

**HISTORICAL SOURCES AS SUBJECT MATTER FOR PLAYWRITING: THE
EXAMPLE OF**

"QUEEN IDEN".

BY

OSAIGBOVO, VICTORY ETINOSA

MAT. NO: ART2101276

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,

BENIN CITY.

OCTOBER, 2025

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS,
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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A. HONS)
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DECLARATION

This work is based on personal research undertaken by **OSAIGBOVO, VICTORY ETINOSA**, in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, Benin City. All ideas and views in this work are product of my personal research where the ideas of others were used and expressed, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This research was carried out by **OSAIGBOVO, VICTORY ETINOSA** of the Department of Theatre Arts University of Benin, under my supervision.

PROF.(MRS.) JOSEPHINE E. ABBE

Project Supervisor

DATE

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, the author and finisher, for His presence, grace, favour and mercy that He has showed me all through my stay in the University and for enabling me to successfully complete this project. I also dedicate this project to the Holy Spirit, for His inspiration and guidance.

To my beloved family, who have been there with me through thick and thin, your love, sacrifices, advice, emotional support and constant encouragement have been my strength and motivation.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines historical sources as subject matter for playwriting: The example of "Queen Iden". Qualitative methods as well as review of relevant literatures were applied to gather necessary data. The research concluded that history when used as subject matter for playwriting not only records the past but serve as a living source that can be reshaped into meaningful dramatic plays. The research recommends history as a building block and foundation for playwriting so as to promote and preserve the rich history and cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom and it's people.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

History is very crucial in the life and culture of any people, because it is the past that shapes the future. History is the systematic study of the past focusing primarily on the human past. It is also an academic discipline, that analyses and interprets evidence to construct narratives about what happened and why it happened. Therefore, history preserves identity, keeping cultural heritage, traditions and origins alive, societies learn

from past mistakes and successes through their history and it protects the truth from distortion and erasure. Historical figures serve as motivation for future generations.

The kingdom of Benin is one of the oldest and most developed states in the coastal hinterland of West Africa (Wikipedia), it is located in Edo State, Nigeria. It was initially ruled by Ogisos, hence it was called 'Igodomigodo'. Around the 13th century, the reign of the Ogisos came to an end, which gave birth to a new dynasty and the establishment of the title "Oba" for the rulers of Benin. The Benin people history is quite enormous and popular, portrayed differently by playwrights and scholars from different perspectives to document the ways of life of the people for posterity. One of these several historical events is the story of Queen Iden, the wife of Oba Ewuakpe who reigned 1700 AD. Queen Iden was a woman of love, loyalty and courage, who offered her life to bring peace and stability to the Benin Kingdom. Her sacrifices to regain the Benin Kingdom is not forgotten in a hurry till date.

This research therefore, exploring with historical narratives into the life and time of Queen Iden and Oba Ewuakpe focuses on Queen Iden's sacrifice for the Benin Kingdom, the research will harness this historical event into creative writing to evolve a drama script – Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the modern day Benin society, the younger generation know little or nothing of their culture, language, history and heritage. Western ways of life resulting from British colonisation has been widely accepted by the younger generation to the detriment of cultural survival and continuity among the people. In spite of the rich and enormous cultural history of the Benin people, just but a few has been captured in plays as a lot still remains untold. Some playwrights like Ola Rotimi, Pedro Obaseki and Ossa Earliece, to mention just a few have written plays that are centered on one historical events, or the other of the Benin people. Ola Rotimi's 'Ovonramwen Nogbaisi' is a good example of a historical play, which tells the story of Oba Ovonramwen and the Invasion of Benin by the British in 1897. It captures how playwrights can promote history, weaving tales about our history to the world and to the younger generation. Pedro Obaseki documented the experiences of the Benin people and the British by focusing on the role Chief Obaseki played in becoming an ally with the British. Ossa Earliece in Nekighidi narrated the tragedy of a Benin warrior. This research retells the story of Queen Iden.

The narrative is a source of inspiration and subject matter for the playwright which will culminate in a script – Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice.

1.3 AIMS/OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research examines the historical events as sources for playwriting. Focusing on Queen Iden and the sacrifices she made to restore Benin Kingdom to the Oba, the research explores this historical material to develop a play script entitled Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice.

This research is driven by the following objectives which is to:

- i. Show how plays preserve history and give insights about it in an informative, entertaining and memorable manner.
- ii. Highlight the role of women and the sacrifices they make to keep not just a kingdom but also future generations standing.
- iii. Highlight the cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom.
- iv. Show how history influences playwriting, becoming the subject matter of a play.

1.4 SCOPE/LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research examines historical sources as subject matter for playwriting. Focusing on the history of Queen Iden, the research sought to represent Benin culture, customs, social structure, beliefs and practices as subject matter to develop a play text entitled Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice. Necessary literatures on playwriting, Benin history, Queen Iden and Oba Ewaukpe shall be reviewed to help gain indepth knowledge and understanding required in treating the subject matter of this research.

The limitations of this research involves getting adequate literatures on the topic of the research as well as limited time available to the researcher to complete the play text. Above limitations shall be surmounted by the researcher's perseverance to seek for enough literatures through library, online, individual collections and interaction. The time constraint shall be solved by the researcher's commitment to be available to develop a play text.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research shall employ both primary and secondary methodology as well as textual analysis to gather necessary data. Primary methodology shall dwell on interactions with individuals to gather necessary information concerning Benin history. The secondary sources shall include the consultation of relevant literatures to the discuss such as books, journal articles, archival materials and internet sources. The textual analysis shall include the writing of the play text "Queen Iden :The Living Sacrifice ", this shall be derived from the materials consulted.

1.6. VALUE/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The play is significant in the following ways:

- i. The play delves into Benin History and culture, using Queen IDEN story as subject matter, giving a comprehensive understanding of her life, sacrifice and decisions in an informative and entertaining manner.
- ii. The play highlights the importance of history, in modern society in educating the younger generation about their culture, tradition, sacrifice, responsibility and hierarchy of the Benin Kingdom.
- iii. The play Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice, emphasizes the use of history as a building block and foundation for playwriting.

This work makes a contribution in promoting and preserving the rich history and cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom and its people. It is an added reference for further research by scholars and researchers in playwriting and Benin history. It is equally useful to historians, theatre artists, theatre directors, playwrights, theatre students and the society at large.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 PLAYWRITING.

As an academic and creative field, playwriting holds a pivotal role in the history of theater and performance. The art of playwriting centers around the creative process of conceptualizing, organizing, and writing dramatic pieces that act as blueprints for performance(Wikipedia). The play is not just a literary artifact; it is a performative script meant to come to life via actors, space, and audience participation. In this way, studying playwriting involves comprehending its literary, performative, historical, and sociocultural aspects.

In his seminal work *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), Aristotle and other academics like Horace and Longinus stressed the structural and aesthetic principles that govern drama, notably tragedy. With his theoretical framework, Aristotle offered the first systematic way to understand what makes a play effective by defining elements such as plot (mythos), character (ethos), thought (dianoia), diction (lexis), music (melos), and spectacle (opsis) (Aristotle 13). Since then, playwriting has changed throughout history in response to shifting social realities, philosophical trends, and artistic movements. The art of playwriting is a constant conversation between literature, history, and performance, as seen in ancient Greek tragedy, medieval morality plays, the works of William Shakespeare, and contemporary experimental playwrights.

The idea of play writing will be covered in depth in this chapter, beginning from its meaning and definition, to the playwright's role, the procedures involved, its difficulties, and the theoretical underpinnings that support it. Because history frequently serves as a source of both inspiration and content for creative writing, the connection between the two will be given particular consideration.

Meaning of playwriting

The art and craft of writing plays, especially scripts intended for onstage production, can be broadly defined as playwriting. It involves using live actors, sets, and other theatrical components to bring tales to life through narratives, dialogues, and stage instructions. Playwriting is a distinct genre of writing that produces narratives intended for theatrical performance. Unlike prose or poetry, a play is written with performance in mind, making its form dependent on dialogue, stage directions, and dramatic structure. According to Louis E. Catron (page 4), the creation of a script that embodies conflict, character, and story in a way that is meant to be staged before an audience.

In addition to characters and dialogue, a play is structured using acts and scenes. These divisions aid in organizing the story by breaking it up into manageable chunks, controlling the speed, and highlighting significant plot twists. The audience may more easily follow the plot's progression with the help of this framework, which includes the exposition and rising action, the climax, and the conclusion.

Writing for the theatre involves more than just telling stories; it also involves creating experiences. The playwright transforms themes, concepts, and feelings into words and actions that can be understood by directors, performers, and designers. A play "exists in the gap between the written text and its realization in performance," as David Edgar observes in *How Plays Work* (Edgar 2). In contrast to other literary genres, in which the text itself is frequently the end product, playwriting stands out for this reason.

Kenneth McGowan wrote in his article (page 23) that he finds only one factor common to all plays and sets a play apart from other forms of literature. This factor is 'Complication', it is a device which creates suspense and keeps them happily affixed to a seat in a theatre. He also states that the difference between dramatic and narrative writing is that in dramatic writing a play must pack more plot and character into fewer words and because of things, it is in danger of overtaxing and confusing the audience that cannot stop and think or read over again. The play must have greater immediate clarity and the plot must be presented with much more unity. Complications play a more or less important part in all plays, they are the life blood of 99.99% of them.

