TITLE: OMEN AND DIVINATION IN AFRICAN LITERATURE:
STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS OF IGBO PLAYWRIGHTS

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Abstract- Part of the major pre-occupations of writers all over the world is to produce literary composition such as poems, plays, and critical essays via imagination. To do this, to adopt some idiosyncratic approaches, which give their works certain peculiarities or uniqueness! Nevertheless people at times tend to overlook this while reading such works. They have not tried to find out why such writers chose to be identified with particular styles. For instance omen and divination are predominant phenomena in the plays of some contemporary Igbo playwrights like Godwin Onyekaonwu, A.B.C Chukwuezi, Enyioma Akoma and many others. It is that gap that the recent study intends to fill in selecting some of the works of these Igbo playwrights with a view for examining the extent to which the incidence of omen and divination help to enhance and elucidate the themes of these works. The selected Igbo plays are Nwata Rie Awọ and Akụ Fecha. The examination of the incidence of these phenomena is based on theory of myth. In order to achieve this purpose, the researcher adopted a descriptive survey method. This is because there are so many Igbo drama texts written by different authors but data of the research were collected only on those that have ominous and divinatory phenomena in them. Through this method it was discovered that the authors made use of these phenomena to explore the culture and traditions of Igbo people which form the common motif of their plays. Secondly Igbo cultures are myth in Igbo which they respect, reference and not mere superstition. They are in various cultures of the world. The authors project them for documentation, preservation and posterity.

Key words- Omen, Divination, African Literature, playwright

I. INTRODUCTION

There is hardly any society in the world without literature or literature without a society. This is because literature is an integral part of language. It helps to preserve the language and culture of the society. Literature as a work of imagination is a mirror through which the writer represents the society in its ideas and ideals, its thoughts, its visions, and its way of life. In the words of Caudwel (1977:145) the task of literature is keeping the collective imagination of a society alive, such that its members will be able to channel their energies to communal social construction. In a nutshell, literature does not only reflect, it affects the society. The literary artist does not just reflect his society, rather he also responds and reacts to socio political and economic changes of the time through the medium of specific languages. Literature is language well used for understanding of the audience according to the message passed across. It comprises three parts and these parts are referred to as literary genres. They are prose, drama and poetry. The concern of this study is drama. Drama s viewed by Aristotle as quoted in Akwanya (1998:3) as the art of the stage, as a mode of imitation representing the characters as performing all the actions dramatically. Drama is therefore a literary form that tells the story of human conflict by means of dialogue and action. It derives its subject matters from the day to day realities of man. According to Jacobus (1989:1) ... drama is one of the art forms that help us realize the potentiality of life for both good and bad. Igbo playwrights attempt to produce drama that reflects life by adopting some unique styles in presenting their works. These unique styles are noticed in the incidence of omen and divination. They adopt these motifs as a device of bringing to light some aspect of Igbo culture associated with them thereby reflecting the life and practices of the Igbo.

II. WHO ARE THE IGBO?

The Igbo are sub-Saharan African people numbering up to 40 million that are living in the territory that is currently called the South East of Nigeria. South East of Nigeria comprises five main states which are Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, and part of Rivers, Delta and cross River. The above mentioned areas are where the Igbo are found, predominantly, but they can also be found in their large numbers in all parts of the world. Igbo people are known from their ingenuity in exploring into available avenues with a view of finding solutions in tackling most of the challenges they encounter in life. The language of the Igbo is Igbo language. The Igbo are usually dark in complexion, stoutly built with tick lips and usually tall. Industry is one of the characteristics of the Igbo. The northern Igbo kingdom of Nri, which rose around 10th century is credited with the foundation of much Igbo culture, customs and religious practices and is also one of the oldest existing monarchy in the present-day Nigeria. Nri kingdom is credited with the foundation of much Igbo’s culture, customs and religious practices.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Omen: Omen as a concept has been defined by several authors and scholars. Among those authors
and scholars that have given their definitions to the word Omen is Walker (1997:389), he asserts that “Omen in popular and traditional belief is a natural event thought to presage a future event. According to him there are two basic forms of Omen, normal occurrence of nature (the craving of ravens, hooting of Owls or holing of dogs for example). These are interpreted in a specific context to augur good or bad future and usual occurrences such as flight of sacred birds or eclipses, or comets that are believed to be direct manifestation of the gods.

On the other hand, Gromen Timms, Branser and Lindo (1997:459) stated that omen is supposedly a sign of future good or bad luck. A good omen foretells a desirable event, and a bad omen forecasts disaster. For example a person may believe that the death of a relative will follow a dream about losing a tooth, sometimes, omen come from a deliberate attempt to look into the future such as a fortune teller reading cards. They go on to say that many ancient societies believed that lightning, thunder or the behaviour of animal foretold event. The Mesopotamians thought that fire would destroy the kings palace if a dog is seen laying on the throne, in folklores many heroes due after disregarding such signs.

