

A STUDY OF TWO DIRECTORIAL APPROACHES TO J. P. CLARK- BEKEDEREMO'S *SONG OF A GOAT*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of two directorial approaches to J. P. Clark -Bekederemo's "Song of a Goat". The directorial approaches are derived from two thematic interpretations of the play. In effect the directorial approaches are the ways of realizing the themes enacted on the stage. In the first thematic interpretation which suggests the first directorial approach, the play is looked at from the sociological perspective, as a study of the family. The second interpretation however, deals with the consequences of the decisions people make.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing literature on the works of Clark-Bekederemo especially on his poetry. The most recent is Luke Eyoh's J.P Clark-Bekederemo's Poetry: A Study in Stylistic Criticism in which he discusses the various critical approaches other authors have adopted in discussing the poetry of the author. But published scholarly writings on his drama apart from bachelor degree projects essays and dissertations are few. The notable ones we would like to cite here include Albert O. Ashaolu's "J. P. Clark: His Significance as a Dramatist" in Theatre in Africa, edited by Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele. In his paper, Ashaolu labours to prove how the seeming classical influences in the works of Clark must have been accidental rather than Clark simply setting out to "Nigerianize the Greeks." However, he concedes in the final analysis that Clark must have been influenced by the Greeks and the Elizabethans (178-179). In another paper "The Classical Temper in Modern African Drama" Ashaolu reinforces his contention that Clark- Bekederemo is influenced by the Greeks in his creation of his Song of a Goat and The Masquerade. He, however, concedes that Ozidi is devoid of any Greek influences as it is based on an Ijaw saga.

Next is Martin Esslin's article on Clark in Introduction to African Literature edited by Ulli Beier. In his article titled "Two Nigerian Playwrights". Esslin is critical of the three plays of Clark. Of Song of a Goat he says:"

I found Song of a Goat not quite convincing. 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 across the generations (259).

Talking of the relationship between Song of a Goat and The Masquerade, he says:

... in fact, J. P. Clark has here attempted something in the nature of a cycle of plays on the working out of a family curse, no less than a Nigerian Oresteia. His is an ambitious undertaking. And it nearly succeeds. Not completely though (259).

About The Raft he feels the characters should have been

individualized and fully motivated by being created far more realistically than being left as stylised and generalized figures making their actions seem unnecessarily arbitrary (260).

Dan Izevbaye's in an article in Introduction to Nigerian Literature also deals briefly with *Song of a Goat* and the other plays. In his paper he makes reference to an obvious classical influence in *Song of a Goat*. He cites Orukorere the Cassandra figure in the play. We have in a recent work explored the motif of family disintegration in the creation of Song of Goat and two other plays Anowa by Ama Ata Aidoo and The Burdens by John Ruganda. Our concern in that work is to look for factors that are responsible for the demise of the families in the three texts.

In addition to these works cited here are the books by J.E. Ifie and Robert Wren. Wren's work in Eyoh's opinion "is significant as the only book-length critical work... which focuses on Clark-Bekederemo's works in the three literary genres". J.E. Ifie, is concerned with the cultural background to the works of Clark, hence his A Cultural Background to the Plays of J. P. Clark - Bekederemo. His work to a large extent provides better understanding for the reader who may wish to know about the traditional influences upon Clark- Bekederemo's artistry. He reveals to what extent the Ijaw and Urhobo cultures in which Clark grew have influenced his creative works. (iv, 1-3). We shall also mention Laurence Margaret's chapter on Clark in her book Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952 - 1964. Her main preoccupation in that chapter is to show in what areas she thinks Clark has been influenced by the Greeks. She starts the chapter by saying:

It is perhaps too easy to see in the plays of John Pepper Clark the influences of classical Greek drama, for these parallels are what first strike the European or American reader and play-goer, the formal tone, the role of the chorus, the importance of lineage themes, the curse laid on a family, the presence of a prophet or prophetess, the man caught in the millstone of the gods, the theme of incest (77).

From the references cited here on Clark, the following observations could be made namely: that apart from Wren's work and may be Ifie's, they all seem to be devoted to treating the plays briefly without spending considerable energy on any particular play. Most of them are preoccupied with the search for seemingly classical influences on Clark. Again, some of the works mentioned are mostly concerned with pointing out the weaknesses of the plays. On the whole, no text has examined any of the plays from production perspective. Hence this work is an attempt at looking closely at *Song of a Goat* from the directorial perspective as a study of family relationship, and of the consequences of the decisions an individual makes. These two directorial concepts could serve as interpretations a director could give to the production of the play.

