Unlike his earlier plays *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade* and *The Raft*, *Ozidi* has a distinct stamp. If the landscape, the delta region and social problems provided the material for them, history, mythology, folklore afforded the subject matter for his new play. Although the published version of *Ozidi* appeared in 1966, other versions of the story were known to Clark. According to Michael Etherton Clark's play has been derived from the traditional Ijo saga, or epic, centred on Orua in the delta region of Nigeria where it is told and performed. Etherton sums up Clark's engagement with the saga thus:

He (Clark) first heard the story when he was 9 years old, a school-boy and far from home, narrated by a story teller called Afoluwa, and it made a deep impression on him. Years later, after he had graduated from university and achieved various academic honours, he set about rediscovering the story. Afoluwa had become a seaman on ships plying between Lagos and Liverpool, but when Clark finally tracked him down and got him to tell again the saga, to him and his friends
in Lagos, it was a terrible disappointment. The man had forgotten it. He has subsequently disappeared without trace.

A much more successful attempt at getting the saga told in its entirety, with intention of tape-recording it, took place in Ibadan. This time the story teller was a man called Okabou, who prompted by one Madame Yakubu, was able to tell the whole dramatized story - which traditionally took seven nights to relate in the course of one long day and night. Okabou is now dead, but the whole saga as he told it was painstakingly transcribed, and the Ijo then translated more or less word for word into English. Clark published this in 1977 with title *The Ozidi saga* with his English translation along side Okabou's Ijo version of the epic. It is not to be confused with Clark's own English language play, *Ozidi*. 1 (P-1)

From the above it may be understood how Clark devoted considerable number of years in bringing to book a saga which was in the oral form and narrated and performed by the people of Orua. The playwright's anxiety to conserve the
traditional oral literature is manifest in his own attempt to give it a form. The play is divided into five acts, each act sub-divided in the Shakespearean manner into scenes.

The plot of Ozidi may be summarized in the following manner. The state of Orua is in a crisis. In four years it had six kings all of whom died in quick succession. The throne is vacant and it needs a king immediately. The council of state of Orua meets to decide upon the next king. The members of the council—Ofe, the short, Azezabife the Skelton Man, A Zbogidi, the Nude and Oguaran the Giant are in a great hurry to elect a new king although Elder advises them to go easy with electing, an another king. But the council rejects the suggestion and decides to go ahead with selecting the new king. Ozidi, whose family has to provide the king now, tells the council that his mother is "in no shape for a role like that" (P-9)². Nor can he take up kingship while his elder brother is alive. He concludes that neither he nor his brother can accept the kingship. At this moment Temugedege Ozidi's brother, bursts into the council and claims the kingship. Temugedege has been made the king.

Temugedege is excited at having become the king. Ozidi complains that neither the people nor the councillors
have paid him the respect due to him. At Ozidi's provocation Temugedege promises to dissolve the council of the state and replace it by a caretaker committee of seven virgins. He tells his brother Ozidi to arrange gifts and tributes—canoe-loads of Yam from Lokoja and Abakaliki, a hundred barrels of Pure palm oil from Isoko and Aboh tenants, bails of hand woven cloth from the Yoruba and a river of gin from Calabar. Ozidi finds his brother mad and attributes it to the curse on their family. Temugedege warns Ozidi that he might be punished for ill treating his brother.

Ozidi frowns upon the people of Orua for not paying tributes to the king, his brother. He reminds them how he raided Urhobo and returned with several slaves to build Orua when Alale was king, how he had run over Itskire when Zitare was the king. Since he belongs to the king's family he cannot repeat his performance now. So he threatens them of dire consequences if they do not pay respects due to his brother. Further, he challenges any if he refuses. Citizens were stupefied by the outburst of Ozidi. They are afraid that they might be killed if they disobeyed the king's brother. Ofe after hearing from the citizens about Ozidi's threats assures them that they will offer a prize for
beyond the lion's head. The town crier announces to the people that they assemble before the ancestral hall with weapons. Ozidi's wife Orea smells danger and warns her husband against leaving the house. Orea fails to prevail upon Ozidi from joining the raid. She sees a lizard moving out of their shrine which is ominous. But the drum beats and blowing horbs pull him out of his wife's appeals. Orea helpless at being ignored offers prayers for her husband's safety.