Playwriting is a literary and performative activity in the academic sense. In *Dictionary of the Theatre*, Patrice Pavis defines playwriting as "the activity of conceiving and organizing a text destined for the stage, often shaped by theatrical conventions and sociocultural contexts" (Pavis 273). As a result, playwriting is simultaneously literary, aesthetic, and sociological.

Origins of playwriting

Playwriting is as ancient as theatre itself, and its beginnings demonstrate how ritual, religion, and cultural narrative gave rise to drama.

According to Hornblower and Spawforth (page 7), the origins of playwriting may be found in oral traditions and ritual rituals. The beginnings of drama can often be found in communal storytelling, chants, and ritual performances in ancient cultures. For instance, the ancient Egyptian Abydos Passion Play, which was staged every year around 2500 BCE, portrayed the death and resurrection of Osiris. In a similar way, African storytelling, drumming, and masquerading customs functioned as proto-dramatic rituals, laying the groundwork for later written theatre.

The literary form of playwriting first appeared in ancient Greece in the fifth century BCE. The genres of tragedy and comedy were developed by playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Their works were not just artistic but also civic, carried out at religious festivals like the City Dionysia, which honored Dionysus, the deity of wine and fertility. Tragedy is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude," according to Aristotle (Poetics 11). This established the fundamentals of dramatic composition, having an impact on playwrights for many years.

In the medieval era, playwriting first appeared in the shape of mystery, miracle, and morality plays. These dramas, frequently staged in churches or plazas, depicted biblical tales and moral precepts. However, the Renaissance saw a resurgence of playwriting as a literary art (Wikipedia). Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson in England, as well as Molière in France, transformed playwriting into a sophisticated art form that combined amusement with social and political issues.

Playwriting has diversified in form and content in the contemporary era. Henrik Ibsen brought realism to the 19th century, focusing on commonplace social concerns such as gender, morality, and class. In the 20th century, authors like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet embraced the Theatre of the Absurd, which rejected traditional

forms and emphasized existential questions. In Africa, authors like Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka incorporated native oral traditions with modern dramatic techniques to create plays that addressed colonial and postcolonial realities.

In this way, playwriting has changed throughout history, influenced by social and cultural changes, but it has always served as a means of expressing stories and reflecting on the human experience.

WHO IS A PLAYWRIGHT?

A playwright is a writer who creates plays, including the dialogue and stage instructions that form the basis of theatrical performances(Wikipedia). He conceives, arrange and write the text of a dramatic piece using dialogue and stagecraft to explore emotions, themes, and conflicts as poets, storytellers, and architects of the human experience. Playwrights compose scripts intended to be translated into live performances, as opposed to poets or novelists, whose works are often read . They must strike a balance between their artistic vision and practical considerations, like audience engagement and the constraints of stage production. Due to this duality, the playwright must consider not only how words will be read but also how they will be spoken, represented, and received by the audience.

The playwright has historically been seen as a social critic as well as an artist. Sophocles, for example, in ancient Greece, utilized his plays to contemplate fate, morality, and human agency. Shakespeare, widely considered to be the finest playwright in the English language, portrayed the philosophical conflicts, political conspiracies, and cultural changes of Elizabethan England(Encyclopedia Britannica). Playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi have employed drama in Africa to explore colonialism, tradition, and postcolonial issues.

Susan Jonas points out that, The playwright is the initiator of the theatrical event, providing the text that sparks the collaborative process of bringing a story to life(Jonas, 2006, p. 15). This highlights the playwright's essential role in theatre. As a result, the playwright's job is complicated. According to Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, "the playwright is both a creator of literature and a collaborator in theater" (Rowe 21). The playwright creates in isolation, but the ultimate goal of the script is teamwork, including the directors, performers, and designers who give it life. Additionally, writers function as

cultural historians. George Bernard Shaw said, “the dramatist is the historian of the human soul” (Shaw 15). From this viewpoint, it is clear that the playwright’s responsibility is to portray the events, feelings, beliefs, and values of their culture and society.

The playwright’s role is essential to the art and practice of drama. He is more than simply a writer; he or she creates worlds, voices, and conflicts that must be felt in both the written and spoken word. The creation of a script is not all there is to playwriting; it is a demanding, creative, and technical process that calls for the playwright’s command of language, comprehension of human psychology, awareness of social interactions, and grasp of theatrical conventions. Being a playwright necessitates accepting responsibility as a storyteller, social critic, cultural historian, and master of dramatic architecture. Being a playwright necessitates more than just literary ability; it also calls for creativity, discipline, and a thorough comprehension of human nature, society, and the workings of the theater. A playwright has to be both an artist and a craftsman—an artist in coming up with innovative concepts and a craftsman in turning those ideas into logical, playable scripts.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PLAYWRIGHT

The playwright has many obligations that go beyond simply telling a tale. These duties include:

- i. **Developing Interesting Characters:** A play’s characters are its essence. In *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that “character reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids” (Aristotle 49). As a result, the author must develop characters whose wants and choices drive the story ahead.
- ii. **Creating the Plot and Structure:** The playwright is responsible for arranging the events in a way that forms a logical dramatic arc. In understanding how playwrights build narrative tension, Freytag’s paradigm of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution is still helpful (Freytag 115).
- iii. **Interaction with Society:** Playwrights frequently play the role of cultural critics. According to Bertolt Brecht, a dramatist should “expose reality so the audience may change it” (Brecht 104) and “the dramatist of social contradictions.” This emphasizes the moral and political aspects of playwriting.
- iv. **Writing for Performance:** The playwright, in contrast to the novelist, must consider how dialogue and action will come to life on stage. David Edgar

writes that “plays are not finished when they are written; they are finished when they are performed” (Edgar 5).

THE SKILLS OF A PLAYWRIGHT

A combination of interconnected talents is necessary to become a playwright:

- i. Dialogue Proficiency: Dialogue should have thematic significance while yet seeming real. “Dialogue is the playwright’s instrument for creating illusion, conflict, and rhythm,” as Catron argues (Catron 77).
- ii. Understanding of Stagecraft: Playwrights should be familiar with theatre conventions, stage directions, and dramatic timing.
- iii. Empathy and Imagination: Layered characters can only be created if one is able to empathize with and imagine a wide range of human perspectives and experiences.
- iv. Historical and Cultural Awareness: Because drama mirrors society, playwrights must be knowledgeable of the past, customs, and challenges that are influencing their communities.
- v. Mastery of Dramatic Structure: A thorough understanding of dramatic structure is essential to writing plays. Theorists have stressed the significance of conflict, climax, and resolution ever since Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Gustav Freytag’s 19th-century model of dramatic structure (*Die Technik des Dramas*). “Drama is an imitation of a complete action...with a beginning, middle, and end,” as Freytag states (Freytag 115). As a result, a playwright must create plots that are logical, suspenseful, and progressive.
- vi. Knowledge of Society and Human Psychology: The playwright needs to have a strong understanding of human psychology as well. Characters are not just abstract representations; rather, they reflect human desires, anxieties, and conflicts. As stated by Egri, “the well-constructed play is not built upon cleverness of plot, but upon the depth and truth of character” (Egri 52). For this reason, the playwright must be able to develop realistic, complex personalities that connect with the audience.
- vii. Furthermore, writers frequently act as social commentators. For instance, Bertolt Brecht contended that theater should be used as a tool for social

critique and change. His epic theatre emphasized alienation effects, which were meant to encourage viewers to think critically about society rather than just accept amusement (Brecht 91). This demonstrates the social responsibility of the playwright's work outside of art.

Playwriting is a vocation, not simply a career, it requires tenacity, self-control, and a lasting love of telling stories. August Wilson described playwriting as "an act of listening—listening to the voices of the community and giving them form on the stage" (qtd. In Shannon 14), implying that the playwright is also a conduit through which collective memory and aspiration are expressed. Playwriting is a vocational activity that is full of difficulties. Limited appreciation, financial insecurity, and the strain of balancing artistic ideas with real-world production limitations are common challenges for playwrights. However, as Miller contends, "the theatre is the playwright's public forum, his chance to wrestle with the human condition in view of the community" (Miller 32). This emphasizes the civic responsibility inherent in the playwright's job.

It is noteworthy to state that the playwright has dual identity of an artist and a craftsman. Balancing art and craft is one of the most important aspects of being a playwright. The playwright as an artist uses metaphors, symbols, and poetic language to express the human experience. The playwright is also a craftsman who pays close attention to stage economy, creates dialogue, and organizes plots carefully. Aristotle's claim that poetry (which includes drama) is both mimetic art and technical creation (Aristotle 55) is reminiscent of this dichotomy. For this reason, playwrights work under a complex tension, they must balance their creative impulses with the theatre's established rules. The ability to strike this balance is what sets apart lasting playwrights like Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Brecht, and Soyinka.

Accepting complexity is a necessary aspect of being a playwright, as it involves balancing poetic artistry with dramaturgical talent, reflecting and changing society, and fulfilling the duties of teaching and amusement. The playwright acts as a custodian of voices, a builder of dramatic structure, and a bridge between history and performance. In this way, the playwright is at the intersection of literature, performance, and culture, producing scripts that come to life on the stage.