SOME DIRECTORIAL APPROACHES IN THE PLAY

The task of this paper therefore, is to present two interpretations of the play that a director could set out to realise within a performance environment. They are: Family and the consequences of characters' decision approaches. The first interpretation is to look at the play as a study of a family; hence we shall explore a sociological perspective of the play under the sub heading "*Song of a Goat* as a Study of the Family"

In the first interpretation we shall explore the nature of the relationship between members of the Zifa family. Here, emphasis will be placed on what makes for the cohesion of the family, not the factors that lead to the disintegration of the family. We however, need to clarify ourselves about the particular concept of family we are referring to in this interpretation. E. I. Nwogugu in his book Family Law in Nigeria expresses the following, views about the family:

The family is the smallest unit of social structure of every society. It is generally accepted that the family is the basis of every human community, and the family may be regarded as the nucleus of society. The term 'family' does

not lend itself to easy and precise definition. In one sense, the family may be defined so as to include all persons with a common ancestor. Under this wide connotation, the family *may* embrace a large body of persons related by blood to a common ancestor... sometimes, the group included in the wide definition of 'family' is referred to as the extended family' - a concept which is prevalent in Nigeria, as is the case in the most other unindustrialized societies. In contrast, the term 'family' may be given a much more restricted connotation. It may refer to a smaller group consisting of a household - the man, his wife or wives, the children and probably the dependants who live with him (316).

Two concepts of the family are evident from Nwagugu's submissions- the nuclear family and the extended family. Our choice however is the concept of the extended family which best explains what the Zifa family is. In this interpretation emphasis must be placed on how members of the Zifa, family relate to each other. The point of interest however would be on how each member of the family carries out his or her own roles. These roles though are not consciously spelt out. Conventions, however, make them obvious. As Ogionwo and Onigu aptly put it:

Every member of a family has some function to perform in maintaining the unit. The father has the overall authority in most societies. He directs the affairs of the unit but takes his vital decisions after consulting with the wife and children, if these are adults. He administers and protects the family and contributes to the physical well-being of the members of the family. This physical well being includes providing food, clothes and shelter. He is not only a bread winner he is also expected to lead in the training of the children. The mother takes charge of domestic affairs. She performs the roles of a housewife and bears and suckles children. She ensures the feeding of the family members and hence generally engages in food cropping or works for money to purchase food. Also he provides initial education for the children (90-91).

As for Chima Izugbara (128) the family performs the following functions:

- (i) The family is the institution that primarily meets society's need for reproduction and procreation, ensuring biological continuity of social groups.

- (ii) The family helps in the socialisation of newly born members of the society.
- (iii) The family regulates the sexual drives and directs the moral behaviour of its members.
- (iv) The family also provides emotional support for members, helping to share grief, sorrow, and love. Distressed people often seek support from family members.
- (v) Other functions of the family include conferring or transferring status to children, political socialisation of the members, meeting the economic needs of members and orientating members on economic skills, providing security, and inculcating religious values in members.

From the submissions of the sociologists cited here, it is obvious that apart from the husband and wife whose roles are pretty defined in any society, other members of the household who stay within the extended family have their functions to perform.

For instance, the education of the younger members of the family is the duty and responsibility of the elderly members. Elder brothers, cousins, etc, participate in the education of the younger ones. Those members of the family who are elderly undertake to counsel younger members of the family, especially, it is pertinent that they give them a sense of direction and purpose and guide them so that they do not go the wrong way, and even when they make mistakes, it is the responsibility of the elder members to correct them.

But a more important thing to any family is its existence or survival. Existence should be looked at on three planes: physical, social, and spiritual. On the physical plane, the family has to engage in a particular occupation or on a number of occupations to subsist. In the case of the Zifa family, they are principally fishermen. In the area of occupation, however, every member who is grown up enough to be able to make use of his hands to provide a means of living for the family feels obliged to participated in one kind of job or another that would enhance the well-being of the family. Hence, in the play in question, both Zifa and Tonye are concerned about their physical existence. They are all fishermen, though Zifa is also a part-time pilot. In dealing with this aspect of the play emphasis should be placed on the aspect of the dialogue and action that deal with the subject of their occupation. The scene in which Tonye is preparing their net while Ebieri is bathing Dode should be well lit; the speeches of Tonye and Zifa that deal with the

subject of their occupation should all be punched.

On the social plane, however, we would look at their existence, as they relate to one another. Here, we should highlight the kind of relationship that exists among members of the Zifa family. The Second Movement would receive particular attention. This is because it is in this movement that the relationship between members of the Zifa family is better shown, may be apart from the final movement where the next aspect of their existence would be dealt with. In the Second Movement, we are given the impression that the Zifa family is a united one, one in which each member is concerned about the welfare of the other. Tonye and Zifa are all concerned about Orukorere, the father's sister. They are embarrassed when Orukorere shouts and attracts the neighbours to come around (Clark 14). Tonye and Zifa all get cross with the neighbours. They believe the neighbours have only come to make them a laughing stock (14). They try to protect themselves from any kind of shame the behaviour of Orukorere would provoke. Zifa expresses a deep sense of concern for Orukorere when he comments on a suggestion by Second Neighbour on how to treat Orukorere's case.

Second Neighbour: Zifa you really must do some thing.

Zifa: Do what? Put her in a room with goats and tie her to a log. Isn't that what you will have me do? (14)

Later in the scene when Orukorere requests for some money, both Tonye and little Dode all plead with Zifa to give to her, if only that would make her quiet (21). Ebiere, on her part too is concerned about the well-being of Orukorere. She treats her like a baby. When she vomits on the ground, it is Ebiere who goes about cleaning it (20). In doing this, Ebiere should be presented as one who is very sympathetic and concerned for a sick member of the family. Of course, it is the responsibility of the family to cater for its sick members.

Yet, the other level of existence is the spiritual. Here, our attention shifts to the Final Movement. Orukorere takes up a prominent role in this part of the play. She advises Zifa on the need for sacrifice. The family would like to ensure that its link with the ancestors who incidentally form the root of family is in tune. Hence, the long neglected sacrifice would be done. It is Orukorere who knows most about the nature of cleansing

that should be done. Here, Orukorere should be placed beside Zifa as stronger than him. She knows what Zifa does not. Of course, on the long run it is she who is proved correct. The scene of the family sacrifice which we can liken to a family worship should be done solemnly. Like any act of worship, the scene should be done in a calculated manner. The mood however, would be sombre. The lights should be dull. In this scene as in most scenes, the action would be done at the centre down stage. Particular attention should be paid to area where Zifa and Orukorere are discussing the mode of the sacrifice. Zifa should be played as some who is ignorant about a thing but wants to feign knowledge of it. Tonye and Ebiere should all be played as people who are guilt-stricken right from the beginning of the Fourth Movement. So when in the end their guilt is discovered and Ebiere faints and miscarries and Tonye hangs himself, their actions would have been seen to be properly motivated.

In the Fourth Movement, the cordiality between Zifa and Tonye has diminished. Their relationship should be shown to be one dominated by envy. Zifa is envious of Tonye. He should be shown to be suspicious of Tonye. Tonye on the other hand should be made to appear as someone who has just acquired a kind of Dutch- courage, probably under some spell. This spell breaks when his guilt cannot be hidden again. Following their intercourse, Tonye and Ebiere should be shown as teaming up against Zifa. An atmosphere that is charged with scheming and plots should be made to prevail. The nice relationship that had existed between members of the Zifa household should be seen to have crumbled. Zifa's speech in page 20 in particular should be carefully and forcefully rendered. Here, the actor should attempt to show all the nuances of thought: Zifa is subject to at that time.

Another important aspect which considered is the health of the family life. Like most families have a family doctor who could be consulted when any member of the family is sick, the Masseur should be made to appear as fulfilling that role to members of the Zifa family. Hence Zifa sends Ebiere to him in order to diagnose her problems. In doing this, Zifa is not facing reality. Probably, he must have thought the Masseur would not speak the truth about the matter, but like any person who values professional ethics, the Masseur deals with the case in an orderly fashion. This writer is of the view that he even went beyond bounds. Hence, it is obvious that he is to blame for the problem that

crops between b Zifa and Tonye. So far in this interpretation we have tried to relate the play to the concept of the family. The Zifa family here is used as the specimen of study of family relationships.

The second interpretation is concerned with the consequences of the decisions characters in the play take. Some of these decisions include: Zifa's recall of his dead father back home, Zifa sending Ebiere to the Masseur, the Masseur's suggestion that Ebiere should be made over to Tonye, Orukorere slighting the gods, Ebiere's seduction of Tonye, Tonye's fall, Zifa's move to have a sacrifice, Zifa's insistence that Tonye must force the head of the goat into the pot, and finally Zifa and Tonye's deaths. Of course, it must be borne in mind that a decision once taken brings about number of consequences. The most important thing however, is that the consequence of a decision could either be positive or negative. As a consequence, the decisions we would discuss here all had negative effects on the characters. In effect, in almost all cases, the people invite trouble to themselves on account of the decisions they make.

To start with, Zifa's decision to recall his father back home ordinarily looks uncomplicated. It is when we come to realise that it must have been too early for him to have done that, do we reckon that his action which resulted from a previous decision was wrong. In this regard, as it is clearly indicated in the play, Zifa's impotence is a result of this wrong decision he took. To deal with the dramatic realization of the consequence of this decision, Zifa, when he discusses this matter with the Masseur, should be presented as a person who does not feel any sense of guilt for the decision he takes. He does what every dutiful son would do. Masseur, however, suggests that the action he took may have been a little bit too early. This fact is brought out in the exposition since at the point the play opens the deed has been done. It is impossible to revoke the decision. It only means that Zifa should learn to live with the sad consequences of his foolish decision with equanimity. Zifa should not be shown as one that is disturbed by the realization that he is suffering because of the mistake he has made. Even when the Masseur suggests that to him, he should not be made to accept it kindly. Zifa triumphs though, in spite of his wrong decision. But it is in his sending Ebiere to the Masseur that Zifa should be made to appear as an escapist. He should not be shown as being stupid. He only tries to play the ostrich. He thinks by sending Ebiere to the Masseur, probably he would have a way out

of his problems. Of course, this decision has several consequences for him. The Ebiere-Tonye sexual affair results from Ebiere's initial visit to the Masseur. And the Masseur is wrong in suggesting to Ebiere alone on how the problem of her husband's impotence would be solved. The ideal situation would have been to discuss the matter with Ebiere and Zifa. The Masseur successfully plants ideas in Ebiere's head, though outwardly she revolts against it. Really, the Masseur should be made to appear guilty when he hears about the death of Zifa and Tonye and the miscarriage of Ebiere, realising that he first suggested to the woman what she eventually does with Tonye. But the Masseur's guilt should be concealed. This could be easily done, by adopting the alternative end, in which the Masseur blames the whole outcome of the problem of the Zifa family on fate. In that way, he exonerates himself from all blames. To depict how Orukorere's possession is as a result of her refusal to do the bidding of the gods would not be easy on the level of her person. Of course, none of her lines refer to it directly. The Neighbours who act as the chorus should be used to expose this salient fact which develops an aspect of the theme that is being handled. Of Orukorere's decision to slight the gods (people of the sea) the first Neighbour says:

First Neighbour: Remember how the people of the sea chose her for their hand maiden.

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

Third Neighbour: As a result they have put this spell on her. But although she has this double vision nobody believes a word she says even outside of the gourd (18).

Orukorere's suffering is as a result of a kind of hubris. But she is not aware of what is happening to her. That lines of the First, Second and Third Neighbour should be stressed so that they would help to reveal this important information about Orukorere.

Ebiere should be shown to be deliberately seducing Tonye. But the fact that Tonye has intercourse with her on his own volition should not be neglected. In the Third Movement, Ebiere should be shown making a number of passes at Tonye. The mock fight during which she implores Tonye to sleep with her should be graphically done. This action would be done up stage centre, near to the door that leads to Zifa's room. This will

enhance their transition into the room where the initial sexual intercourse is supposed to have taken place. This action then emboldens Ebiere and Tonye. But Tonye should be presented as being reticent, unlike Ebiere who would appear as one who is suffering from the influence of a drug. Tonye is mindful of the fact that what they have done is sinful. Ebiere does not seem to care.

When Zifa decides to perform the cleansing ceremony, he has already suspected the Tonye-Ebiere affair. Like the practical man he is, he wants actual proof of his suspicions. In this respect he behaves like Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet. He implores Tonye in course of the cleansing ceremony to force the head of the goat into the pot. Though this action is symbolic of sexual intercourse itself, Zifa is quite convinced, that in this way the guilt of Tonye and Ebiere would be revealed. Of course, he succeeds. All the way in the final movement till the moment Tonye dies, Zifa should be presented as a man who is sure of what he wants and how to get it. He should be portrayed as one who deliberately does everything. His insistence that Tonye should force the head of the goat into the pot should be cold and firm - a mark of a serious man. In this way, Zifa would be acted as someone whose mind is made up about a particular thing. He would not seem to care about the final outcome of his what actions.

This portrayal of Zifa would in effect make his decision to commit suicide by drowning inconsistent with his nature. Of course, that he ever insisted that Tonye should force the head of the goat into the pot in spite of Tonye's plead would show that he does not seem to care about the consequence of his decision. Whatever is the case, his decision to commit suicide following the death of Tonye ends his own life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this interpretation, the emphasis should be on the deliberateness of the decisions the characters make. The dramatization of the consequences of the decision would take into account two things: the nature of the character who takes the decision and how that decision helps to shape the course of events in the play. The characters would in this interpretation appear as people with set minds. Having a purpose fixed before doing something would be one of their attributes. The way they would be made ~ to react to their predicament however would not be the same. For instance, Orukorere who is half-possessed would seem inconsistent if her actions appear premeditated or

deliberate. On the other hand, Tonye would seem to be adopting an escapist attitude, if in the way he behaves he seems to be shifting the blame of their affair on Ebiere alone.

This paper has attempted to marry the art of the director and that of the critic of drama. Of course, every director determines an attitude he adopts to the script and the audience. His interpretation of any aspect of a work is that which he strives with the performers to realise in course of producing a play. A director must always have a particular approach to each work in any production. The two interpretations suggested for Song of a Goat would yield two productions. This paper would thereof serve the purpose of those who are interested in attempting a production of the play as well as those who would read it as a text in dramatic literature. The paper is useful too in enabling us have a pip into the art of the director.

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