The people of Orua gather in the outlying district of Orua. Ofe, Oguaran, Azazabife, Azbogidi and prominent generals have assembled, Ofe instructs the people what they have to execute. Oguaran is afraid that what they planned is immoral. Azazabife assures that there is no danger to their lives. Ozidi who rushes in to join them is surrounded by the conspirators who have planned his murder. Shocked by the conspiracy to kill him Ozidi initially appeals to them to spare him but finally surrenders. Reminiscent of the killing of Julius Caesar by the Roman senators in Shakespeare's play, Ozidi is killed by the conspirators. Orea is misled by messengers that Ozidi has been injured. Very suspiciously she offers a medicine to cure her husband. Temugedege is told by Orea
how Ozidi has been injured. Stupid that he is, he ignores Orea's suspicions and compliments people on their dutifulness. He thinks that under the leadership of Ozidi a war has been fought and booty brought. But instead of tribute he is offered Ozidi's head as a gift. Orea wails at the treason and remembers the heroic deeds of her husband. Temugedege comes to his senses and tells Orea not to end her life. Suddenly an old woman appears and tells her that she should live to bring up the unborn child of Ozidi and make him avenge his father's death.

Having lost her husband and for fear of being killed by her husband's murderers Orea shifts to her mother's home in Ododama, away from Orua. Seven months later she delivers a male child. The birth of the child has all the makings of a great and super human being:

That day it rained barrels
Of water through a sieve of sunshine you
Could say of the storm that against wind
Had taken the sea as an orange by the month
And sucking it, had spat in face of the sun
Who winced lighting, and then hurled it all back
At earth as rain and bolts of thunder observing
The phenomenon, men said a leopard
Had generated in the forest
Now let us see how the cub, fatherless before Birth, grew under the wings of his grandmother Oreame, a witch of no hidden Knowledge from Ododama to Orua.

The description suggests that even the elements of the universe record the birth of an unusual and an uncommon being. In tune with the saga in which the hero is described in heroic terms the playwright creates a sense of awe and wonder around the boy who is the posthumons son of Ozidi. In a series of scenes in Act II Clark presents the evolution of a young boy into a great warrior.

Young Ozidi, who is as yet not given any name is all wild but very skilled in archery. He can hit a revolving object which other boys of his age cannot. When out of Jealousy the boys indulge in pranks and taunt him of being nameless and fatherless he pounces upon them and threatens to Crack their heads. Orea is anxious at her son's conduct:

Much limb he has broken already
Now is there any day passes without
Some angry parent coming to refuse
At my feet a child crippled by your boy? (P-34)
She is afraid the people might drive them away from Ododama. But Oreame is happy that the young boy will live up to the image of his dead father and take vengeance on the killers. When young Ozidi demands why he is not given a name and who his father is Orea and Oreame console him that his "father is a man famous all through the rivers" and that he will meet him very soon.

Oreame employs all her magic to initiate the boy in the art of life, the art of fighting so that he is made the avenger of his father's death. One day she takes him into the woods and scares him with a "hill masquerade". Then she pretends to have been attacked by a leopard and cries for him. The boy Ozidi fails to impress Oreame who taunts him at his cowardice. After this the boy sheds his fear and begins to do heroic acts. For example he carries home on his shoulders dead tree and offers it as a gift to his mother.

Convinced about the potentialities of her grandson Oreame wants to bestow on the boy powers which would incapacitate the enemy. She leads the young boy into a forest where a half human character who can walk on his head and who has the secrets of life and lives of the
forest stands on his head, and dozes off. There is a huge mortar leaning against which is a tall pestle. There are seven pots cooking on seven hobs set out in a row. The boy is amazed at the spectacle and he makes fun of Bouakarakarabiri. He tries to tilt the magician and bring him back to the normal posture but is caught by him on the throat. When he cries for help Oreame arrives and rivets him through the earth. She tells him that the boy is her grandson and he has been brought there for the mortar and pestle charm:

My daughter had a son for Ozidi after
His death, it is what I am telling you.
Now that issue must go forth and scatter death among
His father's enemies.

Later the old Wizard invests the boy with the mortar and pestle charm after performing certain sites. Further Oreame asks the old man to take the boy into his shrine so that:

like his late father,
No sword wielded by man may cut through
His skin nor any spear or bullet would pass
Beyond a bump.
The initiation is complete with Oreame rejoining over Ozidi's successfully sliding dangerously on a slippery floor. The boy himself gains confidence in himself and recognises that he is Ozidi. Oreame not content with the magical treatment given to Ozidi, takes him to a blacksmith who forges a seven pronged, sword. When Ozidi wields and waves the sword it creates a noise as of a night masquerade.