Working together is another essential aspect of being a playwright. Playwrights, in contrast to poets and novelists, do not write in a vacuum. Their scripts act as a foundation for audiences, actors, designers, and directors. "A play is not complete until it

is performed," according to David Edgar (Edgar 6). As a result, the author must consider how the words will be presented, spoken, and expressed, frequently striking a balance between their own artistic vision and the reality of the production. Patience and discipline are also necessary when writing plays. A script goes through several iterations and revisions before it gets to the stage. "I write five pages a day, even if I throw out four," the famous African-American playwright August Wilson once stated. Discovery is found in the procedure itself" (quoted in Shannon 144). The interactive process of playwriting and the tenacity required of those who engage in it are exemplified by this. In other words, a playwright is someone who observes, interprets, and recreates life. It involves being able to translate human experiences into dramatic action by striking a balance between creative imagination and theatrical realism.

Writing plays is a well thought-out procedure that combines creativity, discipline, and an understanding of structure, rather than an impulsive endeavor. Although playwriting is based on creativity, it follows a method that integrates imagination, skill, and discipline. From the original concept to the finished script, the playwright's process is rarely linear; rather, it includes several phases of conception, drafting, revision, and teamwork with other theatre professionals. Although each playwright's approach is different, experts and professionals have discovered shared stages that characterize the art and technique of dramatic creation.

The first step in creating a play is coming up with an idea. Playwrights frequently take inspiration from a variety of sources, including history, mythology, current events, overheard discussions, and their own life experiences. In the words of Jeffrey Hatcher, "a playwright starts with a seed—an image, a line of dialogue, a social issue—that grows into a dramatic world" (Hatcher 9). As drama thrives on tension, the driving force behind a play frequently comes from an examination of conflict. According to Aristotle, "drama imitates human actions in conflict" (Poetics 47). Consequently, the playwriting process frequently begins with identifying a key conflict, whether it be interpersonal, social, or philosophical.

Apart from the idea, the playwright must do research to establish a believable and engaging dramatic world. Research may involve looking at historical circumstances, speaking with individuals, reading literature, or watching social conduct. "Good research grounds the imagination, ensuring that the playwright's vision resonates with truth even as it invents," David Edgar emphasizes (Edgar 22). Study is especially crucial for historical

plays. The works of playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, who makes extensive use of Yoruba cosmology and history, show how combining factual material with creative imagination produces plays that are both dramatically potent and culturally rich.

The playwright organizes the raw material into a cohesive dramatic structure after collecting enough of it. Creating structural maps, beat sheets, or outlines of the story is frequently necessary. The classical model of Gustav Freytag's exposition, increasing action, climax, decreasing action, and conclusion continues to serve as a fundamental reference (Freytag 115). However, contemporary playwrights are free to break away from linear structures and play with fragmentation, episodic narratives, or nonlinear time frames. The play's thematic issues must be considered when designing the structure. "Structure is the skeleton of a play; without it, dialogue and characters collapse into shapelessness," as Louis Catron puts it (Catron 98).

In drafting the script outlines are converted into scenes and dialogue. Here is where characters discover their voices and conflicts are presented in a theatrical manner. The visual potential of movement, stage economy, and the tempo of dialogue must all remain in the playwright's attention. As Hatcher points out, the playwright must consider how words might translate into gestures, motions, and silences on the stage, and must write for the stage rather than just the page (Hatcher 37). Prior to producing a satisfactory text, many playwrights use interactive writing, in which they compose several drafts. Subsequent drafts improve the pacing, thematic coherence, and character motivations, while the initial draft is often used as a discovery process.

The most important step in playwriting is likely revision. It calls for detachment, self-analysis, and a readiness to change complete portions of a character's arc, structure, or conversation. According to playwright Arthur Miller, the playwright's true job is rewriting, and the initial draft is merely the start of the process of discovery (Miller 54). Additionally, revision necessitates a sense of how the audience will react. To pinpoint areas of weakness or confusion, some playwrights use audience feedback to workshop their drafts in staged readings or informal productions.

In contrast to the lonely activity of writing novels, play writing is by nature a collaborative endeavor, from writing to performance. This is seen in *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*, a play written by two playwrights, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo. Only through collaboration with directors, actors, and stage designers does the playwright's work come to life. In the words of Bertolt Brecht, "the script is not a finished

product but a working document, subject to transformation in rehearsal" (Brecht 108). During rehearsals, directors can propose structural changes, and actors can offer fresh interpretations of lines. Great playwrights maintain this collaborative approach while protecting the integrity of their ideas.

Realizing the script in live performance is the last step in the process of writing a play. No matter how excellent a script is, it is still incomplete until it is brought to life by performers and performed for an audience. According to David Mamet, "a play is theater, not literature. Its meaning resides in performance, not on the page" (Mamet 6). The play's performance is the ultimate evaluation of the playwright's skill since it demonstrates if the dialogue is believable, if the tempo maintains tension, and if the topics strike a chord with the audience. In this respect, the audience is the playwright's final partner in the creation process.

The fact that the process of writing a play is rarely linear is worth mentioning. Similar to how new research may change an outline, a staged production can send a playwright back to the revision process. Thus, the process of writing a play is cyclical, with each step building upon the others. "Playwriting is rewriting, reimagining, and re-experiencing until the play breathes with life," Catron states (Catron 101). The playwriting process is a mix of creativity and methodology, combining inspiration with research, structure with experimentation, and seclusion with collaboration. The playwright's intricate journey, which requires tenacity, creativity, and flexibility, begins with the germ of an idea and ends with the staging of a performance. This process highlights the dual nature of playwriting, which is both a personal exploration of ideas and a collaborative effort that results in a shared experience.

Despite its rewards, playwriting is a tough creative endeavor. The complex interaction of creativity, technical constraints, societal expectations, and the practical aspects of theatre creation frequently causes these challenges. In addition to the internal challenges of creativity and discipline, playwrights also deal with external impediments such as censorship, financing, and audience reaction.

Balancing creative vision with the realities of performance is one of the most difficult obstacles. Sometimes a playwright comes up with scenarios that are either too complex or too expensive to produce. "The page is boundless, but the stage has limits," as Edgar points out (Edgar 21). As a result, authors must strike a balance between creativity and practicality. Again, the creative process is one of the major challenges in playwriting. It is

difficult to come up with unique ideas that connect with people. "The blank page is the playwright's greatest adversary, demanding both invention and discipline," writes Jeffrey Hatcher (Hatcher 12). Playwrights must strike a balance between uniqueness and accessibility, making sure that their works are both creative and comprehensible. Moreover, creating engaging characters and real conversations is often a laborious process. "Characters must speak with individuality while serving the broader narrative function; striking that balance is a constant challenge for dramatists," as David Edgar points out (Edgar 37).

Financial and institutional obstacles frequently stand in the way of playwrights. In contrast to novelists, who may publish their works independently, playwrights rely on producers, theatres, and directors to bring their creations to life. Since producers may favor commercially viable scripts over experimental ones, this dependency might restrict artistic expression. Brecht fought against institutional constraints, pushing for alternative theatre venues that were not subject to capitalist commodification (Brecht 94).

Audience response is another challenge. The nature of playwriting, which is subject to direct public feedback, makes it intrinsically dangerous. It is possible that a play that questions accepted social conventions will stir debate or censorship. As an example, *The Trials of Brother Jero* by Wole Soyinka addressed religious hypocrisy and drew opposition from religious organizations in Nigeria (Graham-White 59). As a result, playwrights must strike a balance between their artistic integrity and their awareness of the political and cultural environment.

Additionally, writing can be a lonely endeavor that requires a lot of mental effort. The challenges that writers deal with include writer's block, self-doubt, and deadline pressure. As stated in Shannon 145, Wilson once admitted, "There are days when the page mocks you, when you wonder if the play will ever arrive." The mental obstacles listed above demonstrate the perseverance necessary to maintain a playwriting career.

The selection of language and cultural expression becomes even more challenging for playwrights writing in multilingual or postcolonial situations. For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocated for creating plays in indigenous languages to safeguard cultural identity, despite the fact that this restricted his worldwide audience (Ngũgĩ 73). This predicament mirrors the greater challenge of negotiating identity in a globalized society.

The cooperative aspect of theater presents another challenge. The director, actors, and designers bring the text to life while the playwright creates it. This procedure frequently

necessitates negotiation. "The script is not sovereign; it must coexist with staging and performance choices," Bertolt Brecht reminds us (Brecht 112). Watching others change or reinterpret their lines is aggravating to many writers. Collaboration enhances the drama but also calls into question the playwright's power

Throughout history, several playwrights have been subjected to censorship and limitations as a result of political, religious, or cultural forces. Plays that deal with contentious social topics or criticize power have been censored in both colonial and post-colonial settings. For instance, some of Soyinka's outspoken plays led to his imprisonment in Nigeria during the civil war (Soyinka xii). Playwrights may self-censor, even in more liberal cultures, due to concern about retaliation or transgression. As a result, outside influences frequently limit the ability to express oneself freely. The difficulties of playwriting emphasize the demanding aspect of the art form. The playwright's path is far from simple, with challenges ranging from creative difficulties and structural difficulties to financial constraints, censorship, and the expectations of the audience. However, it is these very obstacles that make playwriting a discipline of resilience and skill. The challenges writers encounter influence both their skill and the enduring capacity of theater to mirror and change society.

