Temugedege unites the two parts of the play in this moment. His choice of proverb mostironical since he is an idiot. The woman he calls foolish displayed more wisdom than he when she fled from Ozidi's murderers. In another proverb, Clark describes the circumstances and Ozidi's death. The murderers of Ozidi are reminded of their vicious act by Kwiri, who announces the news of the arrival of Ozidi's son:

Kwiri: Simply told, my good friend, Ofe, the story is this.

  Many, many years ago several
  Of you here present planted a champion yam
  Well, that yam you sowed several seasons gone by,
  Has now grown beyond arm's span.

Oguaran: Away with your riddles, man! We are not
  Children gathered under a mango tree.

Kwiri: Well, before the flow of my tongue
  Was suddenly diverted ..., I
  Was saying to you for all your good here, Ofe,
  The harvest-time has at last come. [Clark, 1966:64]

This proverb of the yam not only unites past and present dramatic action, but also introduces the theme of revenge into the play. The
yam "has grown beyond arm's span." The growth of the young Ozidi symbolized by the growth of the yam is in fact a threat to the lives of the murderers. Life and growth are, paradoxically, the very source of several deaths in this play. The harvest of the yam is a harvest of death, of vicious battles, and the shedding of blood. Clark, in using this proverb of the yam, brings to mind the Christian principle of reaping what is sown. It is the same principle that underlies Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest. Kongi, as the traditional ruler and representative of the gods, must receive the first yam to be harvested from the land. The whole play is a process of preparation for this dramatic moment when the king is presented with the yam in a traditional ritual. But Kongi has sown corruption, death and a total deterioration of political freedom in his state. Under his regime, the nation moves from life to death. The harvest he reaps is a harvest of death when, at the climax of the play, he is presented with the head of an old man for a yam. There is an interesting parallel between this scene in Kongi's Harvest and the scene at the beginning of Ozidi recalled in the proverb of the yam. In both, a king falls into a fit when presented with a tribute that is contrary to his expectation.

Ozidi
[The procession sweeps past her, moves directly to where Temugedege sits in state and deposits at his feet the head of Ozidi all wrapped up in coco-yam leaves.]
ALL: [With one voice] Here is our tribute to you, King Temugedege, take it and rejoice!!!
[Temugedege with a fixed stupid smile on his face, steps down and opens the parcel dumped at his feet. He shrieks at the sight, tottering back in a fit.]
[Clark, 1966:29]

Kongi's Harvest
[Segi returns, disappears into the area of pestles. A copper salver is raised suddenly high; it passes from hands to hands above the women's heads; it is thrown from one to the other until at last it reaches Kongi's table and Segi throws open the lid. In it, the head of an old man. In the ensuing scramble, no one is left but Kongi and the head. Kongi's mouth wide open in speechless terror. A sudden blackout on both. [Soyinka, 1967:83]

Vengeance is the common theme that motivates these "yam" presentations. In Kongi's Harvest, it is the vengeance of a nation robbed of its right to peaceful existence, a people whose very spirit is killed by the tyranny of a dictator. In Ozidi, the king's brother is killed in protest against his insistent demands that the people pay tribute to their idiot king. He is reinforcing a traditional ritual the king's subjects are not willing to perform. With the death of Ozidi, the protest against tradition appears to prevail -- at least for a short time. But, as Kwiri says, the yam planted has now grown in the person of the young Ozidi. He is about to fight in revenge for his father's death and to restore the balance lost in the first part of the play. But Ozidi's enemies are not going to let him triumph over them. They plot to counteract his plans and to kill him before he destroys them. This call to arms is given in yet another proverb by one of the
murderers. In response to Kwiri’s news of Ozidi’s arrival, he says:

Ofe:  This is no time to wail like women
Who have lost their wares at market. We must
Start work at once. Kwiri, we greet
You for bringing us this warning.
Azezabife, Oguaran,
Agbobodi, up with arms and whatever
To hand, but only in our self-defence,
Remember that. If first we look for a stick
Long enough, we shall never kill the snake
In the house. So rise,
Rise, I say, rise at once. [Clark, 1966:65-66]

This proverb, a response to the previous proverb of the yam, moves the action of the play into a series of battles. The period of preparation and argument is over; now is the time to fight the "snake in the house." Clark uses the common animal image to connote poison and death. The snake is potentially fatal, and is therefore often killed in self-defence. This is the nature of the friction between Ozidi and the giants. They plan to kill him before he kills them. This is the central conflict in the play — a conflict that was initiated by the murder of the elder Ozidi. In this speech, death is brought to the fore through the proverb of the snake. The murderers anticipate a similar plot by Ozidi, whose preparations for battle are rendered in another proverb.

In a scene with the murderer’s wives, Ozidi announces his plot to kill his enemies:

Ozidi:  ... The pot
There on the fire boils over, and
The tortoise in it must die. [Clark, 1966:72]

The "pot" and "the tortoise," the two images in this proverb, are familiar to the audience but not to the women being addressed (actually undressed, since Ozidi strips their clothes off at this point and sends them home naked!) To them it is a riddle, for they do not know the significance of the pot. But the audience has witnessed the forest scene in which Bouakarakarabiri, the Old Man, prepares Ozidi with the charms. It is these charms that endow the feeble young boy with supernatural strength to defeat the giants. After the ritual in the forest, Ozidi is united with the forces of the universe. He has transcended the human realm and is now operating in the spiritual realm. The "pot" and the "tortoise" used in his proverb recall the instruments the Old Man used to conjure up the spirits. At the time Ozidi uses them in the proverb, they have already been identified with the powers of witchcraft. The audience, therefore, has a clear understanding of Ozidi’s statement as a declaration of his determination to kill his enemies by the powers acquired through "the pot". This proverb summons him to battle, just as Ofe’s proverb
summons the giants to defend themselves against "the snake". The plot of the play is outlined in these proverbs. With each new proverb, the drama progresses one step further -- the two warring sides getting ready for the series of confrontations that bring the play to resolution.