Convinced of the skills in the art of warfare and having invested Ozidi with supernatural charms Oreame and Orea returned to Orua. What was a whole city twenty years ago has been reduced to wilderness. Ozidi is told how this place had been prosperous before. There they meet Temugedege who is old and sick and who is pleasantly surprised to know that Orea is alive and has a son who is as strong as his dead father:

These are the feet
Of my brother, show them, not so flat were
His heels, yes, they are my late brother's
And these calves bulging
Through wrappers, these strong arms
Tapering to fingers of tendril that hold
With grip of iron.  (P-62)
The description about Ozidi fits requirements of a saga hero. Like the heroic men in Homer's epics and Atlantean stature of Milton's epic character Satan, Ozidi is a man houlded and shaped for fighting armies and winning battles.

It is ironical that while the conspirators have long forgotten Ozidi, they should be shocked with the news that Ozidi had left behind a man "who lets cutlass cut through pots, our own tortoise. That beats the dog to every bone". Ewiri brings the sad tidings of Ozidi and his family who have returned to Orua. Realising the threat to their lives the conspirators begin to prepare themselves to meet Ozidi in the battle.

Ozidi knows his past but does not know who his enemies are. It is by sheer chanums and accident that he gains knowledge of his enemies. He sets out to the market with his attendant and after journeying for some distance lays himself down at the cross roads. It is dark and some women who are on their way to the market trip over him. They take him for a fallen tree, then for a python, then for pirate. They are offended that they should be obstructed by a stranger. They boast
of being the wives of men who had killed Ozidi. They warn him that he will meet with the same fate that Ozidi had met with. Glad at the fortuitous knowledge of his father's killers and angry at the impertinence of the women he takes off their clothes and announces to them that he is no other than Ozidi himself, son of dead Ozidi.

Ofe, Azazebife, Oguaran, Agbogidi are completely upset and begin to plan to attack Ozidi. It is Azazebife who will meet him first. Oreame prepares Ozidi for onslaught. She prays to Oyin Tamara for help, a prayer for justice and punishment for the wicked:

Twenty years ago, men of Orua
Turned upon his father's head the mortar aimed
At the enemy and pounding the man to pulp, served him
As a royal dish to his brother, where has it
Been heard said a son of the soil was sacrificed to
The spirits
Of his land? where has it been seen one dog ate
Another? only in Orua, only in this city
Are such abominable things to taken in jest
The seed you were pleased to grant the man, even
As he fell splintered in the afternoon like
An oil bean tree, seeks today all agents to the norter
So that the feast begun before his birth may find
A finish.

As if her prayers are granted there is thunder in the sky.
She believes Oyin Tamara has endorsed her request to send
Ozidi to fight his father's killers. Temugedege advises
Ozidi against the fight and pleads for peace but Ozidi
ignores him.

Ozidi and Azezabife stand ranged against each
other in the public square of Orua. Each has his
supporters Azezabife is killed. Likewise Akpobrisi was
reduced to pieces, Azbogidi was given a piece of shroud,
Oguaran got his two score toes and fingers clipped. Ofe,
the lone survivor waits for his turn. The people of
Orua blame Ofe for their present condition. Left to
himself and deserted by people Ofe pathetically pleads
innocence but they are unrelenting. He has to fight
against Ozidi all by himself and desperately resorts
to magic. But he is no match to Greame and his disa­
ppearing tricks are contained by her. At last Ozidi
strikes a death blow and Ofe dies.

The slayhing of the conspirators is not the end
of the saga. Avenging his father's killers is only a
part of Ozidi's mission. He has to cleanse Èrúwa of the monster with seven heads, seven limbs and seven legs, Tebesonoma. Until this deed is done, Ozidi cannot rest. But new that he is to the place he does not know about the monster and his strength. Ozidi dislikes being idle and he cannot relish delicious food served to him by his mother. He is itching for action. He tells his mother:

I was born
With sword to hand, first clenched firm for fight. This course
I have followed without deviation
Doing my duty by my dead further, But now
Like a river at a whirlpool I am come to
A spinning stop worse, like a lion plucked clean of His whiskers, I growl now only in my sleep (P-90)

Ozidi tells his mother that he is haunted by the killings and in his dreams he sees Scrotum King who threatens to swallow him. Fight as well as he might he always loses the battle with the Scrotum King. Orea sees no way except consult the oracle or seek her mother's help. Ewiri diagnoses Ozidi's sickness to his manhood which needs a woman but Ozidi dismisses him and says that he needs to fight not marry. The Ewiri tells him that he
he can take on Tebesonoma of the seven heads. Tebesonoma who wants to fight with Ozidi to decide the strongest in town and forest. Ozidi sends a message that he shall crop all Tebesonoma's seven heads to the ground any day, any place.