PLAYWRITING AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

History has frequently served as a crucial repository of themes, personalities, and events for playwriting. Playwrights utilize historical materials to create symbolic frameworks that allow modern readers to ask questions about the past. As a result, the connection between history and playwriting is dynamic: playwrights take from recorded events but transform them into compelling dramas that reflect contemporary cultural, political, and human issues.

Drama has been inextricably linked to historical events since ancient times. Mythical and historical events that exemplified the principles and conflicts of the Greek polis were often alluded to in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Shakespeare turned English chronicles into dramatic classics like *Richard III* and *Henry V* in early modern England. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, Shakespeare's history plays "not merely the

record of kings but the anxieties and aspirations of a whole culture" (Greenblatt 97). Therefore, history serves as a mirror through which playwrights address issues of identity, morality, and power.

Historical sources, such as oral traditions, archival records, chronicles, and eyewitness accounts, provide both the inspiration and the foundation for dramatic development. In Bentley's words, "history provides the dramatist not with a script to replicate but with a quarry of events from which he may construct a new dramatic edifice" (Bentley 61). According to this, the playwright manipulates history for theatrical effect by shortening timelines, increasing conflicts, or changing viewpoints.

For instance, Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* (1971) uses the 19th-century Yoruba history, notably the Ijaiye war, but it reconfigures the events to highlight the conflict between tradition and modernity. In a similar vein, his *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974) uses history to analyze colonialism and ponder cultural resilience by recreating the fall of the Benin Kingdom during the British imperial conquest (Obafemi 83). These pieces illustrate how history gives the playwright material that is both politically pressing and culturally relevant.

When interacting with history, the playwright acts at the intersection of the roles of an historian and a creative artist. Playwrights value emotional truth and dramatic coherence over factual accuracy, whereas historians value factual accuracy. All historical narratives, according to Hayden White, already include some element of imagination and interpretation (White 82). Playwrights expand on this approach by emphasizing characters, dialogue, and conflict that can represent historical conflicts on stage. For example, Bertolt Brecht's 1941 play *Mother Courage and Her Children* employs the context of the Thirty Years' War to analyze the social and economic repercussions of conflict rather than to accurately replicate history. The play demonstrates how a dramatic lens can refract historical occurrences to elicit critical thought. "Historical plays are never about the past; they are about the present seen through the lens of the past," Brecht himself said (Brecht 102).

In playwriting, the use of historical sources presents ethical and creative difficulties. The playwright has to determine how much accuracy to historical facts is needed and where artistic license can be used. While too much factual information might slow down the dramatic pace, too much simplification runs the risk of misrepresenting the nuances of history. Additionally, when reinterpreting delicate historical events, playwrights run the

risk of being accused of prejudice or revisionism. "The act of dramatizing history is itself a politics of memory, deciding who is remembered and who is forgotten," as Roach puts it (Roach 66)

Historical sources are especially important in African theater during the postcolonial era. History is used by numerous African playwrights to reclaim suppressed narratives and reassert their cultural identity. *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) by Wole Soyinka borrows from colonial accounts of an interrupted Yoruba ceremony, but it reinterprets the incident, placing indigenous cosmology ahead of colonial interpretation (Gibbs 121). In this manner, Soyinka both dramatizes a historical occurrence and challenges colonial epistemologies that attempted to define African customs from an outside perspective. In a similar vein, Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1982) transforms the real Agbekoya peasant uprising of 1968 into a play that discusses current battles against oppression (Olaniyan 99). In these instances, historical materials are turned into real frameworks for social and political interaction rather than just serving as backgrounds.

Plays that are based on historical materials frequently have greater dramatic impact because they link audiences to shared memory. In addition to being entertaining, such plays also serve as acts of cultural remembrance and criticism. Taylor argues that theater becomes a kind of "repertoire" that communicates embodied memory, enabling civilizations to re-experience and re-evaluate their past (Taylor 20). As a result, audiences may engage in the continuous debate about identity, history, and power by seeing historical plays.

Beyond being a literary skill, playwriting is a cultural power that influences society, mirrors history, and challenges the human condition. The act of writing goes beyond individual inventiveness; it places the playwright as both an artist and a social critic. Throughout history, playwriting has served as a medium for community identity, moral education, political criticism, cultural preservation, and amusement. Frequently, plays reflect the communities they are made in dealing with pressing social and political challenges, as seen in Sophocles' *Antigone*, which emphasizes the conflict between individual conviction and state law, and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, which reinterprets Greek tragedy in a Nigerian cultural setting. "Drama is a way of thinking about social experience, not merely a reflection of it," Raymond Williams maintains (Williams 78). Playwrights create stories that both portray and question societal norms by drawing on their cultural, political, and historical contexts.

In addition to serving as a repository of cultural memory, playwriting also has other functions. Plays help maintain languages, traditions, and values, ensuring their transmission across generations. For instance, plays like *I Will Marry When I Want* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and *Ngugi wa Mirii* depict oral traditions, proverbs, and cultural behaviors in African settings, thereby preserving indigenous perspectives in written and performed form. According to Paul Ricoeur, "narrative preserves lived time by transforming it into cultural memory" (Ricoeur 52). As a result, playwriting functions as a cultural archive, protecting communal identities from the erasures brought about by colonization, modernization, and globalization.

Historically, plays have been employed to teach morals and impart knowledge. Christian teachings about virtue and redemption were imparted through medieval morality dramas such as *Everyman*. Hubert Ogunde and other playwrights incorporated moral lessons into their plays in the Yoruba traditional theatre, addressing themes like corruption, community responsibility, and respect for the elderly.

Catron asserts that "plays can teach without preaching; audiences internalize lessons more profoundly through characters' actions and consequences than through direct moralizing" (142). In this way, writing plays becomes an effective educational instrument that is also discreet.

Political criticism and activism have long been linked to playwriting. Numerous African playwrights employed theatre as a means of expressing nationalist goals and opposing oppression during the colonial era. For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo sees playwriting as "a weapon in the struggle for liberation" (*Decolonising the Mind* 44). Likewise, in Europe, Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre prompted spectators to think critically about social and political structures rather than merely absorb entertainment. By means of his plays, Brecht showed that drama could be a revolutionary instrument for promoting political involvement and social awareness (Brecht 95).

By depicting shared stories and collective experiences, playwriting also strengthens communal identity. Community myths, legends, and histories are frequently turned into plays in indigenous traditions, which reinforces cultural heritage. "The writer must recognize his responsibility to his people; his art must serve as both record and compass," Chinua Achebe writes (*Achebe* 9). As a result, writing for the stage becomes a statement of cultural identity and communal togetherness. Despite the fact that playwriting is frequently rooted in particular cultural settings, its themes and structures

are universal. The conflicts of Oedipus, Hamlet, and Odewale transcend cultural barriers, revealing shared human dilemmas of fate, justice, power, and morality. This universality is highlighted by Aristotle's notion of catharsis: plays elicit pity and fear, allowing audiences to confront their own humanity (Aristotle 23).

The continued importance of playwriting is highlighted by its universality. Plays, whether they take place in ancient Greek amphitheaters, Elizabethan theatres, or modern African community centres, transcend time and culture, uniting people through common experiences. The practice of playwriting goes beyond just creating scripts for production. It's a cultural practice that maintains memory, teaches, evaluates, amuses, and brings people together. It both reflects society as it is and illuminates what it might become, making it a mirror and a light. Playwrights continue to use the pen as both authors of stories and guardians of culture, conscience, and community, demonstrating its undeniable cultural and social significance.

2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO QUEEN IDEN

Queen Iden N'Okpokhuo (The Great Woman), a woman of immense beauty, love, and devotion, will always be remembered in the annals of Benin Kingdom for her unselfishness and sacrifice. The first decade of the eighteenth century (1700 AD) saw Queen Iden's reign. It is said that she was from Oka village, which is currently located in Upper Sakponba in Ikpoba Okha Local Government, Benin City, Edo State.

According to *The Benin Monarchy: An Anthropology of Benin History (The Red Book)*, Queen Iden, who was born into a low family, eventually became one of the dearest wives of Oba Ewuakpe, formerly known as Idova was the 27th Oba of Benin. Oba Ewuakpe's rise to power was surrounded by unusual circumstances and leadership challenges. He was young, inexperienced, and not originally destined to become Oba. His father, Akennuzama, declined the throne due to old age and passed the honor to his son, then known as Idova, who was later renamed Ehennegha and crowned as Oba Ewuakpe. Historical accounts portray him as a ruler whose pride, impatience, and harsh temperament alienated his subjects and strained relations with his chiefs. His disregard

for wise counsel and his authoritarian tendencies created deep divisions between the palace and the people.

