

**THE MYTH OF OZIDI AS MONOMYTH: THE INDEX OF  
DAVID ADAMS LEEMING**

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**Abstract**

Among the different procedures in mythic scholarship, classification and comparison are the most universal. Classification and comparison are frequently deployed because mythology often involves the analysis of a wide corpus of data collected from diverse regions and cultures of the world. Consequently, different categories of myths have emerged some of which include myths of origin, myths of heroic conquest, myths of death and the scapegoat, et cetera. This study is concerned with the category described as monomyth, which comprises myths whose plots explore the developments in the life of the hero from birth to apotheosis, a life considered to be a journey of the hero figure from the known to the unknown worlds and back. By deploying the qualitative research methodology and the simplified monomyth theory of David Adams Leeming, the study locates the Ijaw myth of Ozidi within the monomyth category. It arrives at this conclusion through a comparative study of the Ozidi myth and other world myths, gauging both by the events provided in Leeming's framework.

**Introduction**

Myth is a universal and timeless phenomenon whose study defies disciplinary boundaries. Interest in myth permeates diverse fields of human endeavour in the arts, social sciences, and even the sciences. Observing the phenomenon, David Adams Leeming declares as follows:

No longer is mythology approached primarily in conjunction with the study of classical or other literatures. Mythologists are now anthropologists, philologists, etiologists, ethnologists and, perhaps most of all, psychologists. And crossing these disciplines are ritualists, diffusionists, structuralists, Jungians, Freudians, and culturalists, who in turn, are not always mutually exclusive (1).

Despite these disciplinary differences of mythologists and the diversity of theories, there exist some common grounds in their procedures towards the study of myths. Consciously or unconsciously, every known theory or mythologist often engages in the classification or comparison (or both) of myths. These procedures are, thus, inevitable since the investigated data often comprises myths collected from distinct and diverse cultures and regions across the world.

The diffusionists and formalists who belong to the taxonomist school are, for instance, concerned with the principles of classification of myths. The diffusionist theory revolves around the pivot of cultural similarity resulting from the transmission of ideas through contact. Thus, this cultural affinity of the world, which is its major tenet, is further explained by the diffusion of cultures, including myths from, certain ‘mythogenetic’ zones (Leeming 2). Similarly, the formalist theory (with its prominent exponents as Vladimir Propp, Eleazar Meletinsky, and Alan Dundes), is concerned with the relationship existing between the component parts of tales and myths. “Function” to formalists, refers to how component parts of myths match and contribute to the overall meaning of the whole.

Some renowned individual mythologists who have employed the classificatory and comparative methods in their studies of myths include such pioneers as E. B. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*), and Sir James Frazer (*The Golden Bough*). Others are Carl Gustav Jung (*The Archetype and the Collective Unconscious*), Norman Friedman (“Imagery”), Stith Thomson (“Myth and Folktales”), Joseph Campbell (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*), and more recently, Phil Cousineau (*The Hero's Journey*), and David Adams Leeming (*Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*), to mention just a few. Tylor and Frazer observe that the comparison of myths from diverse cultures across the globe reveals certain laws of human existence.

Similarly, Jung suggests that myths from different regions of the world represent, at a deeper level, the unconscious reserves and expressions of the dreams of mankind generally; and that these myths exhibit similar universal materials which he describes as archetypes. Such recurring motifs and images like the mother, the

trickster, and the flood are instances of Jung's archetypes which he believes are part and parcel of the universal vestiges of the human psyche and which man releases unconsciously in myths. Since Jung's theory of the archetype, mythic criticism has been narrowed to mean archetypal criticism. Stith Thomson isolates the motif common to all the versions of a tale as well as the variants in order to establish a prototype and sub-type and by so-doing, enable one to arrive at a possible life history of the tales being analyzed.

Now, the idea of the monomyth is also a universal phenomenon derived from the comparative method. The word originates from James Joyce in the novel *Finnegans Wake*, but its popularization as a concept in mythology is credited to Joseph Campbell who used it in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to designate the basic pattern in the plot of most myths around the world – a pattern which depicts the mythic plot as a journey of the hero. The hero, according to Campbell, is “the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms” (19-20). He further observes that in a monomyth plot, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (qtd. in *Wikipedia* 1). The different incidents in the development of the plot thus represent the different stages in the hero's life's journey, which is comparable to our own life's journey from birth to death.

Consequently, Campbell identifies about seventeen stages in this journey of the hero including: Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, The Crossing of the First Threshold, Belly of the Whale, The Road of Trial, The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, The Ultimate Boon, Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, The Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of Two Worlds, and Freedom to live. These 17 stages could be divided into three sections,

namely, *Departure* (sometimes called *Separation*), *Initiation*, and *Return*. Thus, organized, ‘Departure’ deals with the hero's adventure before the quest proper; ‘Initiation’ with the hero's many adventures along the way; and ‘Return’ with the hero's arriving home with knowledge and powers acquired on the journey. The stories of most mythic figures like Osiris, Prometheus, Moses, and Buddha follow this structure closely. Yet, it must be noted that very few myths contain all seventeen stages/events. While some myths include many of the stages, some others contain only a few; just as some myths may focus on only one of the stages, and yet others may deal with the stages in a somewhat different order.

Cousineau and Leeming are among the “descendants” of Campbell. However, they have in their individual works, tried to expand, restructure, re-order or simplify Campbell’s events of the monomyth. For example, Cousineau has restructured the incidents and reduced them to eight steps including: The Call to Adventure, The Road of Trials, The Vision Quest, The Meeting with the Goddess, The Boon, The Magic Flight, The Return Threshold, and The Master of Two Worlds. Similarly, Leeming has devised eight events in his simplification of Campbell’s original. The events include: Miraculous Conception, Birth and Hiding of the Child; Childhood, Initiation, and Divine Signs; Preparation, Meditation, and Withdrawal; Trial and Quest; Death and the Scapegoat; The descent to the Underworld; Resurrection and Rebirth; Ascension, Apotheosis, and Atonement. Leeming submits that in this journey towards self-actualization, the hero has to pass through some or all (and even more) of these stages (events). And I will add that even though these events are considered stages in the development of the hero’s adventure, each or some of them could as well constitute a whole myth. Hence, there are myths of Trial and Quest, of Death and Scapegoat, of descent to the Underworld, Resurrection and Rebirth, and of Ascension, Apotheosis, and Atonement.

Unarguably, some studies may have been carried out on the famous Ijaw myth, but none of such studies has attempted either classifying it into a known type, or

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comparing its events with those of other famous myths from across the globe as this study seeks to do. Some of the existing studies involving the myth of Ozidi are literary analyses, which examine it side by side the *Ozidi* play often to demonstrate how much J. P. Clark-Bekederemo borrows from the myth in writing the play, and how much the play helps to preserve the same Ijaw culture which the myth represents, and to project Clark-Bekederemo's creative ingenuity and tragic vision. In this category are Isidore Okpewho (*Myth in Africa*), ImeIkhideh ("*Ozidi: The Film, the Saga and the Play.*"), OluObafemi ("*Folklore and Tragic Vision in Clark-Bekederemo's Ozidi and The Ozidi Saga*"), and OmehNgwoke ("*Mythology and African Drama...*"). A non literary study of the myth known to me is that by J. B. Egberike, which simply re-examines Clark-Bekederemo's Izon-English translation of the saga.

In establishing the monomyth status of our subject, the essay adopts Leeming's model. The aim is to demonstrate that even though the Campbell framework may be the prototype pattern of the monomyth plot, Leeming's simplified version provides a perfect framework for the study of the myth of Ozidi. It will be shown that none of the numerous examples cited by Leeming in his book – except perhaps the story of Jesus - adheres more closely to the eight "supreme mythic events in the life of the hero" (6-7) than the myth of Ozidi. The myth of Ozidi becomes a clear instance of the myths which necessitated the said restructuring, re-ordering and simplification of the Campbell model. Thus, in addition to contributing to the classification of the Ozidi myth into the monomyth type, this study also helps to further expose the myth as part of the world myth.

### **Some Background Information on the Myth of *Ozidi***

Some background information on the myth of Ozidi is necessary at this point if the following analysis is to be fully understood. Sometimes described as a saga, an epic, or legend, the myth of Ozidi is an Ijaw tale which community of origin is a small western Ijaw town named Orua. Egberike, an Ijaw man, provides detailed information on the myth's origin and practice:

According to oral tradition, the Ozidi myth originated from the equally legendary town of Orua, situated on the lower reaches of the River Niger. Orua is in Tarakiri clan, and it is the seat of Tarakiriye, one of the most powerful gods of the clan. Tarakiriye is revered for its prompt and austere action once invoked. Devotees of the god from all over Western Ijaw go to Orua annually to worship and sacrifice at its celebrated shrine for power, wealth and procreation. Its high priest is accorded the same reverence as is given to the god. His pronouncements are regarded as being divinely inspired and therefore prophetic.

Tradition has it that the Ozidi story was initially communicated to the high priest of the god by Tarakiriye in a dream. Subsequently, narrators of the story, who in most cases are also the devotees of the god, are believed to be possessed by the deity prior to, or at, the moment of telling the story. (7-8)

The myth of Ozidi is an Ijaw tale “told and acted in seven nights to dance, music, mime, and ritual (Clark-Bekederemo, “Preface” ix). The myth is one of the most revered cultural heritages of the Ijaw nation, and its enactment attracts a highly involved audience whose knowledge of the tale shows their ownership of the material. It is the story of a man cut down treacherously by his fellow warriors and whose son is born posthumously and brought up strictly for the purpose of avenging the death of his father. The plot actually opens with the meeting of the Orua Council of State to deliberate the installation of a new king to fill the vacant throne left by the successive deaths of six Orua Kings within a space of four months. Ozidi rejects the throne, which is due to his district as the seventh and the last in Orua. Ozidi’s idiotic brother, Temugedege, is eventually installed because he readily grabs the opportunity since he differs from Ozidi. His fellow Orua warriors murder Ozidi in an emergency raid out of deep-seated envy over his unmatched prowess at wars and because he speaks up against their neglect of the new king, his brother.

Soon, the murderers led by Ofe the Short, present Ozidi's king-brother with the decapitated head of Ozidi, as the traditional human-head tribute to an Orua King.

Ozidi's wife, Orea, weeps uncontrollably and is eventually flown away by her mother, Oreamme, a renowned witch, to her home town, Ododama, for safety both for herself and for the child which she is discovered to have conceived. Later, the child is born at Ododama and he begins to grow under the tutelage of his grandmother and takes the name of his dead father. Through the aid of his grandmother, a wizard, Bouakarakarabiri, fortifies young Ozidi with magical charms for valour and invincibility. He is also armed with a 'seven-pronged' sword with which he is expected to avenge his father's death.

The child returns to Orua where he discovers, confronts and kills his father's murderers, triumphing also over monsters and daemons. He eventually gets intoxicated with blood from too many killings leading him to the excesses of killing even innocent people, goaded on by his grandmother. The Smallpox King, Engarando, who is the last of the monsters to appear, attacks Ozidi. Ozidi triumphs finally by killing the Smallpox King through the magic aid of Oreamme after his body has been washed with water of herbs and soap by the same Oreamme who mistakes the smallpox rashes for yaws.

