Conclusion

In conclusion it may be argued that J.P. Clark is indisputably one of the greatest writers of Africa and one of the gifted playwrights of West Africa. His claim to supreme position in drama cannot of course be granted because of the presence of another distinguished playwright, Wole Soyinka, who has done a remarkable work in the theatre. However Clark's importance for Africa is more significant than Soyinka's for the reason that his plays are basically African in origin. Whereas some of Soyinka's plays are derived from or transpositions of European literature Clark has taken his art close to the people reflecting their social, political and metaphysical problems. His plays are meant to mirror his society and offer instruction and pleasure.

The development of Clark as a playwright shows a developing engagement with African life and art. His very first play *Song of a Goat* is rooted in the indigenous tradition but there are some indications of the influence of Greek elements. It appears from this combination that Clark was aware of the ritualistic origins of Greek drama and so his play became a Graeco-African
tragedy. Consequently his play observes classical unities of time, place, and action and uses a limited number of dramatic personae. Clark makes the play at once African and universal with his theme of fertility. Besides the universality of theme the play has poetic qualities which evoke a sense of place and atmosphere. There are critics who find the play to be weak in its cathartic function but the deaths of Zifa and Tonye do create emotions of pity and terror. On the whole the maiden play of Clark is a successful one.

Clark's second play The Masquerade has been criticised as a dramatic failure. It has a potential of good drama and the playwright might have exploited the mysteries surrounding the central character Tufa. The denouement is a little un-impressive. What would have been an instance of anagnorsis which is the strong element in Greek drama has not been exploited by Clark. So also the conflict between Titi, who symbolises modernism, and the traditionalists might have been presented much more dramatically. Considering Clark's experience who was only writing the second play the dullness may be
viewed sympathetically. Among the merits of the play may be mentioned its affinity to classical models, concentration of scene, fewer characters, local rootedness. As poetry the play is beautiful because the poetry evokes Ijaw setting. There are vivid images of the Delta creeks, of boats, tides, fishing and sea. The characters use images and allusions which arise from the Ijaw background.

Clark's third play The Raft is far superior to his earlier plays. Here is Ijawland but the basic situation combines naked simplicity and endless complexity. A common situation like four men going on a raft gains in subtlety and becomes a problem that is true at the individual, national, continental and universal levels. Although Clark presents a West African situation the play is rich in ideas. The journey on the Niger river suggests a spiritual journey and the water suggests spiritual agency. The play, therefore, has been praised for its layers of meaning. It is a play which puzzles and leaves many questions unanswered. It has a moral ambiguity which is at once honest and consciously modern. The close of the play has something that approximates to great art.
By the time Clark wrote *Ozidi* a great change had taken place in his career. This is not a Graeco-African play but a work that is solidly African. The play represents Clark's determination to return to his roots. The *Saga* which Clark found in oral form has been rendered dramatic without totally sacrificing the narrative element. Clark has come a long way from *Song of a Goat*. *Ozidi* is not in the classical tradition. There are more characters and the play is like a communal dance. The play presents whole of African art - its characters, scenes, events, orchestra, singing and dancing. There is a great deal of solemn ritual, magic rites, mime, horrific stage spectacle all of which have been kept alive by Africa for centuries. The play, therefore, is richer than the earlier plays. This play itself will ensure immortality to J.P. Clark.