The crisis of his reign intensified after the death of his mother, Queen Ewebonoza. Overcome by grief, Oba Ewuakpe carried out elaborate funeral rites that included extreme acts of human sacrifice, shocking both his chiefs and subjects. In a fit of anger, he also ordered the execution of several chiefs who attended the burial dressed in white garments, which he saw as disrespectful. This cruel action provoked widespread outrage and led to a rebellion spearheaded by Chief Iyase and other prominent nobles. They withdrew their allegiance and incited the people to reject the Oba's rule, plunging the kingdom into political chaos and disunity.

Isolated and humiliated, Oba Ewuakpe was deserted by nearly everyone in the palace, including his wives and servants. The only person who refused to abandon him was Queen Iden, who stood by him through hardship and disgrace. Despite persuasion from others to leave, she declared that once a woman is married to the Oba, she never returns home. Iden's steadfast devotion became a defining example of loyalty and resilience. She remained by her husband's side, offering him comfort and hope when all others had turned away.

In desperation, the Oba sought refuge in his mother's village, Ikoka, hoping to receive support. However, because of his previous cruelty toward Ikoka's emissaries during his mother's funeral, he was met with rejection and ridicule. Angered and humiliated, he cursed the town, proclaiming that no great man would ever emerge from Ikoka, except for its women, who would prosper in remembrance of his late mother. When he returned to Benin, weary and broken, Queen Iden remained the only loyal companion beside him.

Determined to restore harmony in the kingdom, Queen Iden sold her personal belongings to consult a diviner in Ugbor. The oracle revealed that the only way to reconcile the monarch with his people was through a human sacrifice. Although the Oba resisted, Iden courageously volunteered herself as the sacrificial offering. She believed that through her death, peace, unity, and royal authority would be restored in Benin. Her decision reflected not only boundless love for her husband but also a deep sense of duty to the throne and the kingdom.

The exact details of Iden's death vary in oral accounts. Some traditions claim she was buried alive near the Oba market, while others suggest she was handed over to priests for ritual sacrifice. Regardless of the version, all agree that her selfless act became a turning point in Benin history. Before her death, Iden made one final request, that her grave be respected and protected from desecration, declaring that anyone who stepped upon it should be executed. This decree was upheld for centuries until the British conquest of Benin in 1897.

The impact of Iden's sacrifice was immediate. Symbolic displays arranged by the Oba and the diviner gave the impression that reconciliation between the monarch and his subjects had already taken place. Gradually, the chiefs and people returned to the palace, bringing gifts and pledging renewed loyalty. Chief Esogban was the first to seek forgiveness, followed by Chief Iyase and others, leading to the full restoration of royal authority. The Oba's power was thus reestablished, and the monarchy regained its lost honor and stability.

Profoundly moved by Iden's sacrifice, Oba Ewuakpe introduced major reforms that strengthened the Benin political system. He recognized that absolute power required maturity and experience, and to prevent future crises, he established the principle of primogeniture, making the first son of the reigning Oba the rightful successor to the throne. This system brought political continuity and stability and remains one of the most enduring legacies of his reign.

Queen Iden's sacrifice not only saved the monarchy from collapse but also highlighted the vital role of women in the political and cultural development of pre-colonial Benin. Her story stands as a timeless reminder of courage, devotion, and selflessness in leadership. It also illustrates the belief that the strength of a nation is built upon the moral integrity and sacrifice of its people, especially its women.

Queen Iden is revered for her part in maintaining the monarchy and celebrated as a heroine in Benin history. Iden's tomb, her burial site, is still a location of cultural and historical importance and is situated on Omozi Street next to Oba Market. As a representation of love, some Beninians observe her annually on February 14, this is an unofficial celebration since it is not recognized by the Benin Traditional Council.

CHAPTER 3

QUEEN IDEN: THE LIVING SACRIFICE

ACT ONE: THE BEGINNING.

SCENE ONE.

(The stage is dim. The sound of distant drums slow, like a heartbeat. A faint red glow illuminates the space like the rising of the sun over the red soil of Benin. The air is thick with incense smoke. The Narrator enters slowly, dressed in red. The narrator's eyes are covered with a black cloth. They speak with a deep, powerful animated voice. On the other side of the stage, a man is seen standing close to a pile of sand with a shovel in

hand, head bowed down in silent anguish and sorrow, but he does not make a sound or move as if frozen in time)

(A note to the directors: The Narrator could be two persons speaking simultaneously or at intervals, their voices to give a mystic air to the message which they utter.)

NARRATOR: (Pause. Looks to the heavens.) When the iroko tree shakes without wind...
...a leopard is stirring in the thicket of time. Who dares question the drumbeat of the gods?

The stool of the Oba is carved not by man, but by the unseen hands of destiny. (A soft gong sounds once.) Idova, a new Oba ascends. A name with two sides of a coin, A Crown heavy with the silence of ancestors. His steps echo in the dust of forgotten bones. But beware... For the moon does not rise without dragging the tide. And not all blood spilled feeds the earth in peace. (Turning slowly toward the audience) A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. The land murmurs beneath its breath and when the earth murmurs, kings must listen. The oracle has spoken in broken calabashes. A shadow follows the crown. There will be sacrifice. There will be rage. There will be blood... and blood knows the way home. The gods have asked for what only flesh can give.

(The drums rise slightly in tempo.) In the market of fate, no one haggles with the gods. So listen well... For this tale is not just of a crown but of the weight it bears. Of a name that shall echo through time... Etched in blood and sacrifice. One shall rise... One shall fall... And the gods shall feast in between.

(Lights out)

SCENE TWO.

(In a marketplace, traders are seen conversing with travelers, children chasing themselves about playing gmes. The scene picturesque showing the people and the rich goods indicating a bountiful harvest of the season)

TRAVELLER 1: (hums to himself in appreciation of the scene before him) So, this is Benin.

TRAVELLER 2: (taps his friend from behind) See the way you are looking everywhere like an animal who has come to the market for the first time.

TRAVELLER 1: My friend, I can tell you markets do not look like this where I come from.

TRAVELLER 2: (sarcastically) So what does it look like. See this your amazement now it's small compared to the other parts of Benin that you have not seen. It looks like you are forgetting we came for work.

TRAVELLER 1: I know, but that does not mean I cannot stop to admire Osanobua's work. (Picks a yam up) Have you seen the size of this yam? Or these beautiful women?

TRAVELLER 2: They told me to walk with someone that has sense, but I sad I have one. Who knew I was walking alone. (shakes his head)

TRAVELLER 1: What's that supposed to mean, are you saying I don't have sense.

TRAVELLER 2: Did I call your name?

TRAVELLER 1: You implied it.

TRAVELLER 2: See if you are going to keep admiring Osanobua's creation, no problem. But let me tell you that there's no lazy man in Benin. If you don't work, hunger will be your best friend. I am going.

TRAVELLER 1: Ahh ah na, wait for me.

(The two men walk out)

(One of the traders taps her fellow trader)

MAMA UYI: Iyé Eseosa, Iyé Eseosa.

MAMA ESEOSA: (annoyed) Mama Uyi, what is it?

MAMA UYI: This one that you are squeezing your face like someone that smelled faeces.

MAMA ESEOSA: Mama Uyi, what? I don't like when you call me when I am attending to a customer.

MAMA UYI: Ehhm, okay. It's because I want to tell you something that is going to affect all of us.

MAMA ESEOSA: (looks at her from the side) what is it?

MAMA UYI: (clears her throat and looks side to side) So you have heard that a new Oba will soon be crowned.

MAMA ESEOSA: (uninterested) Ehhn, and so? That's common news.

MAMA UYI: My husband heard from one of the chiefs in the palace that this incoming Oba (looks her side) has a bad name.

MAMA ESEOSA: What concerns his name and him being Oba?

MAMA UYI: His name carries an ill omen, there's a prophecy that when a man named 'Idova' becomes Oba, he could either make or destroy Benin.

MAMA ESEOSA: How is that ill? It's a 50-50 possibility.

MAMA UYI: But who knows?

MAMA ESEOSA: This one that you are saying who knows, it's like you want the worse to happen.

MAMA UYI: Ahh no oo, I am just saying to be prepared.

MAMA ESEOSA: I have heard, thank you. Buy am sure your husband did not tell you so you can be telling it.

MAMA UYI: Wetin that one come mean? Abeg oo. E be like I nor go dey tell you anything again.(hiss and turns in the direction of her stall)

MAMA ESEOSA: Ahh, Mama Uyi, you dey vex? I was merely joking and playing with you.

MAMA UYI: Carry your play go your side.

MAMA ESEOSA: (pushes her playfully) Mama Uyi.

MAMA UYI: Leave me. Let me do and close my husband will soon come home and I have not prepared his food.

MAMA ESEOSA: Okay, let me rush so we can go together.

MAMA UYI: I thought you said I have big mouth.

MAMA ESEOSA: Mama Uyi, someone cannot play with you again. I am sorry. (When she doesn't respond) Nor vex, sorry.

MAMA UYI: I have heard. Are you done?

MAMA ESEOSA: Yes, let's go. (The women exit the stage)

(Lights out)

SCENE THREE

(The stage and air is alight with festivities and merriment, the people of Benin are seen on the sidelines patiently await the arrival of the new Oba.)

(A procession at the palace. The chiefs leads the Procession at the forefront closely followed by Omada and the Oba; his stool bearer is seen within the procession along with other persons of importance. The Oba is adorned fully in coral beaded attire down to his shoes. The Oba takes his seat at the throne and immediately covers his mouth with a white handkerchief, the chiefs take their positions at the sides of the Oba. On one side of the Oba, his wives are seated dressed in white with elaborately made Okuku. The drums beat heavy and intensely with songs of praises being sung. Immediately after the Ugho and Esaikpaide dances, the Oba rises to address his subjects.)

Oba gha to kpere!

Isee!

Omo n'Oba gha to kpere!

Isee!

OBA EWUAKPE: Sons and daughters of Benin. Today, the heavens bear witness, the earth beneath our feet listens and the spirits of our ancestors stand guard at this sacred hour. From the beginning of time, the throne of our fathers has endured, carved not only in

bronze and ivory, but also of courage, wisdom, and the life and blood of our people. Today, that sacred mantle rests upon my shoulders. I, Ewuakpe, son of Akennuzama, shall guard this Kingdom as a Leopard guards its cubs. As the morning sun spreads light over the Land of Benin, so shall my reign spread peace and prosperity. People of Benin, your loyalty shall be my shield, your counsel my compass, your joy my crown. May our kingdom never fall silent and may our bronze heads forever tell the story of a united, unbroken people. Today, a new chapter begins and Benin shall rise in glory. This, I swear.

(A shout from the crowd)

Oba gha to kpere!

Iseee!

(The procession begins to make their way off the stage with the people talking and going in different directions, some following the procession as they leave and others in pairs.)

SCENE FOUR.

(The inner royal chamber in the Oba's palace, early morning. The young Oba Ewuakpe, newly crowned, paces restlessly. Ewebonoza, his mother enters)

EWEBONOZA: (Softly) My son... why does the morning greet you with furrowed brows?

OBA EWUAKPE: (Turns, agitated) Mother, I cannot sleep. The chiefs quarrel like market women. They delay every decision. Must I sit and wait like a boy while the kingdom festers?

EWEBONOZA: (Approaches slowly, calm) A lion does not roar at every rustle in the grass. He waits. Watches. Strikes when it matters.

OBA EWUAKPE: (Frustrated) I am not made for waiting, Iyé. I am Oba not their equal, but their ruler.

EWEBONOZA: You are Oba, yes. But even the Oba is a servant to the ancestors, to the land, to his people. Power wielded in anger is like a blade drawn in haste it cuts where it should protect.

OBA EWUAKPE: (Pauses, breathes heavily) They speak in riddles. They test me. I see it in their eyes they doubt me.

EWEBONOZA: Let them. Doubt is a shadow. It fades when the sun of your wisdom rises. But if you meet it with fire, you will burn not just the shadow but the tree, the fruit, and even the roots.

OBA EWUAKPE: (Lowering his gaze) What would you have me do, Iyé? Sit with silence while they drag their feet?

EWEBONOZA: No. I would have you lead—not with your fury, but with your depth. Listen. Know them. Master the game before you move your piece.

OBA EWUAKPE: You speak as if the ancestors whisper in your ear.

EWEBONOZA: Perhaps they do. Did you not hear what was spoken when you were named? Once, you bore another name—a name that carried ill omens. The diviners saw storms upon your path. They said your destiny would break before it blossomed.

OBA EWUAKPE: (Quietly) Yes... I remember whispers of it.

EWEBONOZA: Because to speak that name was to invite its shadow. So the chiefs, the priests, and I your mother wrapped you in another name ' Ehennega' before you were crowned as Oba Ewuakpe .

OBA EWUAKPE: (Reflects, voice softening) So even my name is a covenant with the ancestors.

EWEBONOZA: It is. And covenant binds stronger than quarrel. (She places a hand on his shoulder) You are not just a man, Ewuakpe. You are the sky under which we all walk. The sky does not rage all day. Sometimes, it must simply shine.

(The Oba lowers himself onto the stool, deep in thought, with his mother beside him. Lights out.)

SCENE FIVE.

(The stage is dimly lit, the narrator emerges from the audience, making an ascent to the stage in slow, calculated steps.)

NARRATOR: Hear, O people, the wail that rises from Uselu... The Iyoba, Ewebonoza, has gone to the land of the ancestors. Seven days and seven nights, the city clothed itself in mourning. Drums fell silent, voices broke in grief, and the palace shadows stretched long with sorrow. But in the season of loss came also the season of error. For Oba Ewuakpe, blinded by grief and deaf to the wisdom of ancient customs, forgot the sacred ways of the palace. He stirred anger where he should have poured libation, he shed blood where he should have sought counsel. The people rose in fury. And the court, once firm as brass, trembled like clay. The earth of Benin groaned, for blood flowed in the courtyards, and the throne of the Oba stood on the edge of ruin. Thus it was, the death of Iyoba Ewebonoza cast the kingdom into mourning, but the ignorance of Oba Ewuakpe in the ways of his fathers brought the great city close to its downfall."

(As the narrator exits, an entourage of chiefs are seen approaching dressed in white, with the Oba already seated)

(The Chiefs in unison)

Oba gha to kpere !

Isee!

CHIEF 1: Great Oba, do not let sorrow consume your throne. Death does not silence the wise; their words live in the mouths of the living. The lyoba, your mother, still speaks in memory, in counsel, and in the strength she left within you.

CHIEF 2: We come in white, the color of purity, to honor her passage, that she may find peace among the eternal ones.

OBA EWUAKPE: (in anger) White? You dare to clothe yourselves in white while my heart bleeds in black?

[The chiefs look at one another, confused but silent.]

OBA EWUAKPE: Do you mock me in my grief? Do you mock the Oba of Benin? While my mother lies in darkness, you shine yourselves in brightness?

CHIEF 3: No, Oba, no, we meant no insult. White, it is the cloth of cleansing, the cloth of farewell!

OBA EWUAKPE: Silence! Your cloth blinds my sorrow. Your presence mocks my pain. If my grief must be avenged, let your blood water the earth!

(With a violent gesture, he commands the guards to strike. The first chief collapse, some attempting to escape but are caught. Only one chief remains, trembling, crawling backward. The Oba steps down from his throne, eyes blazing.)

OBA EWUAKPE: (coldly) You will not die as they have. One leg shall carry the weight of this story, so that all may know the wrath of an Oba dishonored.

[He signals. A guard seizes the last chief. With a brutal stroke, one leg is cut. The chief screams, clutching the ground.]

OBA EWUAKPE : Go! Crawl if you must. Tell them, let Benin know what it means to offend their Oba in his mourning!

[The maimed chief is dragged away, leaving a trail of blood. The Oba breathing heavily exits the stage.]

(Lights out)

ACT TWO: PRIDE AND FALL.

SCENE ONE.

(The chamber is dimly lit. Oba Ewuakpe is seated deep in thought. Queen Iden enters gracefully)

QUEEN IDEN: (bows lowly) Oba gha to kpere! Isee! Long live my husband, the leopard who guards Benin, the thunder that shakes the earth, the pillar that holds the kingdom, the lion whose roar scatters enemies and the tree whose shade covers the people. As long as you live, the throne of Benin will not fall.

OBA EWUAKPE : Rise, Iden. My ears are tired of greetings. My heart is heavy, my mother is gone and the kingdom does not share my grief. What comfort can you bring?

QUEEN IDEN: (softly, stepping closer)My lord, I bring no comfort greater than truth. I see your sorrow, but I also see your anger. The chiefs who came in white meant no harm, yet their blood now stains the palace stones. The people whisper, they tremble. They are not happy, my husband.

OBA EWUAKPE: (defensively) They mocked me! They came shining in white when I was clothed in darkness. They should have shared my mourning, not blinded me with their garments. Would you have me swallow insult in my own palace?

QUEEN IDEN: (kneeling slightly, voice gentle but firm) No, My Lord. But anger is a fire if left untamed, it burns the house it was meant to protect. The chiefs' blood has not eased your grief, it has deepened the people's fear. A king does not rule by fear alone. He rules by the strength of his people's hearts.

OBA EWUAKPE: And what would you have me do, Iden? My throne shakes, my enemies smile at my misstep and my mother's death has left me blind with pain.

QUEEN IDEN: My Lord, make preparations to your mother's shrine at Ikoka. But do not go in anger. Go in humility, go to seek her blessing and to show the people that their Oba walks in the ways of his ancestors. Let this journey be the mending of what has been broken.

OBA EWUAKPE: (thoughtfully) You speak with wisdom, Iden. My heart rages, yet your words cool its fire. Perhaps in Ikoka, my mother's spirit will guide me where anger has led me astray.

QUEEN IDEN: Yes, my lord. May Osanobua lead your steps, may the ancestors guard your path, and may the lyoba's spirit strengthen your throne. May you go in peace and return with the people's favour restored.

OBA EWUAKPE: Iden, you are more than my queen you are the voice of wisdom in my storm. I see now that my mother did not leave me alone, with you by my side perhaps I shall yet hold this kingdom firm. I will heed your counsel. I shall go to Ikoka with humility and seek the favour of my mother's spirit and the forgiveness of my people.

QUEEN IDEN : My husband, my King, may your journey be blessed. I shall await your safe return and when you come back, may you return with peace in your heart and strength in your crown.

(They hold a brief moment of silence. Lights out)

SCENE TWO.

(Lights come on stage with the Iyase flanked by Esogban and Uwangue, with other chiefs seated in a semi-circle.)

IYASE : Enough is enough! The Oba has shown himself unworthy. Quick to anger, blind to reason and deaf to counsel. Shall we, the pillars of the kingdom continue to bow before a throne that has no regards for the people?

ESOGBAN :No, Iyase. The Oba has wounded his own house. He killed the chiefs who came in peace. He brought blood where there should have been condolence. A king who slaughters his advisers slaughters the voice of wisdom itself.

UWANGUE : (with bitterness) The kingdom has no life under his rule. If the head is rotten, can the body remain strong?

IYASE : Then, from this day, we renounce him. No homage shall we pay, no tribute shall we render. Let the palace sit in silence. We shall call the people, and they shall see that we are their true protectors.

ESOGBAN : (nodding) Yes, let the people know that the crown no longer binds us. The Oba has ruled without wisdom, and a ruler without wisdom rules without subjects.

UWANGUE: (firmly) Then let it be agreed. Never again shall we bow to his authority. From this night forth, the Oba stands alone.

IYASE : So be it. Let us go forth and rouse the people. Benin shall rise again but not under him.

(The chiefs rise together. Without further word, they turn and exit the stage in different directions)

SCENE THREE.

(The Narrator enters and walks downstage, facing the audience. The Oba seen arriving at the village of Ikoka and at his side walks the Omada, carrying sacred objects and things needed for the visit to the shrine wrapped in white cloth. Their steps are weary from the long journey. To the side of the stage a shrine is set already. The villagers of Ikoka are at the sidelines as the Oba and his Omada approaches, the villagers watching without reverence or welcome.)

NARRATOR: The Oba, in mourning for his mother, Iyoba Ewebonoza, journeys to Ikoka to perform the rites of sacrifice at her shrine. But the people of Ikoka are not welcoming. Their eyes burn with scorn, their hearts heavy with anger. Whispers of mockery curl upon their lips, and their silent gossip cuts sharper than a blade. They offer no food, no water, no word of comfort. Only disdain greets the Oba, a cold silence that wounds more than open insult.

[At the shrine the sacrifices are laid down by the Omada]

OBA EWUAKPE: Iye, mother of my birth and mother of this kingdom, hear your son. I come in grief, I come in pain and I come with sacrifice. Accept these offerings and intercede for me before Osanobua and our ancestors. Let your spirit strengthen me and let the throne of Benin stand firm once more and let the people see their Oba with favour again.

(The sacrifice is performed but the villagers remain unmoved, watching coldly.)

NARRATOR: The rites are done. Yet the people of Ikoka give no hospitality. No cup of water is lifted, no morsel of yam or palm wine is offered. On the long road back to Benin, the Omada staggers under the weight of the journey. Days pass. Hunger gnaws at his body, thirst cracks his lips, yet he presses on, loyal to his king. At last, his strength fails. He collapses upon the path, his life consumed by hunger and exhaustion, his body left as a silent witness to the people's cruelty. The Oba in anger and grief of his loyal servant decrees a curse on the people of Ikoka.

(The Oba halts in fury, lifting his staff of office.)

OBA EWUAKPE: People of Ikoka! You have mocked your king. You have let my faithful servant die of hunger on your land. You denied your Oba the honour of welcome. For this, hear my words and let the earth, the sky, and the ancestors bear witness!

From this day, no man of Ikoka shall rise to greatness. Let them labour, but let their works turn to dust. Let their dreams fall as dry leaves before the storm. Among you, no son shall prosper, no man shall wear honour.

(He lowers his staff slightly, voice heavy)

But the women I spare. For through women lives my mother, the Iyoba. Through them, dignity shall yet remain. The curse is upon the men, but the women shall walk free of it.

(He hurls his staff of office deep into the forest. Thunder rumbles faintly in the distance. With one final look at his Omada, he continues the journey towards Benin.)

NARRATOR: Thus Oba Ewuakpe sealed the fate of Ikoka for generations yet unborn. His curse fell like iron, sparing the women but binding the men for generations. And with the throwing of his staff, the judgment of a king became the burden of a people.

(Lights out)

SCENE FOUR.

(Lights come on slowly on stage. The stage is empty except for the Oba's throne at center.

Suddenly, the Iyase enters with his guards and other chiefs. They march in with force, their footsteps echoing.)

IYASE: Clear this palace! None shall remain in service to an Oba who has lost the people's favour!

(The guards move to the sides. Slowly, the Oba's wives and children enter , some weeping, some clinging to one another. A few loyal attendants follow behind them, fearful and uncertain.)

IYASE : Go, all of you. You are free. The palace no longer binds you, for your Oba has forsaken wisdom. His anger blinds him, his actions shame the throne. Every deed has its consequence and today, the palace itself shall be emptied

(The wives, children and attendants starts leaving. Only one figure remains Queen Iden, standing tall at the center.)

IYASE : Queen Iden, why do you still remain? The gates are open. Your husband's folly has scattered his people. Do not bind yourself to his ruin.

QUEEN IDEN: (calm but resolute) Iyase, great chief of the kingdom, I am the wife of the Oba. The palace is my home, his throne my duty. If all leave, I shall remain. For when the storm passes, the Oba must find at least one candle still burning in his house.

IYASE : Iden! You are dutiful, but your eyes are blinded by love. This king has brought ruin upon himself. He acts without thought, strikes without counsel, and wears his anger like a crown. He is unworthy of the stool he sits upon. Mark my words no kingdom can stand when its ruler does not govern his own spirit.

QUEEN IDEN: (firmly, raising her chin) And yet, he is still my husband. He is still my Oba. Even if the world abandons him, I will not. Let his name be cursed by men, let his throne be shaken, but here in this palace, I will remain. When he returns, he will not find it in ashes.

(The Iyase looks at her long and hard, then signals to his guards.)

IYASE: (coldly) So be it. Remain if you must. But know this a house that shelters fire will one day burn with it.

(He turns sharply and storms out with his guards and chiefs. The sound of their departure fades, leaving silence in the vast palace hall. Queen Iden remains alone, still and steadfast. Lights out.)

SCENE FIVE.

(The throne room stands silent and desolate. The throne remains at the center, untouched, a symbol of abandoned power. Oba Ewuakpe enters slowly, his steps are

heavy, his shoulders hunched with grief and exhaustion. He pauses at the entrance, gazing at the emptiness.)

OBA EWUAKPE: (in a low, pained voice) So this is what remains... The palace of my fathers, stripped of its voice. No wives, no children, no loyal chiefs only silence.

(He looks around slowly, eyes filled with sorrow.) Is this the fate of a king? To return in weariness and find his house emptied like a calabash drained of water?

(Queen Iden enters quietly from the inner chamber.)

QUEEN IDEN: (warmly) My husband, my King. Welcome home. Though the palace is bare, it is not empty for I remain.

OBA EWUAKPE: (looks at her, voice breaking) Iden... faithful Iden. You alone remain, when all others fled. My throne is broken, my people despise me, my strength is gone. Tell me, what is left for a king who returns to ashes?

QUEEN IDEN: My Lord, do not let sorrow consume your spirit. The throne of Benin is not stone and wood, it is you. A river may dry in season, but it flows again when the rains return. So too shall your reign find its strength again. The people are angry, yes. They whisper against you, yes. But time heals anger as the harmattan gives way to the rains. If you stand with patience, if you walk with wisdom, their hearts will soften.

OBA EWUAKPE : You speak as one wiser than the chiefs who deserted me. Still, I fear I have lost too much...

QUEEN IDEN: You have not lost me. And while I breathe, you will not lose the palace.

One day, your name shall be spoken again with honour. Until then, I will stand with you, I will keep your house, and I will believe for us both.

(Oba Ewuakpe looks at her long and deeply, then straightens his back, taking in her words. Slowly, he walks with her toward the throne. They stop before it.)

OBA EWUAKPE: Iden, my candle in this darkness... I will endure. If only one voice believes in me, let it be yours. And with it, all will be restored.

(They both exit the throne room into the inner chambers. Lights out)

(Lights come on stage with Oba Ewuakpe seated on a low stool with Queen Iden beside him, she is seated with a tied bundle of cloth)

OBA EWUAKPE: (sighing deeply) Iden... look around us. The palace, once filled with voices and loyal hands, now echoes like an empty gourd. No chiefs come to greet me, no wives prepare my meals, no guards keep watch. Have I truly become a king without a kingdom?

QUEEN IDEN : My husband, do not let your heart be broken. True, the palace is deserted and the world outside mocks our silence. But you are still Oba even if all the people forget, I will not.

OBA EWUAKPE : What is an Oba who cannot feed his house? What is a throne when hunger creeps into its chambers? My spirit is heavy, Iden. I fear that even the ancestors turn their faces from me.

QUEEN IDEN: No, my husband. Osanobua does not abandon his own, nor do the ancestors forget their child. Struggles are but for a season. The palm tree bends in the storm, yet it does not break. You too, shall rise again. But until that day comes, we must live. I will go to the market. I will sell my wrappers, my beads, and all of value that I own. With it, we shall buy food and what is needed. We will not starve, not while I still have hands to work and cloth to give.