Omen is handwriting on the wall, a portent or prophecy of disaster a sign of impending and unavoidable doom, an indication or sense of what is to come often the writing on the wall (Collins 1991: 2). The allusion is to the Daniel in the Bible, in which a hand mysteriously appeared and wrote a message of Balshazzars Palace wall, foretelling his destruction and loss of his kingdom. Going further in his illustration, he gives some examples of omen by saying that pain or pleasurable sensation on the fingers was considered by the ancient Roman augurs as a sign of evil or joy to come respectively. The pricking of thumbs was considered a portent of evil. “By pricking of my thumbs something wicked this way comes (Macbeth) iv:1).

However, from the above references, the implications of the authors’ definitions of Omen is that for a sign to be regarded as an Omen, it must be capable of foretelling the future, and omen can either be good or bad. In any case, the bad omen which is said to be Ominous is mainly the concern of the study. Ominous is an adjective that gives suggestion that something bad is going to happen in the future. It is synonymous with foreboding, portentous and forewarning. Ominous as a concept has no definite definition. This is because the interpretation of ominous signs differs from one cultural area to another.

IV. DIVINATION

Divination according to Hornby (2000:339) is the skill of saying what will happen in the future or discovering hidden knowledge. Ranson (1989:202) gave a detailed definition of divination by saying that: divination is the practice of foretelling the future by means of alleged predated natural powers. It is based on the belief that the future is predetermined, that all things however casual or accidental they might appear have significance, and that the pattern of coming events can be read from them. The practice has been common to all people from earliest times often through the medium of prophet. Divination includes all methods of fortune-telling: card reading, crystal gazing, palmistry, in Astrology the general direction of a person’s life is read from the position of the stars as the time of his or her birth. Dream interpretation, once a popular form of divination is today an important aid to psychoanalysis. Divination from the definition has something to do with prophecy. The prophetic work of divination is done by a priest called diviner priest. In Igbo language he is called (Diği-afa). In the words of Mckenzu (1965:239), “The priest is the Shaman and religious figure in primitive societies who functions as a healer, diviner and possessor of psychic power, diviner (foreteller) and the mystic. Diviners are consulted whenever there is ominous event or manifestation. They declare the future as revealed to them by the gods and idols. They warn people of impending disaster, displeasure of goods, misdoing or neglect of some religious ceremonies, rituals or sacrifices, to idols, outbreak of infectious disease are epidemic. They prescribe remedies in the way of sacrifice and give better solution to people’s problems.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research work adopted mythical theory which helps to trace the traditional sacred story, typically revolving around the activities of the gods, goddesses and heroes which purports to explain a natural phenomena or cultural practices. The study of myths reveals the mind and character of people. And just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, so myths are the symbolic projections of people’s hopes values fears and aspirations. It may be that myth do not meet our current standards of factual reality but then neither does any great literature, instead they both reflect a more profound reality.

This theory is adopted to trace all the sacred stories of the people and bringing into limelight the notable ominous and divinatory incidence as depicted in the two drama texts used in this study. It also helps to sharpen valid information and correct the wrong ones, since Omen and divination are aspects of myth. The authors of the drama texts under study adopt them to create realism and to portray Igbo way of life as it relates to their religion, belief system, and other cultural practices. In doing that they applied different dramatic techniques such as: foreshadowing,
VI. THE PLACE AND FUNCTIONS OF OMEN AND DIVINATION IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SETTING, LIFE AND PRACTICE

The world-view of traditional African society in general and Igbo people in particular is deeply religious. Explaining the meaning of world-view Kalu in Gbenda (1997:20) opines that: … World view is intellectual or rational explanations of the order which undergird human lives and environments. The pattern of this underlying order could be derived from myths, taboos, customs and proverbs of a community. Kalu’s conception of world-view is the basis of people’s philosophical orientation which is usually expressed through their mythologies of the nature, organization and order of the universe. Also their perspective of the universe is expressed in the use of proverbs and words of wisdom generally. He specifically highlights three functions of world-view which includes, among other things, the explanation of reality, prediction of space, time, events and the attempts to control the events.