Ozidi and Tebesonoma confront each other in the forest outside Orua. With his magic he holds Ozidi captive, bind him with a rope to a tree and begins to kick. Ozidi is helpless since he knows no magic. Therefore he calls his grand mother. In an instant Oreame descends with a noise as of an aeroplane coming into land. She with her charms makes Tebesonoma feats turn to roots groups his arms to earth. Later Oreame releases him so that he can fight with Ozidi. Ozidi cuts off six heads and Tebesonoma pleads with Ozidi that he may be spared the remaining head but Ozidi cuts off even the last one. Tebesonoma curses before dying that his death will be avenged by a son of his sister.

Ozidi and Oreame go in search of the child because they do not want Tebesonoma's curse to become a reality. They succeed in reaching the house of Tebesonoma's sister. They tell her that they have killed Tebesonoma and are there to kill the child. Ignoring the
pleas of the mother Ozidi and Oreame kill her and her son and disappear.

Ozidi's final encounter is with Odogu whose wife he has abducted. The woman threatens Ozidi that her husband will give him a fight and that as a faithful wife she will not yield to him. Ozidi does not compel her any more and asks her to leave his room. Meanwhile her husband Odogu comes and challenges Ozidi. Both the men are supported by women and their magic. Ozidi by Oreame and Odogu by Azema. The two women also fight but Ozidi finds it hard to kill Odogu because he was also given mortar and pestle charm by the wizard of the forest, Bouakarakara biri. Only a magic leaf will save the men. Oreame and Azema rush out to fetch the magic leaf and it is Oreame who returns triumphant. The liquid is squeezed into the eyes of Ozidi. Who flares up in a fresh frengy but Ozidi cuts him down. It is ironical that Ozidi blinded by herb that gave him power cuts down his grand mother also.

The play comes to a close with Ozidi and Oreame offering prayers to Tamara. Orua is visited by Engarando, the Smallpox King. He is followed by cold, cough, headache, spots, fever. Orea very old now finds her son
returning home drenched in rain. Very soon Ozidi is infected by cold, headache and fever. There are rashes all over the body. She is anxious to save her son and cries for help. A Smallpox King and his followers have a hearty laugh while Ozidi is struggling in bed and Orea sleepless. The neighbours withdraw for fear of being infected. In a such a situation Orea prays to Tamara to save her son. The Smallpox King and his retinue leave the shores of Orua signalling the end of all disease.

The most noteworthy feature of Ozidi is its combination of narrative and dramatic elements. Clark found the story in the narrative form but changed it into dramatic form. The play begins with a story teller who begins the play with a ritual and then plays the central role himself. The opening of Ozidi also suggests the ritual origine of African drama.

Characterisation is another important element of Ozidi. Not only the central character but also the other characters are full blooded and come alive as the play unfolds. Ozidi's heroic deeds are not so much as reported as shown. His physical appearance, his skill in archery and his brave deeds make him a truly grand person. Clark raises him to the level of Homer's heroes. It is to be
noted that the playwright does not portray Ozidi's enemies as weaklings. They do have superhuman strength and super-natural powers.

The centre of interest in Ozidi lies in its theme- the theme of revenge. Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, Marlow, Webster and many playwrights had made this theme very popular and Clark knows the potentialities and dramatic element in a such a theme. He knows that the audience can be kept engaged for hours if the hero pursues his killers, tracks them down and kill them.

Magic and music, traditional elements in the drama add to the element of fantasy in the play. Oreame, Ofe, Azema, Smallpox King and his followers have super-natural powers. We have such elements in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists. Prospero in the Tempest uses his magic to confound the enemies. There is also music in the play. Throughout the audience hear the blowing of horns, beatings of the drums evoking the African setting.

References: