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Mythography and Rituals: The Legend of Aku Sika in Focus

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Abstract



*In African tradition and culture, myths and rituals are two inseparably pieces of social life. These two phenomena have been aspects or part of the society from generation to generation through oral literature as well as being practiced or performed at ceremonies. African literature, especially plays, feature these traditions to reflect the social life of the people. Based on Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika*, this study explores the employment of myths and rituals as aspects of human existence and human society albeit through the lens of ritual theory. The study is purposed to explore, myth, and ritual events exhibited by characters in the play. The evidences of myths and rituals in the play are identified and analysed with content analysis as an approach. The play exhibits the rich use of mythology in alignment with rituals right from its commencement to the end. Based on the discussions, it emerged that, there is serious interplay between mythology and rituals and they both have been able to create a unique phenomenon that has established a tradition that distinguishes the culture of the African people from other cultures. The beauty of the African tradition and culture, that of the Akan (Ghana) in particular, is seen to be espoused in the play *The Legend of**

Aku Sika as identified by the study. It is summarily concluded that oral literature and culture that has provided a conducive environment within which myths and rituals have festered are core elements in the play The Legend of Aku Sika, proving that myths and rituals are integral part of the human existence especially the African.

Keywords: Myth, Rituals, Oral Tradition, Tradition, Culture, Oral Literature and Appellation.

1. Introduction

A myth is a story about an entity or locale that has been known for a considerable number of years. Some believe in its authenticity because it appears those stories have their origins deeply rooted in history. Alagoa (1978, p.9) argued that they are historical information transmitted orally by processes peculiar to each community. One may, therefore, be arguably correct to assume that myths may not necessarily be a product of mere human imaginations but probably have aspects of it being expressions of reality. Anyanwu (1987, p.241) citing Houndtonji says that “man cannot live without myths”. The reason is quite obvious: man is a being that cannot bear to live with certain questions unanswered. The quest to answer these unexplained issues is why myths are formulated as responses and answers to those puzzles and questions. Aku, as a character has a vital question to answer; why should she loss a limp at her tender age? Certainly, as the story *The Legend of Aku Sika* by Martin Owusu unfolds, the audience (society) get an answer. Had it not been the amputated arm that was healed mysteriously, Aku would not have had a king to marry her. Thus, man is a myth-making animal (Anyanwu, 1987, p.280).

Many scholars have rightly observed that myths are pre-philosophic in nature. Jaja (2013) makes an insightful point by stating that myths are inherently pre-philosophical; that philosophy commenced where myths ended, indicating that the origins of philosophy lie within myths. This suggests that myths contribute to the philosophical ideas developed by humans. While African thinkers such as Anyanwu emphasise the essential and existential function of myth, Western interpretations have often reduced myths to falsehoods or fanciful stories.

Nevertheless, it is important to also indicate that myth was regarded or received as a compendium of stories which were heavily laced with conjecture and falsities. This assertion was discarded when myth received much academic attention and lots of researches were done into it. According to Ngumoha (1988) and Lang (1998), this notion gave birth to the word ‘mythomania’, which literally means one’s penchant for exaggeration or one’s implicit engagement in pure and plain lies. In *The legend of Aku*

Sika by Martin Owusu, most of the characters are crafted in a way that makes them fallible and extremely vulnerable. It then stands to reason why myths originally were attributed to human creation. Thus, a set of well pieced together stories by people just for it to fit into a certain agenda. This agenda has the potency to give a positive image to certain group of people and the reverse is equally true. This view is further supported by Welleck and Warre (1978) that myths are seen as “anonymously composed storytelling of origins and destinies; the explanations a society offers to its young on why the world is and why we do as we do” (p.11). Solanke (2011) contends that it was after their initial misconceptions about myths that scholars began giving serious attention to research and scholarship into myths because they could now see semblances and linkages even between myths and development of a group of people. In this regard, Elliot (1972) opines that myths and its study now became a tool for cultural rediscovery. A very necessary benefit of myth is, therefore, being espoused as that which can be a film or spectrum through which societies can be studied, thus, their lives, origins, among others. No matter how imaginary and fictional those myths will be, they can offer some leads. Solanke (2011) supports this view when he says “the generic development of a people necessitates” a synthesis of fact and fiction “in respect of their socio-economic, religious and physical experiences” (p.1).

