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Hubris, Physis and Eironeia in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*

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Abstract

In the play, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, the Oba contends with internal intrigues, disloyal vassal states, and wily British colonizers who want to extend their control and trade inland. In the bid to grapple with the internal challenge to his rule he sentences some chiefs to death for the murder of a royal advisor. By the time he engages the British, the Oba already has a divided polity and house of chiefs he addresses regularly, and in doing so he uses words and phrase that invoke the nature of things, physis, in order to emphasize his points. The paper argues that the death sentence is hubris, more of which he continues to commit in other instances, while the words that mimic the nature of things in the mouth of the Oba, especially, and the other characters, become ironic (eironeia) in the end, and now apply to the

Oba and his empire much as they were originally directed to or against others.

Introduction

Oba Ovoramwen Nogbaisi in this play contends with so many contemporaneous forces as he endeavours to wield his empire together in a time of change. He manages internal rebellion or intrigues challenging his accession to the throne, wards off the attempts of wily British imperialists to make him sign off his empire through a treaty. Hence, the Oba delivers first, a death penalty on murderers of Uwangué Egiebor, interacts with subjects from the outer reaches of his empire, engages the white men and so on.

This paper argues that in all these engagements, the Oba first of all commits *hubris* (actions that transgress the bounds of law, conventions or pious decency, which the actor enjoys at the expense of the victim. Here, the Oba transgresses the limits of custom, tradition, and civility), by the death sentence on some chiefs who committed murder, and in defending himself and his empire, he makes statements that invoke *the essences of things in/and by nature (physis)*. These statements, the paper further contends, become ironical (“for the ancient Greeks *eirôneia* meant “dissembling”—a user of *eirôneia* is trying to hide something”(Encyclopaedia Britannica 2013), but the Oba here, hides nothing, but the nature and dynamics of events do, of which the Oba unwittingly gives verbal expressions), as events and episodes in the play unfold.

Character Portrait of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi

Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi reigns in an epoch possibly considered, the heroic age of the Benin Empire. In Greek cultural and political history, such was the age of the *aristoi*. The *aristoi* were those ordained by nature to rule as exemplified in Achilles of the Trojan War fame. He had both divine and human parentage. (Bury 146). Such heroes were regarded as endowed by nature with all the attributes of leadership which are enhanced through rigorous training in military and cultural matters, in such ways as to ensure that they have sound mind in sound body. The *Isikhien* hail the Oba thus: “the gods themselves who chose him/ Made him Lord, bulwark of the land”/ (I.1. 7). Iyase hails him, the “home leopard” (1.1.4)

This is a classical portraiture of an *aristos*. Like Achilles, he tolerates no insults, and like him he cuts Odundun – the Udezi of Akure – to size seizing the swords of state the latter fashions for himself as Achilles challenged Agamemnon. The said death sentence is an eloquent testimony to his aversion for opposition to his imperial and regal powers. His intelligence as an *aristos* manifests as he bursts the tricks of the white men, who presumed he would jump at the supposed benefits of the rubber trade for Benin people and then sign off his empire (1.1.19). He rebuffs white man's Greek gifts, and remarks, "to love someone who does not love you in return/ is like shaking the huge *iroko* tree to make tiny dew –drops fall." (I.1.20). After the invasion, and the Oba dethroned, it takes the combined efforts of all his loyal and respected chiefs to plead with him to pay homage to the British crown – an *aristos* never gives up, Achilles never gave up, he died only out of essential defect, and in the same way, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi does not give up even in apparent defeat. He does not renounce his throne, and essentially because of that valour we have today the monarchy of Benin restored.

The Dilemma of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi

Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi was essentially a youth, forty years old, on ascension to the throne. In spite of this he grapples with enormous challenges of insurrection at home, an undeclared economic blockade at the sea, and manages wily Ijekiri middlemen, his subjects, who now short circuit his business interests, and owe doubtful allegiance to him. In addition, the Oba contends with the intrigues of the colonialists, and it appears that no matter how he conducts his relations with them they have programmed him to fail.

Furthermore, there appears to be a challenge to his ascension to the throne. The intrigues arising from this challenge eventually leads to the assassination of the Oba's favourite adviser. And in avenging him, the Oba sentences his own chiefs to death, especially in view of their insolent defiance. Incidentally, the *Ifa* priest appears prophesying doom. This prophecy terrifies the Oba and he surmises that "I shall be the next victim of vile plotting then/ my dead body following that of Uwangue Egiebor." (I.1.4). He Laments: "civil war – the final curse of internal intrigues!/Binis burning Binis/ brothers freely killing brothers" (I.1.16).

Ordinarily, the situation above calls for decisive action, but the Ifa priest prescribes “Caution!” The Oba is, thus, faced with a very complex situation. Given the cosmology to which the Oba, the *Ifa* Priest, and the culture generally subscribe, and the archaeology of knowledge deriving from it, the Ifa Priest’s “caution”, for the Oba, in this emergency is quite psychologically enervating. As events unfold, the Oba obviously never escaped from that psychological gag arising from the prophecy and cautionary advice.

The Hubris of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi

Shortly before the Oba delivers the death sentence on the assassins of Uwangué Egiebor, he pointedly asks two of them – Obaruduagbon and Esasoyen, “I ask you why did you kill Uwangué Egiebor?” (I.1.4). Obaruduagbon replies, “We ask the Oba: why did he kill our brothers of the House of Iwebo?” (I.1.4). The Oba replies, “Your brothers threw ashes in the face of a rising wind; in reply, the wind smothered them with the same ashes from their very hands...” (I.1.5). Obaruduagbon caps his insolent reply in thus:

If a provoked houseboy cannot match his wicked master strength with strength, he maims the master’s favourite goat! (I.1.5)

From this interlocution between the Oba and the prisoners, the House of Iwebo brothers perished in their challenge to the enthronement of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, and as an *aristos*, he condones no challenges to his dominance. It is consequently surmised that the assassination of Uwangué Egiebo is arevenge killing in which the Oba himself is implicated. This possibly explains why all the other Chiefs at that court appearance pleaded for mercy, except Ologbosere who condemned the prisoners’ words as insolent. It could also be that the plea for mercy by the other Chiefs is because the assassins themselves were Chiefs, now disgraced. Either or both of these possible reasons can help us put Obakpolo Uzazakpo’s upbraiding of the Oba in private into perspective.

If the first option is the case, then the Oba is both prosecutor and judge in his own cause, which is contrary to the principle natural of justice even in traditional societies. If, on the other hand, it is because they were chiefs, they would have died despicably, because there is a suggestion in the literature that condemned criminals about this time of the Punitive Expedition, were

sacrificed to the gods to ward off the impending attack on Benin. This would have incensed all sense of decency about how chiefs are dispensed with in spite of their conspiratorial crime. On both counts the Oba has exceeded his bounds, and hence committed *hubris*.

A comparison between the Oba's handling of the case of Obaruduagbon & co, and that of Ekpoma succession struggle, throws this charge of committing *hubris* into high relief. He summons the Ekpoma elders to hear their case against the son of the late Enogie of Ekpoma who is due to succeed his father, as the Oba does not want any problems from any vassal state. He promptly resolves the case, by advising the Ekpoma people to give the new Enogie a chance, remarking that if he misbehaves, the Oba will know. The case is settled, and the Ekpoma elders leave for home with gifts and prayers for peace from the Oba. Uzazakpo commends the Oba's demeanour in this case and uses the opportunity to remind him that he mishandled the earlier case, about which the Oba disagrees and insists he had to contain the insurrection (1.1.8).

Why does Uzazakpo commend one judgment and condemn the other? The answer is simple. The Oba can treat the Ekpoma case as one of insurrection, just as he does in the case of Obaruduagbon & co, against the authority of the Oba. But he chooses not to do so. Rather he cajoles the Ekpoma people to give the new Enogie a chance. Why couldn't he give a reprieve to Obaruduagbon & co? This is because there is a personal interest component in this case, and in pursuing that, the Oba over reached himself against the background of Benin traditional code of justice and ethics. After all, both cases fall into the category of insubordination or treason, and should be handled similarly. Rather he chooses to inflame an already heated polity by condemning to death Chiefs of the land, whose families would resent the Oba, and be willing tools in the hands of his detractors, both internal and external.

Physis and Eironeia in *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*

In classical Greek literature, *hubris* is a sin left to the gods to judge and punish the offender. But my intention in this paper is not to mystify the fate of the Oba after he makes that tactical mistake of the death sentence. Rather the argument is that after the judgment, the Oba unwittingly sets off a series of actions over which he no longer has control, and which appear more like the punishment from the gods than mere coincidences. In this section of the

paper, the argument is that Ola Rotimi makes the characters in the play, including the Oba, in discussions either in public or private, appeal to *the order of nature or the essence of things (physis)*, in order to make a point. In the context of the play, these otherwise ordinary innocent statements become ironical as the events leading to the downfall of the Oba and Benin empire play out.

Let's first consider the *Isikhien's* characterization of the Oba as, "the home leopard and bulwark of the nation." The Oba is personified as a leopard, and as such, he is also the fortress of the nation. When the occasion arises for him to exhibit the courage and ferocity of a leopard, he became limp like withered vegetable and instead re-echoes the ward 'caution' as if that, in itself, is a magic wand to repel the intransigent imperialists bent on dethroning him. The bulwark of the nation becomes a porous embattlement. He does not show courage even to approve the stratagems of the war council, and the council and commanders now operate as they deem fit.

Shortly after the said death sentence, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi declares his intention to be a maximum ruler after the footsteps of his for bears. He declares:

Some men there are who think that, by honour of years, or the power of position, or by too much love for trouble, can dull the fullness of my glow and bring darkness on the empire. But they forget ...they forget that no matter how long and stout the human neck, on top of it must always sit a head (I.1.6-7)

Henceforth, he tolerates no opposition or rivalry throughout the empire. This is in the character of all royals, never to condone any challenge to their authority. And in his case hardly can anyone get concessions or grace from him, hence this affirmation:

to get water from a well, one does not lift the well and tilt it
(I.1.7, emphasis mine)

In any case, the *Isikhien* reads the inner thought of the Oba, and as a chorus, cautions him on his agenda for maximum rule:

Hold, hold, tight firmly
mother hold the rope

lest

I crash

Baby parrot that I am (I.1.7)

The loquacity of the Oba is at best regretted by the chorus, but what it fears most is the political naiveté of the Oba in declaring maximum rule at a time someone like Uzazakpo, who is a repository of the knowledge of court manners, politics, and intrigues advises him not to instil fear in his Chiefs but to court their loyalty. The Isikhien therefore appeals to providence, in the form of Mother Nature, to intervene and school the Oba at this critical period before he makes more grievous mistakes.

Perhaps more important for our purpose here is that, the Oba's declared intention of maximum rule, his crave to glow throughout the empire like the moon, and his condescending remark at 1.1.6-7, are all ironic given the imminent onslaught of the Whiteman. All these power posturing of the Oba are given pragmatic refutation by the invasion and conquest of Benin and the Oba's subsequent dethronement. In spite of the long years of greatness and honour of the Benin Empire, on top of its *stout neck now sits* the Queen thereby *dulling the glow of the Oba* and his ancient empire.

The *water and well* imagery above is apparently used by the Oba to drive the point home that getting concessions of power or cooperation from him in this Kingdom should not be like working against nature. This is true in the case of the executed Chiefs. But that statement becomes ironic in the context of his relations with the Whiteman who has persistently tried to cajole, or trick him into signing a major treaty that may see him parcelling off his Empire through a mere stroke of a pen. When the Oba would not cooperate as expected by the colonialists, *the well is actually lifted and tilted in order to get water from it* through the Punitive Expedition. In this context, the Oba's claim that no one can twist his arm to get concessions of any kind from him becomes ironic.

Oba's attempt to rally his Forces

The other thing to consider in this context of ironic statements derived from 'nature' is the Oba's attempt to rally his forces in a war council shortly before the battle with the whiteman. Given the pedigree of valour Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi claims for himself, and that attributed to him by

several courtiers, it is quite ironic that the 'Home leopard' starts his preamble to the war council this way:

Caution is our word, my people

Let the whiteman rudely prod

Us further, in spite of caution, *then*

Then he will know that the way a cat

Walks is not the way it catches a rat. (II.3.34, emphasis mine)

The trend of events in the Play, easily show this as an empty boast on the part of the Oba. He has been cowed by the prophecy of the *Ifa* Priest, and he is no longer too sure of the loyalty of his ranks and file in view of the events leading to his *hubris*. Those events, as remarked earlier on, have caused alienation in the population, but especially in the families of those executed prominent chiefs, and those recently being sidelined in the chain of command. The play shows that, apart from the designs and plans of a disconcerted war council, the Oba has no super-ordinate plans that can cause even consternation in the war camp of the invading imperialists.

Nevertheless, the above statement of the Oba has a place in the course of events that is developing. It is made to counter the skepticism of Chiefs Obayuwana and Ologbosere regarding the strength of the Benin Empire, and its current dire straits due to the Oba's indecision and inability to show leadership at this time of extreme emergency.

In spite of the skepticism of the two high chiefs about the concert of Benin currently, the Oba offers them kola nuts as he muses:

Break them...

Break the kolanuts

Given in bond

Ye elders of

Benin –

Share them: share

In the spirit of that

Bond

Share them (II.3.34)

The playwright shows, by the arrangement of the words in this passage, that the Oba is already losing both psychological and physical vigour as he speaks to the war council, which in itself is symptomatic of the irony of both kola nut and the search for unity among the chiefs at the time.

Kola nut is an ironic symbol even though it is venerated by so many cultures in Southern Nigeria, especially the Igbo. Irrespective of the claim that he, who brings kola nut, brings life, it is ironic that that which brings life is dismembered by violence either of the fingers or a knife. In the present context of the war council over which the Oba presides, and in view of his search for concert among his war generals, this bond of peace so much desired, without preparing the grounds in the internal politics of the land, must suffer passion: "Break them..." is the Oba's plea. The objects immediately in question are the kola nuts, but the ironic objects to be broken are the chiefs though peace is the target. Division appears to be what the Oba's words invoke, as if an elder would say, "as the lobe of kola nut when broken fall apart and remain separate forever, may you all break up and go your separate ways."

This appears to be what is playing out here. The Oba assumes a concert among the chiefs that is not there. Before now, he has not rallied and sought the loyalty of the other Chiefs as advised by Uzazakpo. Rather he singles out Ologbosere and gives him the princess to marry, thereby turning him into the favored one to the chagrin of other Chiefs.

The Irony of Uzazakpo and the Oba's hubristic distortion of traditional command structure

Given the reactions of the other prominent Chiefs to the death sentence on the murders, Uzazakpo advises the Oba to court the favour of Ologbosere, which he does, and in so doing, sets off a series of unintended consequences, much, to his utter disadvantage. Uzazakpo means well, but does not see the full implications of his own advice. Having assured Ologbosere that the Oba means no mischief through the *fait accompli* of betrothing the princess to him, Ologbosere has no choice, from now on, but to justify the Oba's confidence in him. Having secured the trust and loyalty of Ologbosere in the fluid situation, the Oba makes further costly slips in judgment and actions.

First, he charges Ologbosere to command Benin army sent to contain restive Agbor. Ologbosere is shocked and complains:

Me? But...why me to lead the army of
the empire against Agbor. Why not the
commander-in-chief himself, Iyase?
What about Ezomo? I'm only third in
command, my lord. (I.1.21)

Ologbosere's remonstrance is instructive as it highlights the Oba's subversion of the traditional command structure. He sidelines the Iyase-commander-in-chief, and his deputy, Ezomo. In Act II scene V, the Oba passes over to Ologbosere the 'ada'-symbol of the Benin Empire with these solemn words:

I put in your hands,
The spirit of the empire
Let it breathe
Child of chameleon rarely dies young
This is the life of the nation
Defend it...
Let it... breathe...

As far as the play goes, there is no obvious reason for this side-lining of high ranking traditional commanders of the army. It appears, therefore, that Iyase and Ezomo do not deserve their removal from Command positions in the army, and to that extent, the Oba's action amounts to *hubris*.

One's heart aches for the Oba, especially as Uzazakpo's apparently well-intentioned advice to court the loyalty of the Chiefs through Ologbosere, has led him, ironically, to further *hubris*. Rather than relying on the *solo* effort of one man to secure the trust and loyalty of his other high chiefs, the Oba, should have given audience to them in order to test their mettle.

Subversive Rhetoric at the War Council

The war council is convened at Act II scene III to deliberate on the plan for repelling the invading forces. The Oba as the supreme commander of the empire, the home Leopard, the bulwark of the nation, should show forthright leadership, and effectively direct the flow of discussion at the council clearly, for the chiefs to know how his mind works at that critical moment. This expected leadership the Oba fails to provide. Rather he advises "caution" to

the War Council, arising from the shackling of his mind by the utterances of the *Ifa* Priest from Ife, at a point he should be firm, thereby throwing the war council into consternation leading to guesses as to what actually the Oba wants from the assembled generals.