Expectedly, there are many raconteurs conversant with the myth as a communal property, but the version upon which our study is based is that of Okabou Ojobolo, which the ingenious scholar, Clark-Bekederemo has collected, translated and published as *The Ozidi Saga*. Thus, the Ojobolo version is the "true Ijaw thing" because, according to Clark-Bekederemo:

as a story, Okabou's version has a beginning, a middle, and an end in a total structure where no segment is superfluous. Each incident therein connects with the rest in its proper place and time so that were it to be left out, a fault would develop in the overall

arrangement that is plot, upsetting thereby the action presented. It is because Okabou, a dark horse in the race, preserves the *Ozidi* epic as a unified work of art that his account remains right in front of the others favoured to win the handicap. (xv)

In addition to the Ojobolo prototype, the *Ozidi* play shall also be drawn from, when necessary, to illustrate some of the monomyth events that are better captured there. This is possible because the play is based entirely on the myth.

### **Leeming's Events and the Plot of the *Ozidi* Myth**

To adequately appreciate the significance of the hero archetype in the myth under study, the reader must understand that *Ozidi*'s senior and junior are one and the same person - the junior being the incarnate of the senior. As the narrator tells us after the death of *Ozidi*, Orea "received her dead husband into her womb" (Night One; 12).

Now, in line with Leeming's first event, which is "Miraculous Conception, Birth and Hiding of the Child," *Ozidi* junior is conceived miraculously and his birth is clad with amazing incidents. *Ozidi*'s conception is miraculous for two reasons. One is that Orea is barren and even believed to have no womb:

That woman is the kind that cannot bear.

A wife who from her time of coming has

Never been pregnant.

The woman has no womb to her. (145)

Two, is that it happens on the eve of her husband's death. The conception of a wombless woman is such a miracle, more so at the verge of her husband's death. No wonder, she is ignorant of her pregnancy thus requiring a supernatural being to convey the news. Her mother and witch, Oreame, it is who tells Orea "Don't you see you are with child?" (Night One; 12). By this, Oreame symbolises the divine vendor of good tidings like the biblical Angel Gabriel who brings to Virgin Mary the news of her imminent miraculous conception of Jesus. Thus, like Mary, Orea is

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favoured by God because the baby in her womb is on a similar mission, that of redeeming the sinful Orua – an assignment he began just before his demise as Ozidi senior. As I have noted elsewhere:

Ozidi becomes something of a Christ-like figure to Orua because of Tamara's choice of him for the divine assignment of saving the entire community. This divine choice of Ozidi accounts, therefore, for his survival of the massive death in his district alongside Temugedege who is also a catalyst to the God-ordained mandate. .. by Tamara's design, Temugedege with the equally-spared warriors of Orua like Ofe and company, serve as the vehicle used to speed-up the necessary transformation (from a sinful — all in Orua have sinned: “we have enslaved too many” — to a sinless being) that Ozidi must undergo to be qualified to execute the divine mandate. The transformation, however, is not before the hero has planted a seed in the world of the unborn from where he will return to execute the mandate. Here lies the significance of Ozidi junior's conception just after his father's death and his reincarnation almost in that kind of cyclical worldview which we see in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. (48)

Therefore, Orua represents the universal child hero's mother, who is usually a virgin, pure and innocent. Orua, like Virgin Mary, is pure, innocent and without blemish; and Ozidi, like Jesus and Buddha, are born free of “any impurity from [their] mother's womb[s]” (Leeming, 48).

Ozidi's birth is equally miraculous: not only does the birth take place in the seventh month instead of the usual ninth month, the child also issues forth amidst wondrous signs:

And so his wife was heavy with child until by the ninth month, when she fell into labour, and a great storm appeared. Once the storm rose, it blew till nightfall, then it blew till dawn; blew till dusk, and on till

dawn and so to fall of night and then to break of day. So it raged, and as it became a seven-day storm, the woman delivered. And when she delivered, it was a baby boy, big and upright. Once you saw the father, you saw the son. (Night One; 13)

In his own recreation of the myth, Clark-Bekederemo an Ijaw man and a potential (if not an accomplished) raconteur of the myth, heightens the spectacle surrounding the child-hero's birth. In his own words:

... That day it rained barrels  
Of water through a sieve of sunshine. You  
Could say of the storm that a giant wind  
Had taken the sea as an orange by the mouth  
And sucking it, had spat in face of the sun  
Who winced lightning, and then hurled it all back  
At earth as rain and bolts of thunder. Observing  
The phenomenon, men said a leopard  
Has generated in the forest. (2.1)

Elsewhere, I have noted that the leopard image hinted at in the above excerpt fits very much to the personality of the hero whose entire life is that of uncommon bravery and valour. Similar to Ozidi's miraculous birth is that of Olumba (another hero archetype), which is said to be shrouded in "mystery" (Effiong 20); and that of Buddha who issued forth from his mother's womb like a preacher (Leeming, 19).

