The Masquerade may be considered as a poetic play as it uses symbolism throughout. The Neighbours as in a Song of a Goat constitute the chorus commenting on the action, the characters and the conditions of the societies. It is interesting to note that it has Shakespearean echoes, of star-crossed lovers who die as victims of social conventions. This play is in a way a continuation of the Song of a Goat whose characters re-appear here again.

In the opening lines of the play the choric commentators evoke the scene of disaster. There is a high tide in the river which promises to rise higher. This is the third such occurrence in the season and the fishermen have been finding it difficult to move their boats further ashore and tether them safely. It was similar to the annual floods. To signify the disaster the new moon is already full. It had not happened like this before. When in the past if the moon had appeared like this there were several floods and the whole earth was covered with water. That was years ago when many had died including the great Yekpe.

From the commentary of the Neighbours we also gather that the high tide has denied the fishermen their
catch with fishes having been carried away by currents of water:

And will not be distracted by dogs
To stop for a bite (p.52).

The fishermen have no fish to sell in the market. They are in for "hunger and worse" for the end of the river and its tide are mysterious. There must be explanation for this unnatural phenomenon. In the words of the second neighbour:

Its foreboding enough
But conjoined with a new moon that has sprung.

We gather that a number of feasts have been offered in propitiation and it is difficult for them to understand why such an ominous thing is taking place.

Although it looked enigmatic and mysterious for others, for the first Neighbour the cause lies in this:

It is tomorrow the young dashing stranger
Carries the girl off to other Greeks. Such
A mermaid of a girl Now, I get it
Its on account of her abandoning us
Heaven and sea have put up this show
Of anger.

From the above, it may be gathered that there is a beautiful girl who is prepared to abandon the community and its customs. The young dashing stranger will carry this girl away to his land. This is not only objectionable to the community but also to the cosmic forces.

As the choric group is analyzing the causes and consequences of the love of the stranger for the girl, they see at a distance the lover and the girl, and decide to watch them unnoticed. The lovers themselves are unaware of the world outside. They find the moonlight magically and the sands like a silver spawn. For Tufa, Titi's flesh is many times lovelier than gold and like pearls brought on to the shore by the streams. Describing the fire in her eyes as "several Suns" Tufa begs Titi to permit him to feel "the ungunt flow of your flesh, and I have drunk/For life" (p-54) Titi is also in a cheerful mood. She is charmed by the fireflies who have obscured even the stars. However hard she might try she cannot catch them because they escape
from men. They are to be found in thousands in the grass. Among them is a watermaid who is threatened by a wicked traveller, Tufa imagines that he himself is a traveller who has come to possess the beauty of the maid. He says that it was Titi's coyness that prevented him from possessing the goal rather than the customs of clan. In a scene which is very tender and passionate the lovers feel each other and are restless. Titi imagines herself a celestial object like the star and says that like the stars who are like brides she is shy. Ignoring Titi's advice for patience Tufa asks her to nestle in his arms. Titi is still looking at the sky and the rainbow path they have created. Not content with what she sees in the sky she asks Tufa to tell her what lies beyond them. Tufa promises to lead her to a greater world when she is released from her father. Titi refutes Tufa's comments on her father. She says that her father hates to be a keeper. It is she who has chosen to stay indoors. Now she has flown out of the cage to test whether Tufa can overcome the obstacles and catch her. As a test he must catch a dragonfly first, tie a stoutest stream to her and fly in the sky without losing. Tufa accepts
the challenge and tells Titi how he had sailed kites into the sky "right up the beared of the wildest wind". In the course of the conversation Tufa admits that he had not known his mother:

My coming was her undoing atleast
So my aunt who brought me up, poor woman,
She died last year.

Before he finishes the story Titi cuts him short and asks him to tell her about him. This is a very crucial movement in the play because he identity of the central character is not revealed to audience. The playwright deliberately prevents the truth from coming out so as to rouse the expectations of the audience.