Ologbosere believes that, in shrouding his motives, at the moment, the Oba is testing both the loyalty and resolve of the chiefs. He draws attention to the Oba's swift judgment over the murderers of his adviser earlier. So, why should he not act in like manner now? It is because he wants to know how loyal the chiefs are to the throne and empire. He reminds the Oba that a fierce snake is sleeping, which the Oba denies.

On his part, Iyase constructs a dilemma out of the whole situation: "... our teeth have touched a bone. Which end must we crack? To break custom and so anger the gods of our fathers, or to break the white man's pride with resistance to his coming, and thereby rouse his wrath? (33).

For Obayuwana, Benin has cried wolf for a long time since Nana of Ijekiriland was dethroned by the white man. This wolf, the Whiteman, took time to appear, so, fear gripped the land. "My brothers-at-arms, is this how we must dangle the rest of our lives? On fear?" (33). Gods! what is Benin Coming to?" (34). To Obakhavbaye, by urging caution, "The words of the Oba are not pleasing" (35), and possibly because of this, Osodin perceives the whole scenario a fragile (35), and to Osodin's assessment, Obayuwana reacts swiftly by asking-"what is fragile about it? You are a fighter. I am a fighter. We are all fighters. Ours is the task to protect the empire, my brothers".

From the flow of debate at the war council, we see that the Iyase, commander-in-chief, constructs a dilemma rather than being proactive and taking a stand of leadership. However, the Oba escapes from the horns of this dilemma by reminding Iyase that the gods are part of the Benin existence, sharing its fears and joys, and placated for wrongs done them by the blood of slaves sacrificed at their shrines. But the Whiteman we have to approach with *caution*. The Oba appears to be urging the war council to look for other alternatives to solve the problem, rather than war, may be a kind of embassy to meet the white man for discussion. But because, he does not come out clearly to say so, Ologbosere and especially Obayuwana are able to raise the stakes. Both accused Benin of cowardice at this moment, while Ologbosere sees the Oba as testing their loyalty, Obayuwana maintains that rather than

preparing for war in the tradition of the empire, Benin is gripped with fear like children crying wolf. From his earlier dealings with the Oba on this vexed question of trust and loyalty, Ologbosere is possibly genuine in his suspicion that the Oba is testing their loyalty. But why is Obayuwana vociferously prodding for war? It is either of two things, in my estimation: He is an arch conservative who wants to maintain the Benin customs and tradition, or he is playing the fifth columnist. The real option out of these two may never be known, but a guess can be hazarded in the context of the play. If we remember that Obayuwana is one of the high chiefs at the murder 'trial' scene, who pleaded for mercy for the murderers of UwangueEgiebor, it is thus suggested that he is playing the fifth columnist at this war council scene. Osodin may be believed that the situation is fragile, and given the Oba's lethargy at this critical moment, Obayuwana is thus deliberately rooting for war that would eventually consume the Oba. The wolf-is-coming scenario he artfully constructs, lends credence to this suggestion. There is an attempt in that scenario painted by him, to create an inescapable quagmire for the Oba, such that whichever way he acts, disaster cannot be averted, and if that is so, the maligned House of Iwebor **would** be avenged. This appears to be Obayuwana's mission at the war council. The Oba appreciates the dilemma as constructed by the high Chief, but does not effectively rebut it. There are two internal evidences in the play that support the analysis here. Act II Scene IV is supposed to be a victory celebration at which the Oba is given first hand report of how Benin warriors routed the whiteman's uninvited party. Of course the report is given with the decapitated heads of White men laid before the Oba, which he beholds with horror, and consequently laments

*Children of our fathers
Benin, I fear, has this
Day swallowed a long
Pistle; now we shall have to
Sleep standing upright (37, emphasis mine)*

The lament and consequent despair of the Oba is given dramatic effect by the playwright as he makes the Oba sway dizzily and is helped out of stage. Second, the feeling of the Oba at this scene, and his appreciation of the enormous consequences of the pyrrhic victory of Benin warriors over the whiteman's advance party, is corroborated by his open admission that his warriors were wrong, at the trial after the fall of the empire (III.I.60).

These two passages tend to mirror the thought of the Oba: my chiefs, some of whom masquerade as loyalists, have finally brought disaster on my throne and empire, as a way of avenging the House of Iwebor. This, he had 'foreseen' earlier when he remonstrates at the divination scene:

I shall be the next victim of vile plotting
then-my dead body following that of
Uwangu Egiebor... civil war-the final
curse of internal intrigues! (15).

Indeed there are internal intrigues: the chiefs' handling of the episode of the Whiteman's uninvited advance party, is one of such "internal intrigues and vile plotting." It is thus ironic that the same persons who apparently brought calamity on his head are the same persons who, at the homage-paying scene, now entreat him to forget power and status and pay homage to the Queen.

The irony is driven home by the comment of Roupell after the Oba had paid homage:

*From this day, this land of Benin belongs
to Her Royal Majesty Queen Victoria!*
(54).

This dethronement of the Oba is given greater effect by Moor in reply to Osodin's question: "What position does the Oba hold now?" (62). In reply, Moor declares, "He is a chief, like any other chief". This is the dramatic death of the Oba – "the final curse of internal intrigues"

The other irony of the play is the apparent heroic death of Obayuwana. At the war council meeting he is a war monger using warped Logic wrapped up in a fear factor- wolf is coming! Through the war, which he prosecutes ostensibly to show that a fierce snake is alive and alert, he implicates the Oba in the mass murder of the Whiteman's soldiers and thus brings calamity to him (Oba) and the empire. It is therefore ironic that through his vile plotting to bring down the Oba, he hastens his own death: having been condemned to death by hanging for his role in commanding and overseeing the massacre of White men, he 'heroically' stabs himself of death, giving effect to the adage that says, "the mouth that says "cut off the head," cannot survive the decapitation it recommended.

Hubris and Eironea in Act III

From the preceding discussion, it can be surmised that the trial of Benin Chiefs and the subsequent exile of the Oba are all manifestation of the Oba's punishment for many of his hubristic actions, against his own people, for which the gods punish him, the climax of which is the trial by the white man. At this trial, more ironies emerge, from some statements of the *Dramtis personae*. Back at I.1, the Oba, while addressing the Ekpoma elders on the desirability of having a leader, said:

*...in every land big or small there must
be a head... what are you? Crabs? That
you seek contentment in just a belly and a
back and no head? I will have no human
crabs in my empire.*

The homage scene, at III.1, the Oba's pays homage to the British throne and flag, thus giving the above statement of his, an ironic twist. By de-crowning himself, as an act of obedience to the British Monarch, the Oba has symbolically decapitated his royalty, and the Benin Empire, and both at once have become crabs without a head.

There is a double irony in the death of Obayuwana: the Oba genuinely believes that the Chief died for him in protest to the humiliation of the Oba and the sack of Benin, oblivious of the fact that Obayuwana was, probably, the arrow head of "vile plotting and internal intrigues". Obayuwana perishes in recompense for his own *hubris* against the Oba and the Benin Empire, by hiding under the service to the gods and defending the sanctity of customs and tradition, to wreak havoc on the throne and the empire.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to show that there are relationships between *hubris*, *physis*, and *andeironeiain* Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. At the appropriate junctures in the paper the appearance and operation of each of these operative terms was argued. Attempt was made to show that whenever the Oba over reached himself given the bounds of convention, customs, tradition and civility, it amounted to *hubris*.

The appeals to *physis* in pedagogic and didactic statements, in the play are apparent, and presumably need no arguments. However, instances of them

were highlighted as the paper progressed. It was also argued in the paper that these didactic statements of the Oba became ironic in the dramatic contexts of the play. The invocation of the imagery of the crab as headless, when advising the Ekpoma elders to accept the heir apparent as the new Enogie, together with the Oba's emphasis that he would have no human crab in his empire, all became ironic when the Oba de-crowns himself as homage to the British Queen. In a graphic way, he has become 'headless', and by that very act, the whole Benin empire at that point in time, through a pragmatic refutation of his earlier affirmation.

Eventually, the paper drew a double irony in the suicide of Obayuwana at the trial scene of the chiefs after the fall of Benin Empire. It was argued in the paper that going by the debate at the War Council, Obayuwana played the fifth columnist to facilitate the imminence of war in order to consume the Oba. This suggestion is based on Obayuwana's tolerable disposition to the condemned chiefs. It is therefore ironic that he commits suicide in protest against the dethronement of the Oba. It is further a double irony for the Oba to plaintively exclaim, "he died for me!"

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