Ozidi's birth and upbringing at Ododama account for the aspect of Event One considered as the Hiding of the Child. The myth has it that after burying the decapitated head of Ozidi senior, Oreame "struck her daughter with her magic fan, and that instant both became air-borne for their home-town" (Night One; 12), which is Ododama. Ododama becomes the city of refuge for the child-hero who is to be hidden from the evil eyes of the Herod and Pharaoh figures: Ofe, Azezabife,

Oguaran, and Agbogidi who killed his father. In a similar fashion, baby Jesus was taken to Egypt for safety from Herod's onslaught, while Moses was hidden at the river bank to save him from Pharaoh.

The Second Event is the stage of basic initiation of the child-hero into his role as a saviour or quester. Rightly entitled *Childhood, Initiation, and Divine Signs*, this is the stage in which the child is expected to confront and control forces (demons, monsters, giants, like adult human beings and fantasies remaining from the personal and racial childhood) infinitely larger than himself and which he cannot simply comprehend. To get through this, Leeming writes, the child often requires outside assistance – a sense of security based on a more powerful being. Childhood and initiation are specifically accounted for in the Ozidi myth by the incidents in the child's bush path adventure with his grandmother, Oreame, who represents the more powerful being assisting the child to surmount his early fears in his growth process. In the bush path, Oreame, at different intervals, turns into a hillock, a leopard and a hill (Night One; 14-21) to test the child's bravery. These objects represent the forces infinitely larger than the child-hero which he cannot fully comprehend and which he must surmount to attain manhood. His fearless pummeling of the hill and frightening of the leopard in his subsequent adventures (Night One; 20-22) – having been scared to death by the two objects/forces in his earlier encounters – fulfill the child-hero's eventual deliverance from the fear-filled world of the nursery to that of adult responsibility. His initiation is thus complete.

For *Divine Signs*, Leeming says that the child-hero could perform a miracle which indicates that God is with him (82). He must perform feats which had flawed both fellow children and perhaps adults. To begin with, Ozidi, as a child, beat other children at games. The narrator recounts that "As children of the town were out playing at archery, he said he would go too and shoot, but when he appeared because whenever they played at tops, it was he that always trounced the lot, they refused to play with him" (Night One; 17). And later, when all the children have failed to hit the target in the archery game, Ozidi:

shot as they had and off it sprang! The arrow sped whizzing away, it went on and on, zoomed on into the sky, and while all there searched and strained for it, the arrow swung back and hit the plantain leaf, standing there rattling... All turned their thoughts gazing on the ground. (Night One; 19)

Considering the above, the children believe “invisible hands/Guide [Ozidi’s] missiles to the target” and “help/Trip opponents when the wrestling gets/Too awkward for the champion” (2.1). The last of the divine signs indicating the child-hero’s final burst into adulthood is his cutting down of a huge iroko tree, dragging its log home and breaking it into pieces for fire (Night One; 23-24). In comparison to Ozidi, Krishna kills a daemoness and calms a storm while still a cradled infant; Heracles or Hercules while a child defeats the devil serpent and takes milk from the breast of Hera; Olumba revives a dead woman at the age of five; and David as a boy slays the giant, Goliath.