Three types of stories are typically found in myths: genesis stories, explanatory stories, and didactic stories. A specific phenomenon is intended to be explained by each of these tales. African myths are live chronicles in their thoughts rather than scholarly explanations or creative imagery. The history, culture, and inner experiences of the African are contained and conveyed via them. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do. Uduigwomen (1995) opines that myths are used in African epistemology as a way to learn and share knowledge about Africans. It helps the African to remember the previous actions of men and societies, which allows the individual or societies to orient themselves in order to comprehend the confusing contemporary society’s events.

It is indeed surprising that some scholars still doubt the existence of African philosophy. The reason being that some philosophers having basically studied Western philosophy treated African philosophy from a typical western standpoint. It is necessary to remind this class of scholars that in traditional Africa, there are individuals who are capable of critical coherent and independent thinking. This approach is often referred to as ‘philosophic sagacity’. Most myths in Africa have elements of rituals and supernatural occurrences.

Rituals can be defined as a religious activity that involves actions that are performed in a coherent manner. Rituals can also be looked at as something that is done regularly and becomes a part of the daily life of an individual. Rappaport (1999) gives a definition of ritual:

the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers. This definition, being extremely terse, demands elaboration and discussion. Before discussing its specific features (performance, formality, invariance, inclusion of both acts and utterances, encoding by other than the performers) several general comments are in order. (p. 24)

As part of theatrical stage performance, African plays have elements of myth and ritual since most stories are taken from the oral tradition of the past. *The Legend of Aku Sika* by Martin Owusu dwells much of the miraculous happenings on ritual performances. One unraveled myth in the play is the issue of a king or queen not to be given to a deformed person. Despite the profound role that myths and rituals play in African societies, their dramatisation in literary texts, particularly in Ghanaian theatre, has not been fully examined through a ritual-theoretical lens. This study seeks to fill that gap by analysing Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* as a text where myth and ritual are not merely thematic devices but foundational elements of structure and performance. These conceptualisations of myth and ritual form the theoretical basis of this study, which interrogates how *The Legend of Aku Sika* dramatises these elements to reflect African ontology, identity and communal ethics.

The purpose of the study is to explore the various dimensions and roles of myths and rituals in the African or Ghanaian setting. An attempt to understand what they both are as well as how they have permeated or seen and applied in everyday settings. Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* will be the spectrum through which the meaning and essence of myths and rituals will be seen. This paper seeks to add to the scholarship and academic discourse on myths and rituals but within the scope of literary studies.

2. Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Perspectives

There has been an upsurge interest in the utilisation of custom as a social logical device in different fields of scholastic talks. It is extremely astonishing how perused works of anthropologists, sociologists, history specialists, scholars and experts in strict examinations have gone into custom. These scholars and experts see custom and traditions as extraordinary powerful social road to comprehend how individuals make

and revamp their universe. The utilisation of the purpose of the study will be to engage, fundamentally, the demonstration as well as endeavor to wander into an investigation to establish myth and rituals as customs which are intertwined as evident in the play. Thus, the custom hypothesis is utilised as a road through which examination was finished to figure out the nature and practice of mythography in stage performance. Hence this theory clearly fits to underpin the examination of myth and ritual through the perspective of the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*.

The concept of Ritual Theory exhibits different perspectives on the idea of custom in the investigation of mythography on stage. To a great extent, it is seen, according to a religious point of view, in this way, to make space and dread. The explanation is that it is man's enthusiasm for his weakness. Accordingly, for loathsomeness man depends, on the extraordinary for practically, the entirety of his necessities and activities. By these, custom turns into an adapted monotonous example of conduct related with strict convictions and practices and in some sense considered to be sacrosanct (Nwanaju, 2013). Custom, in its performative standing, contains component that characterises its setting for execution (time, area, air, tone) with a ceremonial request, spatial component and entertainers who coordinate it. To the African, custom is a basic piece of the general public.

Myth is a basic constituent of human culture and informs a culture's behavior and essence. Myths are stories, sometimes immemorially old, which tell not only man's relations with his kind, but also with his gods or the supernatural in whatever forms it may be represented. Okpewho (1983) defines myth as an oral narrative derived from the creative or configurative powers of the human mind. He maintains that any narrative of the oral tradition can be called a myth if it gives due emphasis to 'fanciful play' (1983, p. 69). He explains that myth 'is the irreducible aesthetic substratum in all varieties of human cultural endeavor, from one generation to another (1983: 70). Donna Rosenberg also suggests that myths symbolise human experience and embody the spiritual values of a culture (1992, p. xiv). Myths are therefore beliefs that cover a range of meanings in the historical evolution of a people.

As Awuah-Nyamekye (2015) contends, grasping the essence of myths requires an exploration from angles that set them apart from other forms of traditional oral content, such as folktales, legends, and fables. Each of these serves as a tool to educate ordinary individuals, particularly the younger generation, about societal traditions and expected behaviors within their communities. Fables, much like folktales, provide moral teaching lessons imparted during childhood regarding interpersonal relations and insights into human nature. Likewise, if myths serve as stabilising elements for African experience

and African philosophy reflects that experience, then African philosophy is a critical reflection on myths as stabilising elements. Instilling in Africans the habit of critically reflecting on matters pertaining to life would therefore be greatly aided by critical analysis and an understanding of the significance of myths, proverbs, folklore, etc. (Jaja, 1995).

According to Jane Harrison's "things said over things done" concept, insofar as a myth can be the words spoken at a ritual it is doubly open to structural or formal approaches. First, because it is a definite, particular utterance, and second, because it is grounded in actions that presumably find echoes in the utterance. The myth-ritual school in Walter Burkert's stimulating scholarship (1987, 1983, 1966) and, to a lesser extent, in some of his recent work (1999), places mythology into the same perceptual orbit as oral literature. Communal and cultural unison in beliefs and practices embedded in African communities crave an existential spectrum for oral literature.

Furthermore, interdependency and correlational livings are important aspects of the African community system. It is critical to remember that the African's identity is rooted in their community nature, which encapsulates their way of life. Other components of the system thrive on interdependency. When interdependence is removed, the African community system's essential foundations are shattered. Many authors have advocated for the essence of Africa's communal system. Agulana (2010) looks at communalism as the sense of awareness which identifies an individual not as an isolated character, but as an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality. The imperativeness of this assertion captures the value of communalism where people rely on other people for their survival. On these communal myths and beliefs that common traditions and values are built.

The construction of human institutions is incomplete without the presence of values. Every civilisation requires a set of values to serve as the foundation for the numerous corrective and motivational institutions. These institutions guide people's everyday activities which forms a tradition that is identifiable with a group or community. Individuals, families, and society as a whole have both cherished and despised ideals and standards. These concepts or norms are referred to as social values when they are shared by societies. Social values then refer to the ideas shared by members of a society as to what is good, right, and necessary. According to Ogbujah (2014), because civilisations or millennia are not similar, social values vary from society to society and can change through time as a result of influences from other cultures, a process known as acculturation. Due to influence and adulteration from other cultures, certain African societies' ideals have remained untouched, while others have completely lost their values.

Myth is a very common feature of African indigenous religion. It is an important means of expression through which man's experiences and encounters with the supersensible world is revealed. Myth provides answers for a student of African traditional religion seeking interpretations to such fundamental and cardinal questions of life. These cardinal questions include the origin of man, the original state of man, the fall of man, the phenomenon of death, the problem of evil, life in the after-life, etc. Thus, Africans through their encounters with the universe evolved their own indigenous myths explaining and interpreting African beliefs concerning questions of fundamental importance as enumerated above. Accordingly, there are cosmological myths, for example, found all over Africa which is concerned with the creation of the cosmos, after which, man was created to take charge of the created order. For the Yoruba, it was Olodumare, the Supreme Deity, who commissioned and delegated Orisa-nla, the arch divinity, to perform this task (Idowu, 2018). In an undeniable exposition, myth are stories that are oral literature passed on through the years to date. Any attempt to discard them as untrue creates a vacuum that cannot be filled and leave several societal questions unanswered.

Literary art is a mirror of a people's culture and tradition. Myths, rituals, folklore, proverbs and other forms of oral literature are integral part of African Literature (particularly, literary performances). Ok'pewho (1983) asserts that despite the fact that many academics have overlooked it; the creative aspect of myth must be acknowledged. He contends that the greater cultural values are derived from myth, which must be seen as a creative resource. According to him, myth is the attribute of fantasy that, in varied degrees, informs the human mind's creative or configurative capacities. For this reason, any oral tradition story can be considered a myth as long as it appropriately emphasises imaginative play (p. 69). African theater in its definitive form or pattern, according to Tobalase (2017, p.16), develops from wordless practices such as ritual ceremonies, dances, and mimes performed during festivals to honor and praise African mythological and legendary figures who have been deified as gods and goddesses.

Within the African context, the origin of theatre was a mixture of religious or magical ritual, rhythmic dances, chants and singing, which anthropologists refer to as sympathetic magic. Therefore, imitation sets in as the people needed to precipitate rain, engage in sanguine activities or war, and so on. Hence, they imitated these activities. (Dhlomo, 1977).

3. Methodology

This study employs the qualitative paradigm as its methodological approach. Given that this study seeks to explore symbolic meanings and cultural representations within a literary text, a qualitative paradigm particularly an interpretivist approach is most suitable. This study adopts this paradigm based on its alignment with the interpretive

nature of the research. The view of Corbin and Straus (2007) on qualitative paradigm as an approach that will lead to an understanding and comprehension of a phenomenon is the bases for the research. They also acknowledge that conclusions may change anytime the perspectives being engaged are altered. Because the main spectrum through which we shall consider the dimensions of myths and rituals is the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*, textual content analysis will be used as the analytical tool to aid in revealing the facts that proved the existence of mythology and ritual as part of our human existence.

Textual content analysis is a qualitative technique that systematically examines patterns, symbols, themes and discourses within a written or oral text. In this study, it serves to identify and interpret ritualistic and mythological elements embedded in the narrative and performance aspects of the play. Ritual theory will serve not only as the theoretical foundation but also as a lens through which the selected text is interpreted. Concepts from Victor Turner's ritual process and myth-ritual theory will inform the thematic and symbolic analysis. The data garnered will inform the discussions and conclusions will then be drawn based on them.

3.1 Synopsis of the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*

The Legend of Aku Sika is a drama drawn on the grounds of belief of life as a predetermined destiny and life hereafter. The story mainly circles around three characters whose destiny is revealed to the audience through the sage. The major three characters had their destinies predetermined by their fate, the gods and the supreme being, Odomankoma before they come to the world to spend few scores of years.

These three mortals are Aku's father, Aku and Nanayere. They are introduced to the audience as spirits about to commence their journey on earth. Their destinies are looked into shaped and concluded before they are granted entry into the world. Aku loses her mother at her birth and her father at a tender age. Her father who was a hunter set a steel jack trap to be sent for a hunting expedition. At the blind side of the father, as he was bathing at the far end of the courtyard, Aku woke up from sleep and unfortunately, placed her left hand in the steel jack trap which led to the loss of her left arm from the elbow.

Aku's charming beauty and isolated lifestyle after she lost her father, put away young betroiters for fear of rejection. The Sage, who sees in and out of the play's world describes her beauty thus:

Beauty that dazzles the eye:
Eyes that charmed and melted the heart of stone,
And humility of soul that calmed the stormy mind, grace this maiden (Aku)

Young men dared not approach her for her hand, for fear of embarrassing rejection. (p. 9)

The Sage's description of Aku in the above lines is an indication of an extraordinary beauty of Aku. Aku's father had died due to his thoughts about the fact that he was responsible for the condition of his daughter, Aku. He died and left Aku in the care of his mother, Aku's grandmother, Nanabaa. Nanabaa has raised Aku to become this beautiful eye of the community who also is the hope and comfort of the grandmother. They live together in a simple compound house in the village.

At a ceremony to swear in a young king of the community, the new young king's eyes catch glimpse of Aku. He falls in love with Aku. His love becomes strong and in his own words said;

But if I had met her before ascending this ancestral throne, I would have married her ten times over if I had discovered that she was physically short of a limp.

My Aku is not and has never been deformed. (pp. 19-20).

Yaa, the King's sister, stands behind his brother in their plight to defend, support and get Aku to marry the King despite the customary consequences that await the king; to be "dethrone in disgrace". Nanayere, the second mortal spirit, also has her life predetermined by the spirits, the immortal beings, before she came to earth. Nanayere, as the first wife of the king, hears about the king's intention to marry Aku and decided to expose Aku's deformity. She lays complain before the Queenmother and Elders. The king stands firm to defend Aku which is an indication of his extreme love for Aku.

The complaint laid against the king by Nanayere is heard and the outcome is that on Saturday noon Aku should come to the public gathering to display her long hidden left hand in public for the community to see if Aku is indeed deformed. Yaa and Okyeame go to Aku's house to relay the information to her for her to get prepared. They hear the story behind Aku's deformity and have confirmation that Aku has her left arm amputated from the elbow. Aku's grandmother does not agree to the idea that after all the sad life her granddaughter has gone through in her life on earth, she should further be disgraced in public. However, Aku stands on her feet to accept to let the public see the truth about her.

On the day prior to the set Saturday, Aku cannot stand it anymore and so decides to

commit suicide by drowning in a river. In her cry to call for the ancestors to take her away with them to the other side of the river, it is rather a spirit sent by Odomankoma, Supreme Being, who turns up. He performed certain rituals for a python to appear to help Aku not to take her life but to replace her lost arm with an arm 'embroiled' with golden bangles.

On the set date, Aku unveils her left arm to the surprise of everybody at the gathering. The king himself is overwhelmed with the golden hand. He decides to forgive his first wife who is to be killed because she had told a lie; what she claims is the truth has turned out to be a lie. The king claims he will not allow blood to dent the beauty of the golden arm. Because of the golden arm, the king announces that from then Aku should be called 'Aku Sika' but not just Aku anymore.

The plot of the play is carefully arranged in a chronology that makes the story of the play be followed logically. In the beginning part of the play, a drink is poured to usher an immortal spirit to earth with celestial music filling the atmosphere as the splendor and majesty of a heavenly architecture emerges from the clouds and fire in thunder and lightning. Three souls yet to be born file in. The male, to become Aku's father, Soul of the mortal king's eldest wife and that of Aku. A mortal Spirit one in a swift Spinning motion as heavy thunder accompanies his flight to Earth. A Supreme Being known as Odomankoma asks Fate to look into the bowl to tell the destiny of the Spirit daughter to be released to live among mortals. Fate still looking into the bowl shakes his head meaning negativity from beginning to end. No light and the darkness deepen as the spirit daughter travels the journey. A full view of Aku a beautiful young woman in her early twenties, is revealed momentarily; wrapped in cloth in such a way that her left arm is hidden. There is a great jubilation, talking drums "speak" the king's appellations. Then, holding great sword of office, the king dances gracefully to the tune of slow, majestic fontomfrom making actions to symbolise his authority.

Nanayere Ama is home where she is being confronted by a man concerning her husband the king who is violating traditional custom by marrying another woman who is deformed.

Aku is referred to as an orphan girl who killed her mother for giving birth to her and destroyed her father whose grief ended his life. Nanayere reports the issue to Okyeamme seeking the shameful dethronement of the king if he is wrong and for her to be killed if Aku is not deformed on her left arm. Yaa, the king's younger sister insists and decides to be behind his brother, the king no matter the circumstance. The Queen Mother asks Nanayere if she has seen Aku's deformed arm. Elder's exclaim if Aku is deformed by birth or accident it is still deformity and she is needed to prove the king right or Nanayere

wrong.

Yaa and Okyeame visits Aku in her home to tell her about the issue running in the palace and her presence needed to save the Situation of the king. Aku narrates to Yaa and Okyeame on how she became deformed in her infancy after she lost her mother at birth and the sudden death of her father. "I was born complete like any child that crawls, falls, cries and laughs". Aku runs from the house after Okyeame and Yaa had left attempting to kill herself by drowning in a river but hears her grandmother calling and runs afar. She is being restored on her left arm by the spirit python she meets by the road and honors the king's visitation and prove before the citizenry her golden arm as the king becomes happy and blissful. Nanayere gets ashamed but being spared by the king and marries Aku peacefully.

4. Analysis and Discussion

On the onset, the play opens with mystical appearances that emerges in the presence of the Sage. In the play, the Sage serves as the moderator of the play who links the earth and the supernatural (spiritual/ancestral world). The emergence of the Supreme Being and Fate comes as a result of the Sage's libation initiating them to open the corridor that serves as entrance to the earth from the spiritual world of the unborn mortal spirits.

Time opens its ancient doors,
And through the blackness of the dark, dark
Corridor that leads to the land
Of mythology... (pg. 4)

The above statement of the Sage, whose wisdom and supernatural seership embodies both the land and the spiritual worlds, craves an element of mythology. The existence of the spiritual world for spirits of yet unborn persons is a myth; an existence created by non-evidential stories which are based on believes. This is evidence that Africans explain the creation of things through the work of supernatural beings through stories. It conveys life more effectively than abstract thought because it is concrete (Jaja, 2013).

Right from the playwright's molding of his characters, the three mortal spirits to their emergence on earth appear to be a myth. It is a belief that every man has his soul already in existence and the gods determine the time the corridor will be opened for any soul to come into this world. Further, the spirit coming into the world has his fate already established by the gods which determine the destiny of life on earth; "And you, Begetters of us and the unborn / Generation" (pg. 2). This pre-determined life of man is mythical because they are beliefs which do not have concrete evidence to prove such

existence. Fate and destiny, as it were, are equally non-evidential life's definitions.

Fate and destiny are spiritual elements of life which are believed to showcase one's activities on earth. These two elements determine the activities of man from birth to death. To man, fate and destiny are mysteries which are only known by the gods. This verifies the assertion by Anyanwu (1987) that "man cannot live without myths," which explains life's mystery and that humanity inherently creates myths because people cannot tolerate living with certain unanswered questions; thus, they construct myths to provide answers to these inquiries.

These elements are believed to influence our actions and the experiences that come our way during our lifetime. They are also thought to determine the circumstances of our departure from the earth. In the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*, this mysterious destiny of man is crated and sealed and unravel to the Sage through Fate:

I stand before you, Mighty Wisdom;
I lie prostrate at your feet (*He does so*)
And rise to receive the sealed destinies of mortal beings. (pg. 4)

This revelation of destinies is done at the blind side of the mortals but lie bare before the Supreme Being (Mighty Wisdom) and the Sage.

Another mythology in the play is the cultural definition of a person who is fit to be within the royal throne's caucus. The tradition that holds that anyone with physical deformity is not right to be a king or anywhere near or around a royal family is based on mythology. Elder 4 emphasises and details this when the issue of deformity is raised against Aku in the palace:

It does not matter whether it is a birth defect or accidentally inflicted.
A deformity is a deformity. (p.19)

This the King, in his speech, clarifies as not logic because there are other social menaces that make someone unfit rather than physical deformity that deduct nothing from the wisdom and/or purity of a person:

...There are so many of us in this kingdom, including would-be Kings and power-thirsty corrupt men and women, who are morally and spiritually deformed. Yet, society seems to sanction the bankruptcy and spiritual cancer, and rather seek out to humiliate the pure in heart,

whose physical make-up is neither a social crime or the measure of human imperfection. (p. 19)

From the above statement, a rhetoric is created on the bases for which people with disability or deformity are denied anything relating to royal positions in that community. In the actual sense, there are no factual bases for which such a law is made if not a myth. This kind of custom is what Nwanaju (2013) contend that it a costume that turns into an adapted monotonous conduct related with strict convictions and practices and in some sense considered to be sacrosanct.

Yaa, the King's sister, batteries her support when she is trying to convince Aku to appear before the public at the palace:

... To come would mean that the ultimate judge of human imperfection is Odomankoma alone. (p. 22).

Therefore, it is only mythological stories that explains such traditions but not base on logical explanations. In this sense, myth, as epitomised in the play do not align to logic and realism and its showcase in African drama is the exhibition of oral literature embedded in African tradition.

Again, Aku's decision to end her life opens up the myth about ancestral home. She calls on her dead parents to admit her to join them in the world after death:

Ena e e e

Agyaee

...

Ao, Mother; Ao, Mother. I have suffered enough. I can bear no more. Receive me back into the other world. (p. 27)

In this declaration, Aku exhibits her traditional cultural belief of life after death which is evidence of mythology in the play. The emergence of Spirit after Aku's calls displays a magical orientation. It is also mythical based on the idea that spirits are not to be seen yet Aku sees and communicates with the Spirit. The Spirit itself finds its appearance as unusual and scary, and therefore warms:

Fear not, those Odomankoma will bless will not be helpless forever.
(pg. 28)

And;

You are not alone. Unseen by mortal eye, the living ancestors walk with you, dine with you, and watch over you. (p. 28)

The speech above from the Spirit reveals the myth about the spirits living with the living in their ins and outs as well as having the power to protect the living.

Pythons are natural animals who live with man on earth. In the case of the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*, we meet a supernatural python who appears and disappears after a ritual and command from a spirit. This python also possesses the power to mend an amputated arm. The appearance and the processes by which Aku's arm is replaced depict mythology.

Great Power of the Universe! Let the healing Python appear! (p. 28)

.....

Great Power of the Universe! Let the healing Python disappear! (p. 29)

And,

Aku, my child, fear not. Come closer -closer -closer.

Now! Thrust your handless left arm into my flaming mouth. (p. 29)

The above being a voice from the Spirit and Voice of Python demonstrate episodes that do not reconcile with realism in the play hence are seen to be mythical. In our ordinary world, surgery can be done to fix an artificial arm to an amputated person's arm. However, in the case of *The Legend of Aku Sika*, a natural hand is revived and complimented with gold bracelets and bangles without any surgical process. This demonstration of an unusual occurrence is a prove for the play to ascertain the fact that the play's story is based, primarily, on mythology.

At the climax of the play, the expressions from the crowd gathered to witness Aku's left hand are:

"AMAZING, INCREDIBLE, UNBELIEVABLE, IMPOSSIBLE, ETC."

These words reflect unusual occurrence diverting from natural course of happenings in a real-life situation. A situation Dhlomo (1977) ascertains that anthropologists refer to as sympathetic magic. A mystical happenstance that occurs with certain rituals. Myths

are stories created to answer questions that are unanswerable if logic and human intelligence are put to play.

Ritual is a vital embodiment of mythology. Almost all instances of mythology in the play come with customary rituals as tradition demand. In the African society, and indeed one can claim universality of the fact that communicating with the spiritual world comes alone with ritualism. The pouring of libation, chants, and commands are all dwelling on rituals. Appellations that come along with rituals are sometimes myths that hails a spirit or narrates a legendary story about a past hero.

In the first scene, the Sage performs the ritual of pouring of libation accompanied by appellations. The thunder and stormy weather that opens the play signifies the extraordinary nature and powers of the gods and spirits the Sage is appraising to welcome them after the storm, with a solemn sound of a flute and traditional music. They, the supernatural beings, appear to play their part in the creation and activities of mortal beings.

... Great Spider,
Supreme Being,
From whom wisdom issues
And falls on the wise, the grey hair
From whom the myths and legends
Of our faded past
Were showed upon the living tongues
Of our dead begetters;
And you Begetters of us and of unborn
Generation ... (pp. 1-2)

Such rituals are particularly exhibited, during times mortal beings in their quest to find answers to life's mysterious questions approach the gods and supernatural beings. The mortals enquire from the spiritual world, in the African context which is effectively portrayed in the play, to find answers to life's mysterious questions. Appellations (during the pouring of libation) appear with creativity and are poetic in nature. Such is oral literature at its best as an undisputable aspect of African literature.

A second count of rituals in the play is the lamentation of people living in African traditional communities. During times of pain, the African (Akan) cry to the ancestors or the death for them to intervene. They seek comfort, intervention and solutions from the ancestral world. Mostly, referring to the Akan, "Father" and "Mother" are called on for

their intervention when we are in pain, especially when they are dead. Even when the parents are alive such inferences are mostly a ritual citation referring to the dead:

Ena e e e

Agyaee

...

Ao, Mother; Ao, Mother. I have suffered enough. I can bear no more.
(p. 27)

This is found in the play at a time Aku can 'bear no more' the pains of the world and a pending disgrace when her amputated limb is exposed in public. This ritual, in its natural form is nonsensical as the dead logically, cannot save the living. However, in the case of Aku, the spirits hear her cry and intervene to save the situation; a situation that is apparently mythical with musical performance and weeping. The Spirit appears after the rituals of lamentation by Aku. Though Spirit states that it has always been there with mortals;

You are not alone. Unseen by mortal eye, the living ancestors walk with you, dine with you, and watch over you. (p. 28)

But the Spirit reveals itself only when Aku makes a request through the traditional rituals for calling on the ancestors for assistance.

Another evidence of ritualism in the play is the enchantment which brought the appearance of the Healing Python. Spirit does a ritual of incantation, dancing till it falls into trance before requesting the appearance and exit of the Healing Python from the Great Power of the Universe.

Great Power of the Universe! Let the healing Python appear! (p. 28)

.....

Great Power of the Universe! Let the healing Python disappear! (p. 29)

There then shows an intentional correlation between mythology and rituals. Traditional setting of the play is much evident with the culture and tradition epitomised from the beginning to the end of the play. From libation, rituals, chieftaincy, communal living, belief system to mythology, all portray oral literature as part of tradition of African society exposed in African plays, and evident in Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika*.

5. Conclusion

The playwright, Martin Okyere Owusu, has successfully woven his play with a clear setting of a traditional Akan society. There are intentional infusion of customs and traditions that reveal mythology and rituals. The flow of all activities and actions in the play are geared towards espousing mythology and rituals which are part and parcel of African culture. A tailored action with the use of the Sage moves the play between the spiritual world, which is based on mythological beliefs, and the earth (natural world). The play, *The Legend of Aku Sika*, can be identified therefore as a play that exhibits myths and rituals in an interplay to portray oral literature's influence on African literature through dramaturgy. The study of African drama, and to a large extent African literary art, cannot do without a deep study into mythology and rituals. Such studies portray, restore and preserve the cultural identity of the African society and African literature. An unadulterated African literature cannot be said to be so without the element of oral literature (in the case of this study, myth and rituals). This study is limited to one play and future research could explore other African texts or compare ritual structures across regions or genres. The stage performance and mimicry of the African mythical plays on stage can also be an important area for future studies.

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