With the arrival of Diribi on the scene Titi breaks loose and runs away into the dark followed by Tufa. Now the playwright suspends the narrative for a while to enable the chorus to comment on Tufa - Titi love. For them the lover's meeting is:

A real dance of
The dragon-flies, if you ask me: A pause
Here and there to touch wings and tickle
From their commentary we may gather that both Tufa and Titi are exceptional human beings. In a long passage the beauty the regality and brilliance of Titi are described. People belonging to all categories have shown great admiration for the girl in her glory. To a curious question as to how such a beautiful girl took to the stranger one of the neighbours says that there is no one certain story about it. But one story is that once when Tufa went to the market to buy some fabric he was struck the beauty of Titi. He had offered all pieces of silk on display "as a tributary at her feet", finally offering himself at her feet. Titi instantly responded to his love. It is interesting that the chorus of neighbours who knows so much about the love story have no knowledge of the identity of Tufa. At the end of the first act the all important fact that emerges is the mystery surrounding Tufa. In his mystery lies the strength of the play and so the playwright postpones his identity by not allowing
Tufa to speak about himself and the chorus pretending ignorance.

Situation II opens in the courtyard of Diribi, father of Titi. It is a festive occasion in which there is feasting and dancing. It appears that Tufa who comes as a guest has been generously tossing out money and gifts among spectators and dancers. Diribi is jealous that Tufa is trying to excell him in generosity. When Tufa assures him that he is not, then Diribi advises him to be sparing. In a parable he explains how even the over ripe orange tree will not shower forth in grip of wind, Tufa need to reserve for his wife's up keep. Tufa accepts the advice and promises to give Titi decent living. He also requests Diribi to light the first fire in their hearts nearing consumma-
tion of marriage. Diribi expresses how he has been possessive with his daughter and wonders whether his daughter "is not exchanging the pipe for ladle". From this we understand that Diribi is not certain about the happiness of marital life.

While Diribi is discussing women in general and marital life in particular a group of neighbours enters
and begin to sing. The singers make wild references to Tit's love for Tufa and forebode that Tufa might turn out to be a scare-crow and a python. Diribi is annoyed at the implied suggestion but the singers plead that they are singing only an old song. They demand money from the bridegroom, Tufa, some present to remember the smashing stranger but Diribi is so angry with them that he asks Tufa not give them a penny. Further, he threatens to get them chased out with a broom. A group of neighbours is offended by Diribi's out burst. At this the First Neighbour breaks out the truth that Tufa is an illegitimate child. Now Diribi demands from Tufa the whole truth about his birth and parentage, who his father is, who is his mother and the root of his family. Tufa now demands the neighbours to speak up:

I do not know who you are in this town
Or whether indeed you have drunk too much
And do not in your heart intend to cause
Me harm. But speak up what is this tale
You say is abroad? What has it to do with me?
Oh, speak up the slander!
The Neighbours advise Tufa to go to the market place and hear what people have been saying about him.

In Situation III Diribi and Titi are face to face arguing with each other over the breaking off Tufa-Titi marriage. Titi is in an angry mood and questions her father the propriateness of separating the lovers after having blessed them. She reminds her father how she went through the ordeal of kneeling at her father's feet witnessed by the entire clan. In the presence of so many people Diribi placed his warm trembling hand on their brows, rubbed the lotion on their forehead and poured libation and invoked the instant issue of a child. Diribi complains that he has been misled into taking the dagger for a fan of fine feathers. Umuko adds fuel to the fire when she complains against Titi's postponement of marriage. Diribi says that Titi did not forewarn him of her love. When he was thinking of his daughter's marriage she came with her man and he had no time to think of pros- andcons. Now that he knows the truth she cannot marry Tufa. Diribi explains the illegitimacy of Tufa:

Has he? Did he tell you also his father
Usurped the bed of his elder brother, yes,  
Brazenly in his life time, and for shame  
Of it after hanged himself in broad day light  
While this unfortunate abused husband  
Walked of his own will into the sea?  p.  

Titi contests her father's contention:  

Well, is the seed to be crushed and cast  
Away because of aberration  
And blunder by those who laid out  
The field?  p.  

Now it is the turn of the mother to convince her daughter  
that her choice will pollute the Diribi race. Diribi  
assures her that he will find a worthy husband by  
offering all his wealth. Titi is insulted at the  
suggestion that she will be taken out to different  
places in search of a husband. She refuses to be sold  
for any price.  

When Diribi's persuasions fail to convince his  
daughter, he leaves the mother and the daughter to  
decide the matter between themselves. Umuko tries to  
convince Titi to give up Tufa. At this very moment
Tufa arrives and Umuko objects to his presence. She even accuses Tufa of concealing his identity and calls him masquerader. Titi accuses her mother of being very harsh to her husband, for she says:

We are man
And wife already who can separate us.

Umuko says the (Titi's and Tufa's) relationship was dissolved.

Towards the close of the scene Tufa pleads innocence and says that he himself came to know about his part only now and he never meant to deceive any one. Umuko dismisses Tufa of not being rich, of not having parents, of not having parents, of not having sisters, of having nothing to deserve Titi.

This scene is the climactic scene with the sudden reversal of fortunes for the lovers. The relationship which promised to blossom into marriage is dissolved. More importantly, this is a scene of anagnorsis because Tufa is given to the shock of recognition. He realises that he was born illegitimately
and has no right to love and marriage.

In the brief scene in Situation Three B, Diribi, Umuko and women of the house are shown in gloomy and sad moods. Diribi is visibly angry at the disappearance of his daughter with Tufa. He had loved her with all his heart but she has turned out to be worse than a harlot. He had always wanted to give the best to his children. What is more painful for Diribi is Titi's defiance of her father's advice. The news of his daughter's running away has spread to the community and men and women have started to arrive at his residence. The women of the house, however, console him that all is not lost and the situation can still be remedied. Diribi says that he has prayed best, offered father sacrifice. But in return he is scandalised by gods. Umuko is hopeful that her daughter may be around and can be found out. The women of the house agree with Umuko and tell Diribi to search for Titi immediately. When Diribi accuses his wife of complicity in the matter Umuko confesses to have been misted by Tufa. She says that the matter was decided by Diribi himself. She also
says that she had foreboding of the situation when she found a python in the fish basket. It is an indication the evil and misfortune for the family. The scene closes with Diribi giving up the attempt to search for the girl and women of the house taking the responsibility.

In the last scene of the play, Situation Four, we find three priests discussing Diribi. The Third Priest says that Diribi has run away into the woods overcome by the shameful act of his daughter. The First Priest who knows Diribi so well cannot believe that Diribi has taken to the bush to kill Tufa and Titi. The Third Priest now reveals that Titi is killed and her death has made many people scare and have left their products in the market.

While the three priests analyse the cause and effect of Tufa-Titi's love Tufa himself arrives on the scene and is searching for the murderer of Diribi. The Priest advises him to hide in a safe place to escape the wrath. But Tufa on the other hand says that he is in search of Diribi and he would kill him. The priest continues to advise him to escape. Tufa refuses to
carry out their advice. Recalling how he persuaded her to run away without wasting time. She was keen on watching the pageant. The three priests while paying a great tribute to her great qualities, prevail upon Tufa to hold his spirit and not dissolve.

There is a long account of the homicide following the above scene. It is a heart-rending and pathetic account of an innocent girl killed by her own father. Diribi, hunter that he always was, killed his daughter like the hunter kills a bird. It is ironical that the gun used by him was given to him by Tufa himself. The nobility of dead girl is proved when she tries to save the girl she was holding while she knew that she was being killed.

The scene and the play end with Diribi appearing with the motive of killing Tufa. Tufa now confronts Diribi and in the quarrel Tufa is killed. The dying words of Tufa are very poignant. He traces his tragedy to his mother who concealed him from an illicit relationship. He wonders why he was not killed when he was born. He also wonders why he was brought up by witless old woman. Tufa dies after analysing his own story and
the priests decide to honour his body with a rite.

Like the great love stories in world literature
The Masquerade ends tragically with the lovers' deaths.
Clark's apprenticeship to western tragic drama, especially to Shakespeare is undeniable. The playwright's ingenuity consists in his appropriating a stock in trade theme but giving it local setting. The tragedy is shown to have resulted from a deeper and stronger cause — the illegitimate birth of the hero, one who is tainted by the adulterous conduct of his mother. The play therefore is noted in Nigerian morality.

References:
1. All textual passages are four OUP (London) edition of the three plays of Clark.