The Igbo world-view forms the limits of Igbo culture. Igbo world-view as stated in Ofegbụ (1982:214) recognizes three orders of existence namely “Mọọ” (spirit)- the spiritual order of the dead, “Mmadụ”- the human order of living human beings and “ihe”- the materials order of things. These materials interrelate daily and continuously. These orders and their interactions constitute the Igbo world and regulate to a large extent, Igbo beliefs and behaviour. Nevertheless, Igbo world-view recognizes the existence of Omen, and divination. That is one of the reasons why the writers of the two plays of this study adopted the use of these motifs as techniques of exploring the culture and traditions of Igbo people. The Igbo people believe in Omen and divination. It is common among the Igbo to believe that things do not just happen by chance or accident. The occurrence of two negative events which an English man can be described as a mere co-incidence could be described by a traditional Igbo man as ominous. Two negative events occurring at the same time may be described as ugly coincidence but to a core traditional Igbo man there must be a cause for that occurrence. Therefore there is need to find out the cause or what such events are indicating,. Thus uncertainties in nature and the need for security seem to be the most reasons for divination (Igbo áfá) by a diviner (díbíá áfá) in pre-literate Igbo society.

Divination, described as a means of foretelling the future, reveal the unknown or find out the wish of a deity or a spirit (Awolalu & Dopami 1979:62). It is the ominous occurrence or events that lead to divination in Igbo land. The Igbo recognize mysteries (ihe Omimi) and the extra-ordinary and inexplicable new reality (émëbọ). The Igbo normally stress cause and effect. Some examples of ominous signs in Igbo land are hooting owls (Akwa ikwụkwụ) and crying of the raven which is an ominous sign that somebody will die, perching of vulture on the peoples house top, unusual visitation of totem animals like python (eke), tortoise (mbe), millipedes (esu) Monkey (enwe), Snake (ejule) etc signify danger. other portentous signs are appearance of swarm of bees in somebody’s compound, sudden fall of a remarkable big tree in a village, appearance of rainbow in the sky in the daytime are signs that a prominent man is about to die. Crowing of cock in the middle of the night expressing his idea on this Igbo (1974:22) says that it is against the Igbo tradition for a cock to crow in the middle of night for this is “áry” or ritual pollution. If such a thing happens, it means that something must be done to cleanse the evil effect of such breaches or else the spirits of ancestors and “Ala” will plague the society either with epidemic or massive death. Igbo explores more on this by giving other example of bad omen or ritual pollution for example he claims that. “It is an abomination if a child is born with feet coming out first or with thing teeth or as twins. Such children were destroyed and the abomination against the earth goddess cleansed ritually by an Nri priest where the delivery is normal, the child is taken inside the house after it has cried loudly as an assurance that there is life. In any case if the child did not cry it means that something is wrong and that is a bad sign that life is not there.” Prolonged illness is another example of bad omen in Igbo in all cases no cure is carried out entirely by the traditional doctor (dibija) without consulting diviners. Diviners divination in the case of illness, nearly always leads to finding out what spirit had been wronged and what human relationship had been strained. Sacrifice and propitiation accompany whatever herbal medicine is given to ensure proper cure.

Dream is another form of omen in Igbo land. It is of two types good and bad dream. Good dream signifies bad omen. Childlessness, prolonged labour and infant mortality could be ominous. It can imply that some generous offence has been committed by an individual or individuals and the gods are meeting out an appropriate punishment to be the transgressor (s). Favour can be recognized only by resort to the medicine man or diviner (díbíá afa) who will advice as to the sacrifice to be offered in the circumstance. Prolonged labour is believed to be punishment by the gods to the offender against ex-marital sex in many parties of Igbo land. A pregnant woman must confess all the men with whom she had sex with before the child could come out (Ogbalu 1974:22). Incest is taboo is Igbo land. It is visited with heavy penalty. If hidden it is behaved to cause childlessness, infant mortality and bad health as it is seen one of the plays of this study. There are many other ominous signs and portents or ominous events in Igbo land.
VII. OMEN AND DIVINATION AS A WORLD-WIDE PHENOMENON

Omen is observed in various cultures of the world, irrespective of people acceptance of Christianity or any other form of received religion, or their high form of civilization such a people have their local premonition and ominous (or what the church calls superstition) concepts signs. Bushawa (2008) acknowledges the above idea when he says that omen may be considered either good or bad depending on their interpretations. The same sign may be interpreted differently by different culture. For example, a superstition in the united state and other countries across Europe indicates that a black cat is an omen of bad luck. Comets also have been considered to be both good and bad omen. He says that the best known example is probably Halley’s Comet which was bad omen for king Harold of England but a good omen for William the conqueror. Shakespeare (1972) confirms that comet is a bad omen in Rome it portends the death of a king or a prominent person in Rome. Thus in Julius Caesar Calpurnia during the time she is persuading Caesar not to go out to capitol because of strange and terrible signs that manifest themselves says to Caesar “When beggars die, there are no comet seen, the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes” (P.87). Likewise the Mesopotamians thought that fire would destroy the kings palace if a dog is seen lying on the throne. In folklores many heroes die after disregarding such saying (Gromen et al 1997:450). In some parts of Igbo land, the consistent backing of dog at midnight signifies death.