Having translated from the fear-filled world of infancy into adolescent bravery, the hero needs to be prepared for the challenges ahead because “This boy, if left as he is, will come to no good.” And as the narrator fears, “What if he takes off for the city of Orua – the strong in that city are teaming, so they are in that state of Orua” (Night One; 24). Therefore, the third event is Preparation, Meditation, and Withdrawal, which, according to Leeming, is a continuation of the initiation process which began at the second event. Having conquered personal and childhood fears, the hero withdraws for meditation and preparation to be able to face the challenges ahead because life is all about struggle with unknown forces. This withdrawal for preparation or meditation is usually to a lonely place. Jesus withdrew to the wilderness, Mohammed to the cave, and Moses is called to a place of seclusion. In like manner, Ozidi is taken into the bush by Oreame. In this lonely place of withdrawal, the hero undergoes both physical and spiritual preparations referred to in mythological parlance as *rite de passage*.

Rite of passage usually involves three major stages, namely, separation, transformation and return. Separation in the Ozidi myth is accounted for by young Ozidi's sojourn into the bush. Preparation begins with his investment with the charm of "mortar and seven cauldrons" for invincibility, power, bravery, courage and thirst for war. After that, he is fashioned a seven-pronged sword with which he is expected to conquer forces in his underworld journey. Of course, the young lad returns unscathed from his passage rites in the bush. According to Leeming, the hero's withdrawal amounts to the "losing of self to find the self, and it involves both physical and mental suffering" because "the god within is not easily born" (119). Here lies the significance of the colic suffered by Ozidi from the mortar and seven cauldrons charm that he swallows, and indeed the torture of his first encounter with Bouakarakarabiri, the wizard and Old Man of the Forest. Clark-Bekederemo recreates the event thus:

He tries to tilt the old magician and wizard back on to his feet but succeeds in waking him up. Next at one somersault, old man has caught him by the neck between the vice of his feet, throttling and making him shout in pain and panic...At each pause for breath the old wizard tightens his grip on the boy now speechless and beginning to dribble in the mouth and show his tongue. (25)

The Fourth Event is Trial and Quest. Leeming writes that in one sense, the quest myth is the only myth – that is to say that all the events are a part of the quest myth. In other words, the hero's whole life from birth to apotheosis is a quest. Actually, the whole of the Ozidi myth constitutes the hero's quest for the return of sanctity to Orua because sin has become endemic in the land. Generally, quest myths involve immense tasks (trials) which, when completed, serve as proof of supreme manhood. Indeed the hero's journey in the myth of Ozidi involves great tasks which begin with his refusal of the thrown, followed by his insistence on tributes to the new king, his brother Temugedege, which eventually leads to the raid that brings about

his horrible death, and later his suffering in the underworld and then his triumph at the end of the plot, thus, proving his manhood.

The “labors [sic] or quest” writes Leeming, “continues essentially in part 5, where the hero must confront physical death” (8). Actually, Ozidi confronts physical and violent death, but ironically by his own people. The narrator is elaborately dramatic about the tragic incident:

Next, almost at once, they fell upon him from behind, blow after blow. When he raised his sword like this, the ground became one rolling mass. Yes, soon, they hit him again blow upon blow. He tried to lift his hand but cramp seized it. So it went on, because these were his people, because he had no thought of killing them, he let his sword drop, and his hand went limp. And so they pummeled him, pummeled him until he tumbled down. (Night One; 8)

Even more ironical is the fact that his death is for his people, the same as killed him -the people because of whose sins, he is has become a ransom. Therefore, Ozidi is the *scapegoat* in line with the title of Event Five, which is Death and Scapegoat. The hero, according to Leeming, becomes a scapegoat for the guilt and fears of a society, thus, the hero faces death and dies for us. Ozidi dies for Orua and that marks the end of death in the kingdom. Dan Izevbaye is to the point when he asserts that “The wrong of the community gradually becomes the burden of an individual who is also used as a scourge against the community and who eventually undergoes scourge” (qtd. in Obafemi 162).