As the play progresses towards the actual battles, the murderers of Ozidi sit in the sand to counsel together and to plan how they are to attack the young Ozidi. The men who succeeded in killing the elder Ozidi now sense the difference between him and the young son he left to avenge his death. As they compare the two Ozidis, the scene at the beginning of the play in which the first murder is committed is brought into striking relationship with the battles about to begin. It is in the proverbs these giants quote here that past and present action is combined in one continuous plot. The young Ozidi has exactly the same relationship with the murderers as did his dead father. What has altered in the new relationship is the balance of power. This significant change is conveyed through the proverbs used by the three men as they plan the details of their attack:

Azezabife: I say, deal with him as we did
   With the father before he was born.
Oguaran: We can't all go and attack him
   At once. The fellow is no *iroko* tree
   That we have to call together the whole
   Community before we cut him down.
   The sucker!
Agbogidi: Yes, to meet him as of a body
   Would be to award the pulp the title we did
   His father. And Oyin knows he deserved it.
Azezabife: Let me tackle him alone then. This day
   I shall go and challenge the fellow
   To single combat. Be not afraid of the dog
   Returning to his kennel with all
   His four limbs unbroken.
Oguaran: It is that witch Oreame swells
   His heart. Left to the idiot Temugede,
   The yam we buried in his backyard was
   As good as eaten by worms and weevils.
Ofe: Now they are asking us to roast it
   Afresh for them to eat.
Agbogidi: I here and now offer them
   The palm oil for it. [Clark, 1966:73]

According to Azezabife, the new Ozidi is but a "dog returning to his kennel with all his four limbs unbroken." These men have no respect for him whatsoever. He does not even deserve a joint effort to attack him. This is the tragic error Ozidi's enemies make. In underestimating his power, they devise a means by which he wins victory over them. In the proverb of the yam buried in the backyard, Clark defines the identity of the new Ozidi. Ewiri has earlier announced his arrival as
the springing up of the yam planted several years ago. Now, in this new proverb, the yam that was buried is identified with the young Ozidi who draws his strength from Orame. The new Ozidi is the reincarnated Ozidi, risen to avenge his death. There is a spiritual relationship established between the two Ozidis in this proverb. The previous murder of the elder Ozidi made it necessary for his young son to survive and take his place on the battlefield. The first death provides the motivation for the series of deaths about to occur. Revenge is the driving force which makes these deaths inevitable. Uyovbukeri has indicated the significance of revenge to the Ijaw people. According to him, the Ijaw believe a man who dies by murder is not allowed to join the ancestral host. "He is compelled to wander in the "Evil Grove" until his murder has been avenged." This view of revenge is similar to what Aeschylus has expressed in The Oresteia, where revenge is the motivation for action. In both classical Greek society and Ijaw society, the implication is that murder deprives a soul of a dead man the right to be at rest with the souls of other ancestors. If by avenging the death of Ozidi the young Ozidi can free the dead soul from this bond, the implication is that there is a spiritual relationship between the dead and the living. This spiritual unity that still exists between the dead Ozidi and his son is so forceful that it motivates the actions of the young Ozidi. The new Ozidi performs the functions of his father after the father's death. This relationship is conveyed graphically in the two proverbs of the yam.

Clark's use of proverbs is extended to the battlefield scenes, in which Orame inspires Ozidi to take up arms and fight. Exclaiming at Ozidi's lack of action when Azezabife is ready for the contest, Orame says: "Who sickens at blood must stay on diet of palm oil!" Implied in this proverb is the stunning idea that Ozidi must feed on blood as a man feeds on palm oil. Both are "diets" according to Orame. This proverb introduces a new turn of events in the play. Uttered just before the first battle Ozidi fights, it ushers in a new Ozidi. During the course of the play, Ozidi undergoes a process of identification. At the beginning, the young Ozidi is denied the knowledge of his father. It must be concealed until the young Ozidi can assume the full title of Ozidi and the responsibility that accompanies it. Before Ozidi comes to a full awareness of his identity, he must undergo a process of transformation. Orame, together with the old man in the forest, performs the necessary rituals that transform Ozidi from a cowardly weakling to a supernatural being, required to avenge his father's death. Ozidi's full identity unfolds at the end of these rituals, when he first declares his name. Here at the battlefield, Ozidi falls asleep and almost forgets his responsibility. Orame's proverbial exclamation not only introduces the battles about to begin, but also reminds Ozidi of his identity and reveals his role in the play. When Ozidi again awakens, it is to reaffirm his full title and to assume the new duties awaiting him. The declaration of his name reaffirms his new sense of acquired awareness.

The proverbs and superstitions Clark introduces in his plays are
well integrated into the dramatic design. Clark uses them not to simply place his plays in their traditional context; they serve as a key to our understanding of the issues presented in the plays. Through proverbs, Clark reveals the dramatic irony inherent in the situations he presents. His use of proverbs becomes even more complex when they become concrete metaphors linking the different parts of the plays. Past, present and future action is crystallized in one moment through proverbs Clark introduces at strategic points in the plot.
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