There is a general belief of the spirit causation of some strange manifestation in the world. For the Romans, for instance disaster is seen by a manifestations of divine disapproval and unusual phenomena as portents of catastrophe. Shakespeare acknowledges this idea and that is why he made Caesar to order his priests to offer sacrifices to the gods and to let him know if the results are good. Caesar here is afraid of all the ominous manifestations around him. As it is in Roman culture, so it is in some cultures of the whole world. Bearing the above ideas in mind some Igbo contemporary writers adopt the idea of consultation of oracle, diviner priest (Dibija afia), Priest (Ezemmuo) and prophets (onye anuma) in their works, especially those works that carry along with them ominous signs. The consultation is done to find out the cause and solution to the problem or to forestall the impending danger.

In line with the above idea, Bob and Mitchell (2000) affirm that Romans habit of interpreting natural phenomena as signs from the beyond stemmed from Etruscans. The Etruscans developed reading omens and auspices into a form of science, new different means of divination. In their belief the signs they read were sent by mythical called Tages, who in their mythology was to have been ploughed up from the earth. They go on to state that the Roman read the future by examining the entrails of special sacrificial animals, the liver being of special importance for that purpose. They would observe light ruing and interpret meaning. They try to find meaning to any unusual phenomena which occurs, lakes Swamps even animals were all deemed to be host to spirit. Likewise in some communities in African as stated as N.E.R.D.C. (1987) there are sacred mountains, lakes, rivers, trees, valley etc which are associated with spiritual powers.

On the other hand Murray (2008:6) an Indian Astrology proclaims that “Omens seen or heard or even virtualized at the initiation of an activity are said to foretell the outcome of the activities. Omen and portents is useful branch of Indian astrology which includes interpretation of dreams, status of living and non-living items in the environment, sound produced by human and animals, portents, mode of pacification of adverse omens. More so, he says that it acts as a guide in horary astrology to clinch the issue when there is stalemate.

In line with the above views, The paranormal Hunter’s Guide (2001) opines that marriages were planned for certain days and certain months to prevent them from being over shadowed by bad omen. It is an omen of disaster to have black cat entering the house. He goes on to say that there are other omens when a snake falls from the roof into the yard or for a beam of the house to split, it is a bad omen. To spill wine, oil or even water could also be a sign that bad things were about to happen. Another sign of bad Omen is to meet a mule in the street carrying a herb called heposelimum which was used to decorate tombs. To stumble over the doorway when leaving one’s house is considered a bad omen. Nightmares were generally seen as omen of bad luck. He goes on to say that bad dream might be a reason for a lawyer to ask his case to be adjourned. No official state business is held without the taking of Omens/auspices for this purpose an augur would be present. He would mark out a square on the ground
with his staff from where the omens should be observed. Significantly he is not the person to actually take the sighting. This is left to a state official the augur acted as his advisor.

Dream is an example of Omen. According to Hall in Eze (2010:26) “Dream has been described spiritually as messages from gods, prediction of future or from the soul, for symbology is the language of the soul. Many cultures practices dream incubation with the intensification of cultivating dreams that were prophetic or contained messages from the divine.

On this note, Partena (2009:5) Opines that American culture believes that dreams are meaningful. Their culture has always regarded dream with great respect. They see dreams as a means of obtaining sacred wisdom and guidance for life. He illustrates further that visits from ancestors’ spirits occur between midnight, 2.00am which corresponds to the many Igbo communities, in Nigeria where it is generally believe that ancestors visit during midnight when the person is in deep slumber. It is a bad omen in Igbo land for one to have a bad dream. In Igbo land for someone to have a dream where he is being chased by a masquerade is a sign that the enemies are after the person’s life. For one to eat a dream signifies that the person is being initiated into a diabolic society like Ogbanje in Igbo land.

In his own argument about dream Morewedge (2009:3) asserts that at least three countries including the United States believe that dream contain hidden truths. Morewedge and Morton in one of their studies that surveyed general beliefs about dream surveyed 149 universities students in the United States, India and South Korea. They asked the students to rate different theories about dreams. It is discovered that dreams reveal hidden truth about themselves and the world.

However, in literature dream is used as prophetic elements in literary works of some contemporary playwrights and novelist. These writers adopt dream mainly in their tragic works and also in some works that are not necessarily tragic like tragic comedies, works that have grim message to deliver to the audience as well as works that seek to project the idea of predestination as correct; the idea that one’s fate is unchangeably decreed before birth.

Examples of such works are both European and African literature. Like in Julius Caesar written by Shakespeare (1972:367), he adopts dream to for tell danger in this drama Calpurnia Caesar’s wife had dream of Caesars murder or assassination in the capital in Rome. Caesar himself confirms Calpurnia’s dream with the following statement in Act II scene II “No heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight thrice had calpurnia in her sleep cried out help ho! They murder Caesar! Who is within?

Caesar was disturbed as a result if his dream for this reason he orders the priest to offer sacrifices to the gods in order to forestall the impending doom. Calpurnia too was frightened and she tried all she could to persuade Caesar not to go to that day. Caesar out of pride, refused to oblige to his wife’s advice. He went to the capital to the forewarning and suffered assassination in the hands of his purported friends Had it been that Caesar obliged to this he could have forestalled the impending doom.

From the discussions made on the concepts omen and divination as it presented or used by different authors of the study, omen is a worldwide phenomena. It comes in various forms according to the people’s world-views and beliefs. In some case they came to warm with the sole purpose of saving; if the affected can read and interpret the handwriting properly and take precautionary measures. In some other cases they portend disaster and doom which cannot be forestalled.

### VIII. SYNOPSES OF THE TEXTS

Nwata Rie Awo: This is a play written by Godwin Onyekaonwu. It was published in (1980) by university press limited Onitsha, Nigeria. This play depicts the themes of excessive pride, infatuation and wickedness. It is about a famous Wrestler of Amangwu named Awo who commits incest by marrying his daughter unknowingly. Obioma forces herself to him to marry her because of his wonderful performance in a wrestling match. Awo hates Obioma so much to the extent of accusing her of poisoning his food. Because of this his kinsmen support him and send Obioma back to her parents with her baby. As if that is not enough, Awo planed their kidnap and sells them item into slavery. Before all these could happen to Obioma she had a very bad dream that later came to reality. Awo later decides to many after fifteen years. Unknowingly he married his own daughter Ôdinchefu. Ôdinchefu encounters the problem of childlessness, and constant illness. Because of these problems Awo and Ôdinchefu consult a diviner priest (Dibja Afa). The diviner reveals to them the cause of their problem and also proffers solutions to them. When Awo discovers his mistake at the return of his lost wife he stabs himself to death.

Obidiya: Eyinna Akoma is the author of this drama. It was published in Nigeria by university press limited Ibadan in 1973. The themes of greed corruption, wickedness and revenge are recurrent and universal themes. The drama presents a picture of a rich greedy man who wants to acquire the poor man’s only piece of land by force. Oriaiku Dike the rich man does not want the poor man to live. He engages the services of assassins to take the life of Ô numa because he defeated him in the land case. Obidiya the wife of Ô numa was so grieved that she revenges her husband’s death in a very ruthless manner. Oriaiku was made to pay heavily for his action. He died a mysterious and shameful death. He was not given any burial rite but rather thrown into the river. In fact, he was buried like nobody. Not long after his death, his
son who was studying overseas, died like his father and his other children got drawn far away from home and his entire family was completely destroyed.

IX. Omen and Divination As Portrayed in Selected Plays of the Study

Nwata Pie Awo

The writer uses dream to displayomen in this drama. Obiaoma the wife of Awooro the protagonist had a bad dream which later manifested to her own detriment. She narrates her dream to Nwamgo her friend as follows:

Otu a ka m na ụmụ Nwanjọ ihe m siri gawa ihota ero n’elu ugwu ojọ ọhụ ka anyị na-erute nso ugwu ọhụ, otu mmụọ nwere isi asaa na otu anya nochibidoro ọzọ anyị ga-esi rigo ugwu ọhụ.

A sịri na onye mmụọ ọhụ metụrụ aka uwa echunahụ ya. Ndi m na ha ụjị gbanahuchara m, mmụọ ọhụ wee rígogo élù ugwu ọhụ. Na maanị m ụ bụ onye o metụrụ aka tutu ụrọ ịbe m we rigowe ugwu ọhụ. Ka anyị rigotara n’ọnụ ugwu ọhụ malite na-acho ọrọ aṣọhioro m ụkwụ weee si n’elu ugwu ạhụ dakaṣịrị ruo n’eziegbọ ndagwurụghụru di n’ike ugwu ọhụ ebe ọtụtụ ndi mmụọ dika nke ọhụ anyị ụrụ mbụ gbakọsịrị wee kụgide m ihe wee ganye na m ụnwọ.

I and other women went in search of mushrooms on top of one dangerous hill. As we approached the hill, one spirit with seven heads and an eye barred then approach to the hill. It was reported that whoever the spirit touched is damned. All my companions escaped from the spirit and ran up the hill but I was the only one he touched before I joined the others to make ascent. As we were on top of the hill searching for mushroom I missed my steps and fell down to the bottom of the hill. There, many spirits like the one we saw before gathered and started to beat me until I died (pp. 58-59).

Obiaoma’s dream is a bad omen. It foretells her future life. Among all the women married in that community, she was the only accused of poisoning her husband. Also she was divorced, ostracized and sold into slavery along with her only daughters. In another dimension, she was the only woman whose husband unknowingly married their daughters, and the two became co-wives to one husband (p.73).

Furthermore, she was the only woman her husband committed suicide when he found out that he had committed incest a great abomination in his community (p.74). Another form through which the author displayed the ominous in his work is taboo. He uses Awooro the protagonist to bring to light the consequences of breaking taboos. Incest is a taboo in Igbo land anyone who commits it is damned. He/she had to suffer either prolonged illness or childlessness, and miscarriages. The propitiatory sacrifices are performed to placate the divinities and ancestors so that misfortunes and calamities do not befall the individual and or the society.

In this play, Ọdịnchęfu the daughter of Awooro who married her father unknowingly suffered prolonged illness, infertility and unhappy marriage life. These problems made them to consult a diviner priest. The diviner through the instrument of his divination reveals the cause of their problems predicts the future occurrence and also provides the solution to the problem. Awooro died because of the flaws in his character, “pride” and wickedness. The writer uses the play to project the idea that ominous signs are dangerous and tragic. Thus the play is a tragic one.

The writer also depicts the ominous in his work through strange signs and forewarning. In the play the writer uses the hooting and crying of an owl and evil bird (Akwa Ikweghikwi and ajọ mmụnụ) which in traditional Igbo society portend death. The writer uses the following dramatic technique to present omen and divination in his work, they:

Foreshadowing: At the beginning of the play the writer uses a character Onuzo to foretell the future dramatic events in the play. Through his interpretation of the ominous signs like the hooting and crying of owl and the evil bird predicts the tragic nature of the drama. Other techniques are exposition, dramatic monologue irony, suspense, diction and figurative expressions

Obidiya.

Akoma used dreams, premonitions, strange signs, to expose ominous incidence in his work. The first ominous sign exhibited in the play is dream. The writer uses it as a prophetic element to represent beforehand what unfolds later in subsequent scenes of his play. In Obidiya, It is through dream of obidiya the wife of Ọnuma that God revealed to her husband the impending doom that will befall him which is death. Findings show that dreams are not just fragment of the dreamer’s imagination as we tend to believe but a mystical process by which man gets information from his creator. Obidiya’s dream is truly information from God. She had a divine visitation when she was sleeping. She dreamt of his husband’s death. Her dream was a prediction of the future just as she dreamt she reports to her husband saying: “Ọ na-emee m ka ọ bụ na mmadụ ka ọ bụ na nọọ. I ọọ na-asa ọhụ, sachaa bọọ isi, dimkpaa mmadụ atọ abata ebe ọhụ burile okpiri kọọ gi daa n’ala na-agba ịko. Ha eme ala. Etiiri m mkpụ ndi Mmadụ aza (p.6).”

It was as if it was real or in a dream you were taking bath; finish your bath, you are combing your hair, three men came in there, hit you with a club, and you fell down struggling to survive. They disappeared I shouted and people responded.

The above dream came to fulfillment as the whole incident took place as represented beforehand. This incident therefore confirms the theory which says that “Dream is a hidden truth” (Morewedge, 2009:3).

Obidiya’s dream is a hidden truth revealed. She became afraid when she woke up from sleep. She believes that her dream is a very bad one. But when she reported to her husband, though he accepted it as
being a bad dream but did not take any precaution. Rather, he says that dreams do not normally affects the person whom the ominous points at. Moreover, he has no need of being worried since he is not planning evil against anybody. This is his own personal belief but not too long after Obidiya’s dream Oriaku hired three assassins to kill him. Behold the poor man was murdered in cold blood in his house as he was combing his hair after his bath. This incident happened when Obidiya was a away to market. She later revenges her husband death.

Premonition is a strange feeling that something bad is going to happen. Both Ònmụma and Obidiya had premonition of death before Ònmụma’s death. After her dream which she narrated to Ònmụma her husband, Ònmụma begins to have some ill feeling of danger, he complains; “Ime ahụ nile na-eme m kpọdu kpọdu, Obi m na ahụ ezeokonghi” (P.13) I am feeling quite uncomfortable. There is no (coordination between my whole body systems).

After few days Obidiya started to have the same kind of ill feeling. She became worried that she complains to her husband saying; Ime ahụ agaghi m a ga. Obi m na-agà ka elekere anya Ahụ ekweghi m mneghara.Abalị nke taa ụra abaghị onye Ọ bula anya.Ihe fođurị ikpiikpi bụ i n’ite ọfe Mgbọ m tete ụra auzuụ gbara uo nile gbụrụgbụrụ. Ahụ juru ezi nile taa. Chineke ogu oo! (p.19) I am not feeling well inwardly. My mind is working like the clock. This night nobody slept at all The owl hooted excessively. When I woke up, soldier ants had. Circled the house, ants had filled the homestead today God everything is in your hands

The couple’s feelings are in order. This is because in Igbo land there is a common belief that when something bad wants to happen to somebody, that person or someone very close to him/her will start to have some bad feelings without being able to explain why. Another example of the ominous signs in the play is the appearance of totem. Totems are animals or plants that are deemed sacred and consequently revere by a clan or group of people. There is always a myth that explains the relationship between the totem and the clan which makes the clan not to eat, kill or destroy them. Almost all the clans in Igbo land have an animal or plant species that it does not eat. In some cases it may be a part of animal. There are some totem animals whose visits to a house or its appearance are ominous for instance; Ònmụma was visited by a Python (Eke). Its visit is a warning to the family about an impending doom. The fear of the python made Obidiya to ask her husband “Anyị a ga-eme olia?” (what shall we do?) in the same way, Ònmụma did a lot of pacification and propitiation when he realizes that the presence of Python in his house portends danger and he them addressed it as a human being with the following praise to find out his mission;

Eke Nweala Nwe ọhia Amadi dike, anaghị ahụ gi mpụ. Ginị bụ gi ije a? I hapụ ala eze gi bịa ebe a …. (p.20)

Python the owner of the land and forest, the strong, you are not seen in vain what is your mission? You left your kingdom…

He even offered food which the snake refused to eat. Showing that its mission is not for good, in an anger Ònmụma attempts to kill the snake but it disappeared. All these signs portend danger that is why Obidiya declares “Enyi ije dị m ihe a bụ uchị ojoo (p.21) my friend I am afraid these are bad omens.”

But Ònmụma, being a man these signs are nothing to him He does not believe in them that is why he replied to his wife in an unaffected tone saying “ụgo, adighị m, onye enweghị ihe o bụ o nweghị ihe o ga-akuwa (P.22) “I am not afraid, he who has not on his head has nothing to break. This type of belief prevented Ònmụma from being precautions like consulting the “afa” (diviner) as it is in Igbo culture to find out the cause of those signs and what to do to forestall any impending danger. Ònmụma’s attitude justified Bushawa (2008) claim that people hold a variety of beliefs concerning the cause of omen. Each belief varies across culture it may be influenced by many factors such as level of acculturation, gender, level of education, experience of Omen and individual faith.

Relating to what happen in Obidiya are example of signs and portents in some literary works of contemporary playwright and Novelist. For instance Shakespeare (1972) in Macbeth made use of signs and portents. In this Drama there were signs and portent that accompanied the murder of Banquo by Macbeth in order that he got the opportunity to the throne of Scotland. These signs and portents came in form of thunder and lightning amidst the eerie screams of the three witches. These statements made by lady Macbeth and old man respectively are examples of ominous.

Macbeth: I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry (p.55)

Oldman: It is unnatural even like the deed that is done on Tuesday last, a falcon towering in her pride of place was by a musing owl hawked at and killed (p. 73).

In Julius Caesar Shakespeare also made use of signs and portents. Here Calpurnia Caesar’s wife reports to him of other people’s experiences about what was to come by saying:

Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies yet now they fright me. There is one within. Besides things that we have heard and seen, recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch. A lioness had whelped in the streets. And graves have yawned and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fury warriors fight upon the clouds in ranks and squadrons and right form of war, which drizzle blood upon the capital, the noise of battle hurtled in the air, horses did neigh and dying men did groan and ghosts did strict and squeal about the street.

O Caesar, these things are beyond all use and I do fear them (P. 95),

The above forewarning did occur before Caesar was assassinated. This is simply because he did not regard these signs or heed to his wife’s advice to go out, his wisdom was consumed in confidence, and he went out and was killed.

Similarly like the incident in Özuma’s house series of portentous signs are noticed in Oriaku the rich man’s compound. There are unusual visit of some certain birds and insects in Oriaku’s compound. The Ìmú nnadị (Weird sisters) see these and testified they are portentous, they proclaimed:

Giị ni ụdị ihe ịụnụ ndị? Na-egosi onwe ha n’ezee na ụfo Oriaku? Eke na ajuala na-akpọcha n’ụfo n’ejihe ọcha. Wee fukuwa n’iru Mmadụ nile, udele na-ebere n’eli ụfo si n’otu elu ụfo efekwasi. Nke ọzo ijere na mkpụ arapuwo Ebe obibi ha wee bia weputa obi ebe, Mmadụ nile na-ani. Ezigbo esu na-eji ka unyi ndị ọzi ọzi iye, egosiwo onwe ha n’obi ọchụsịa ndị ọhịa nile, ....

Giị na ndị na-egosi? N’ezie Oriaku nọ na nsogbu (pp. 66-67) What are these signs which manifested themselves in Oriaku’s house? Sacred python and puff-adders crawl into the house during the day and disappeared before all eyes. Vulture perches on house top. Soldier ants and termites have left their habitual and occupied the reception hall thus driving visitors away.... What does these signs shows? Truly Oriaku is in trouble!

The ultimate result of these strange signs is the total and complete destruction of Oriaku’s household. Oriaku’s death is also a bad omen to his community. It is an abomination for a man to die of swollen stomach. In Igbo land the corpse of such person is thrown away into the evil forest. It is because his death was a mystery that made his kinsmen to consult the diviner priest of Ozuuzu oracle. Through divination it was reported that Oriaku committed a lot of abomination. Thus his servant Gogo reports the message from the oracle.

Otuụtụ ihe tinyere aka n’ọnụụ ya, Ozuusu si na ọ kwafuru ọbara ndị Onweghị ihe ha mere, were ada ya nwanụ gwo gwor ọgọ. Na aka ya dị ọnụụ Özuma... Ozuusu kwukwara na ya were ọfo na ogu anyị nye ndị ọzọ na kwukwara ego. Na ihe mere o jiri ọgbapụta ya n’aka ndị Iro bụ na ndị ọzi na-anye ya nsogbu (p.76)

Lot of things contributed to his death Ozuusu said that he shaded blood of innocent people, used his daughter for money ritual. He was responsible for the death of Özuma... Ozuusu also said that he sold our symbols of peace and justice (ọfo and ogu) to enemies. He recovered it from the enemies because the ancestors were disturbing him. Because of the mysterious death of Oriaku no burial rite was accorded to him.

The dramatic techniques used by Akoma to present omen and divination in his work are foreshadowing. He uses Ìmú ndadi (Weird sisters) at the beginning of the play to issue an eerie scream of what the audience would expect as they predicts the evil intensity of oracle, the murder of Özuma and horrifying death of which Oriaku would suffer and the destruction of his family other examples are, exposition, dramatic monologue, suspense, dictions, figurative languages like idiom, personification, rhetorical questions hyperbolo etc

CONCLUSION

In the contemporary society, there are various omens in different cultures of the world according to people’s world-view and beliefs and these attract the attention of many Igbo playwrights and their counterparts at other parts of the world. However, only two drama texts are used for this study. The chief instruments used to research on these two phenomena are Library, personal experiences, observations and oral interviews.

One of the major findings in this research work is that the writers explored the culture and traditions of the Igbo people which form the common motifs in their plays. The writers ostensibly make use of these phenomena with a view to documenting, preserving the Igbo cultural values for posterity. It was also discovered that the writers of these works draw from the same cultural well because their works are related. Their ideas about the two phenomena omen and divination are related. This is probably because oral tradition has a great impact on their lives and thinking.

The findings show that omens and divination are prominent in lives of both traditional and modern Igbo man. Both the traditional and modern Igbo man believes in the two phenomena. For instance, the traditional Igbo man goes to a diviner priest (dịbịa afọ) whenever there is occurrence of ominous events around him. Likewise the modern Igbo man especially the Christian and elites believe in the two phenomena. They go to safety doctors like pastors, powerful men and women of God, priests with high spiritual power when they are faced with difficulties and misfortunes they cannot immediately understand. The prescriptions of these doctors are usually fasting and prayers and also offering of sacrifice in form of thanksgiving to God.

The authors’ different styles of presenting these phenomena in their works are so unique. The dramatic techniques adopted by these authors, help to make their plays real and educative. They also help them to explore the solemnity often associated with tragic drama.
However, omen and divination are part and parcel of Igbo culture. They have come to stay because people without culture tend to exist in collective amnesia. Igbo culture therefore has valuable insight to offer about the ultimate reality. It remains alive and can never die. The writers ostensibly used omen and divination in their works with a view to documenting and preserving the Igbo cultural values for posterity.

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