The presence of a woman is also associated with death and scapegoat myths. In the myth of Osiris is Isis; Aphrodite is present in the Proserpina myth; while Hipta or Rhear’s presence pervades the myth of Dionysia. Similarly, Orea is present in the myth of Ozidi. Leeming writes that “the lament by a woman who is a fertility-earth-mother goddess and the woman’s active search for the dead heir imply the possibility of his being found and resurrected, as he almost always is” (217). The

lament of Orea at the death of Ozidi is, thus, very much in place. It is argued in Mythology that the death of the hero and his association with the female force hold promise of a new life, because reproduction and death depend on each other and because the hero-god dies as he gives sex to the mother in whose sacred precinct he is buried. The female force in the Ozidi myth is Orea, and her last filial association with Ozidi senior results in that new life, which is Ozidi junior.

The Sixth Event is Descent to the Underworld. This event accounts for the hero's journey in the underworld for the purpose of conquering death as a prerequisite for his rebirth. This underworld journey is symbolized by Ozidi junior's journey from Ododama to Orua, the city of death. Orua symbolizes the underworld of death because it has witnessed so many deaths both before and during the development of the plot of the myth. For example, it had witnessed the death of six Orua Kings and the wiping out, by the smallpox epidemic, of the citizens of the seventh district, as well as the brutal murder of Ozidi senior. Moreover, its citizens are murderers. Expectedly, the hero's journey in the underworld is to confront the forces of death here symbolized by such daemon and monster figures as Ofe the Short or the Club Feet, Azezabife the Skeleton Man (skeleton being itself a symbol of death), Agbogidi the Nude, Oguaran the Giant of Twenty Toes and Twenty Fingers, Sigirisi the Skeleton Man, Tebesonoma of the Seven Heads, and the Smallpox King with his entourage of Migraine, Fever, Cold, Cough, Spots and Maggots.

Leeming adds that, "In the universal myth of the descent into the underworld the hero finds himself an explorer in the province of death itself ... The descent into the underworld is a rite of passage carrying the hero and man past the monster guardians of the higher truth which the underworld contains" (265). Ozidi explores the whole province of Orua, identifying and killing all the forces of death one after another and at different occasions and locations, fulfilling also Campbell's assertion that the hero must face the challenge of crossing threshold after threshold and conquering dragon after dragon.

“The myth” adds Leeming, “involves the hero’s suffering or witnessing the actual torment of the underworld before defeating death” (265). Accordingly, none of the daemons and monsters is an easy ride for Ozidi. Spanning almost six nights – from Night Two to part of Night Seven – Ozidi’s fights in the underworld prove to be no mean tasks. Some of the daemons exerted so much strength and magical powers that at different occasions in their fights with the hero, Ozidi suffered seriously and even came close to being killed. In one of his fights, for instance, Ofe “manages to kick Ozidi in the belly, sending him reeling back in sharp pain (3.8); and “in the forest outside Orua, Ozidi ... is tossed up and being dragged on the ground by Tebesonoma” (4.2). Clark-Bekederemo believes that Ozidi triumphed over these deadly daemons not because of his personal powers, but because the gods, God and indeed, the witch, Oreame, are with him (“Introduction” xx).

We are further told that the hero in the underworld witnesses a stage of momentary withdrawal from action and refusal of the call to action (Leeming, 7). Accordingly, in Night Five, Ozidi refuses to kill the sister of Tebesonoma and her new-born baby even when Oreame persuades him to. The narrator tells us that “As she spoke, Ozidi stared steadily at her, and his body went limp. All thoughts of killing the woman were no longer in his mind. He paused in deep thought” (Night Five; 252). That moment of momentary withdrawal is graphically captured in the *Ozidi* play, where in Act Four; Scene Three, Ozidi withdraws even from eating, his mind and belly preoccupied with all the previous killings he had accomplished:

... Oh, how  
Can a man go on and on from one day to another  
With leading a life like this, a life of stone  
Upon which one drop of rain is a great event...  
I cannot farm or fish; nor as others  
Exchange fruits from both for profit. I was born

With a sword in hand, fist clenched firm for fights. This course  
I have followed without deviation  
Doing my duty by my dead father. But now  
Like a river at a whirlpool I am come to  
A spinning stop. Worse, like a lion plucked clean of  
His whisker, I growl now only in my sleep.

Event Seven, which is entitled Resurrection and Rebirth, accounts, as its title implies, for the hero's eventual return to the real world by being reborn. Leeming writes that, "Here the hero continuing his role as a scapegoat, rises from the dead." The miraculous birth is thus repeated and in some myths, "the rebirth is in the nature of a reincarnation" (292). Even though the death of Ozidi senior and the birth of Ozidi junior may be said to have fulfilled this, this event is rather more symbolic in the myth. The hero's resurrection is symbolized by his restoration from the deadly grip of the Smallpox scourge. The account says that Oreame scrubs his body of yaws with water of herbs, and in one swift, the rashes and the entire symptoms of the grave sickness, which made his body rotten and caused him to "collapse[d] straight into a comma" (Night Seven; 378) disappeared. And Ozidi was reborn. With his rebirth, the hero completes the divine cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The journey completed, Ozidi the hero places Orua back in the secure fold of the gods, nature and God Almighty – the kind of man-god relationship that had eluded Orua before the cleansing of the city.

The last and Eight Event which is Ascension, Apotheosis and Atonement, is described in a purely psychological sense as the individual's final step in the voyage of self-actualisation. At this final stage, writes Leeming, "the 'wonderful song of the soul's high adventure' is completed" and the hero "ascends to heaven, achieves atonement, or is made a god himself if he was not one already" (9). At the end of the Ozidimyth, the hero actually attains an exalted status and becomes a god among

the Ijaw. In one long excerpt, Egberike sums up the Ijaw people's perception of Ozidi, a perception which accounts for his ascension, apotheosis, and atonement:

Ozidi is a proverbial name, a heroic title, a wrestler's ritual totem and an apotheosized tribal hero among the various communities of Izonland. Those going on a warlike expedition invoke his name for immunity against the fatal strokes of an enemy; those for wrestling contest call on his spirit to infuse in them his superhuman might, and medicinemen invoke his name for magical efficacy in concocting heroic amulets and charms for untested heroes. In fact, the name 'Ozidi' has come to pass for a house-hold word with definite archetypal associations which instinctively spring to mind whenever the name is invoked as a title or a slogan. As far as the Izon people are concerned, 'Ozidi' is a culture hero, and the story, a cultural myth of heroic conquest and territorial expansion. (7)

The hero's words at the end of his journey are also suggestive of his apotheosized status. He says: "There's no unnatural death that can kill me now" and "All the battles in this world I have fought them. I shall never seek another fight" (Night Seven, 387-388).

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing study has put the plot of the myth of Ozidi through a monomyth mould and mill, and comes out with the conclusion that the said myth is an example in the category of myths described by such mythologists as Joseph Campbell, Phil Cousineau and David Adams Leeming as monomyth. However, it has shown that while the Ozidi myth may not adhere strictly to the seventeen pioneer events of the monomyth stipulated by Campbell, it follows closely the eight events of Leeming's simplified framework, which depicts a more straightforward plot with well-defined events. Therefore, like all monomyths, the plot structure of the Ozidi myth is that of a heroic journey. By this is meant that the chief character's life depicts a kind of voyage from birth to the actualization of self; from the known to the unknown and

back. Like other examples in the same category, the Ozidi myth dramatizes a hero on a divine mission for the interest of his own people. This is why we have likened Ozidi to Jesus, Moses, Buddha and other mythic heroes. Ozidi's constituency is the Orua community among the Ijaw of the Niger Delta.

Thus classified, the myth of Ozidi ceases to be a local property of the Ijaw ethnic nationality, but a universal property, whose roots, however, reside in the collective unconscious of the Ijaw culture. Thus, it is a world myth in the same category as the stories of Buddha, Moses, Osiris, Dionysus, Proserpina, and many others.

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