OBA EWUAKPE : Iden... you, the queen of Benin, wife of the Oba, to sell your wrappers in the market? Shall the people not laugh? Will it not bring greater shame upon my head?

QUEEN IDEN: Let them laugh if they must. A queen's honour is not in the cloth she wears but in the duty she keeps. If I must trade wrappers for yam, beads for oil, then so be it. My pride is not in wealth, but in standing with you.

OBA EWUAKPE : Iden, I don't deserve you... When the world forsakes me, you remained. O Iden

QUEEN IDEN: And I shall remain, till my last breath. This is but a shadow, my husband. The sun will rise again upon your reign, and the people will remember you not for this hunger, but for how you endured.

OBA EWUAKPE: Then let it be so. Go, Iden. If the world sees you in the market, let them see not shame, but the strength of a queen who carries her Oba through the storm.

QUEEN IDEN: (bows) So it shall be. My husband, take heart. All will be well in its time.

(She makes her exit to the market)

ACT THREE: THE SACRIFICE.

SCENE ONE.

(The stage is dimly lit. A single spotlight follows the Narrator, who walks slowly to the stage and faces the audience. The palace in the background is shadowed and silent)

NARRATOR: The Oba's Palace, once a house of splendour and power... now silent and forsaken. Not only the chiefs and wives had departed even the kingdom itself lay abandoned. The markets stood empty and the farms grew wild with weeds, unattended.

The throne was deserted and the people scattered. It seemed as though the very heart of Benin had stopped beating. Yet, in that dark time, there was one voice of loyalty, Iden. She looked and said: "This is no ordinary sorrow. A kingdom does not forsake itself without reason. The spirits must be consulted, for only the Oracle can reveal the truth." With courage in her heart, she resolved to seek the voice of the gods. Better to face the burden of truth, she said, than to stumble in darkness. And so, she prepared to carry the weight of a kingdom upon her shoulders, to go and bring an Oracle and ask why Benin had fallen silent.

And the palace... it remained as it was: a hollow shell, waiting, echoing only with the silence of a people who had turned away.

(Lights fade out on the narrator)

SCENE TWO.

(Dark red light floods the stage, the throne room comes in view. Oba Ewuakpe is already seated . Queen Iden comes in with the Oracle clothed in white with his staff of divination in his hand, slowly he moves towards the throne)

ORACLE: Oba of Benin... I was summoned, but the spirits told me long before. The kingdom is wounded, and a wounded land bleeds silence.

OBA EWUAKPE: Tell me, why have the people abandoned their king and their kingdom?

The palace is silent, the markets are empty, the people have turned their backs on their king. Tell me, what is the cause of this misfortune? Why has the kingdom become desolate? Have the ancestors turned away from me?

ORACLE: When a tree is struck by lightning, the birds take flight. When the earth drinks blood unjustly, it remembers. The anger of the king planted fear, and fear has driven the people from their homes. The land demands balance, and the gods cry out for atonement.

QUEEN IDEN: Then what must be done? What sacrifice will bring back the people? What ritual will restore Benin?

ORACLE: The land cannot be healed with gold, nor with beads, nor with the fat of goats. They demand what is broken, cast aside, forgotten. Go to the marketplace and gather these: The broken calabash, the cast-off head pads of the traders, the palm leaves trampled underfoot, and the refuse no hand claims. From what is rejected, cleansing shall begin. But more is needed, this alone will not cleanse the land. The earth thirsts for blood.

Not the blood of goats, not the blood of cattle, but the blood of one who walks upright, who breathes, who knows. A life, given freely, must be laid in the marketplace before the new moon wanes. If the time passes, the wound will rot beyond healing, and Benin shall never rise again.

QUEEN IDEN : A human sacrifice... and the refuse of the market. So this is the will of the gods?

ORACLE : (nods solemnly) The gods do not speak in vain. The path is set, though the feet that must walk it are yet unknown. Choose swiftly, for delay is death.

(Without another word the Oracle leaves. Oba Ewuakpe and Queen Iden make their way off the stage to get the items needed for the sacrifice)

SCENE THREE.

(The palace is dim, lit only by a single oil lamp. A pile of gathered items rests at the side broken calabashes, cast-off head pads, palm leaves, and other refuse of the marketplace. OBA Ewuakpe and Queen Iden stand close to the pile)

OBA EWUAKPE : (pacing) We have gathered all that was commanded the broken calabash, the cast-off head pads, the palm leaves... Yet one thing is missing. A human. And the night runs swiftly toward its end. By midnight, if it is not done, all shall be lost!

QUEEN IDEN : (holds on to him, to steady him) My husband. The people have fled. The palace is empty, the markets deserted. No man or woman remains to offer their life.

There is no one left but us. The Oracle has spoken and time will not wait. If a life must be given, then let it be mine. Better that I fall, than that a kingdom is buried forever.

OBA EWUAKPE: (turns sharply) No! Do not say it, Iden. You are my heart and strength... How can I bury you in the marketplace like refuse? There must be another way. The gods will not demand this of us. I cannot lose you! I would let the throne crumble than to place you in the ground.

QUEEN IDEN: (moves closer and holds his hands): Listen, my husband. This is not the end but the path to life for Benin. If the gods demand blood, let mine flow. If a body must rest beneath the market, let it be mine. For from my grave, the people shall return, and your throne shall stand once more.

OBA EWUAKPE: (sinking to his knees before her) Iden... must it be so? Must you give yourself to save me, to save us all?

QUEEN IDEN: (lifts his face) Yes. There is no other. But hear my last request. If I am to lie in the market, let my grave be guarded with honour. Let none defile it with insult or careless steps. Swear to me, anyone who treads upon my resting place shall pay with their life.

OBA EWUAKPE: (grasps her hands) I swear it, Iden. By Osanobua, by the spirits of our fathers, your grave shall be sacred. None shall touch or step foot on it without meeting death.

QUEEN IDEN : Then let it be so. Let my life be the seed, that Benin may bloom again.

(Oba Ewuakpe clings to Queen Iden hugging her tightly, as the lights dim slowly to black.)

SCENE FOUR.

(At left of the stage stands a pile of sand, faintly lit by a narrow beam. Oba Ewuakpe is there, clutching a shovel. His face is shadowed with anguish. A cry of raw sorrow bursts from his lips, a sound torn from the depths of grief. Dropping the shovel, he stumbles forward, falls to his knees and seizes a handful of sand, clutching it to his chest as tears fall silently. As he remains bowed, the Narrator enters slowly from stage right, stepping into a separate pool of light.)

NARRATOR: The deed is done. The sacrifice is complete. In this sand lies more than earth. It holds the blood of love, the weight of duty, the price of a kingdom. Queen Iden, jewel of Benin, Wife of Oba Ewuakpe, gave what no treasure could buy. She offered her life, not in weakness, but in strength, that her people might return, that her husband's throne might stand, that Benin might live again. She loved to a fault, Loved beyond herself, loved enough to be buried where the market stands. Her grave guarded by the vow of

kings. Iden's name shall not be forgotten. Her sacrifice is the pillar upon which Benin rose anew. Her spirit lingers still, not in sorrow, but in triumph.

(The Narrator lowers their head, stepping slowly backward into the shadows. Oba Ewuakpe, still kneeling, lets the sand slip through his fingers in silence. The light fades, leaving only the small mound of sand visible for a moment then total darkness)

SCENE FIVE.

(The stage is quiet. The palace steps are dimly lit. From stage right, Oba Ewuakpe enters slowly, a shovel in hand. His cloth is stained with dust . He walks to the steps of the palace, lowers himself heavily and sits. His eyes are hollow, gazing blankly into the void. For a moment silence reigns. He clutches the shovel across his knees like a broken staff.

Suddenly, faint voices are heard offstage murmurs rising, footsteps approaching from every direction. The sound grows louder. From stage left, stage right, and upstage, as the people of Benin begin to enter. Men, women, and children, dressed in simple cloth, stream toward the palace. Some carry yams, bundles of firewood, baskets of cassava and palm nuts. Others bear wrappers, beads, or folded cloths. Their faces are humbled, their steps hesitant but hopeful. They gather before the palace in great numbers, bowing low as they approach the Oba.)

IYASE: (stepping forward, bows deeply) Oba gha to kpere! (Long may the Oba live!)

Isee! Forgive us, great king. In fear, we fled and in our weakness, we left you. But now, we return with open hands and loyal hearts.

UWANGUE: (holding out a basket of produce) We bring what we have the fruit of our farms,

The work of our hands. Not for tribute, but for healing. Accept us once more as your children.

OBA EWUAKPE: (lifts his head slowly) You left me in silence. You left me in shadows. In my darkest hour, when sorrow pressed upon me, there was no hand to lift me, no voice to comfort me. Even the palace was emptied, and the throne of my fathers stood deserted.

But one heart remained... Iden, my queen, my strength. She gave herself where all others fled. Her blood bought back the love of a people, her grave in the marketplace stands as witness that the throne of Benin is not built on power alone, but on sacrifice. And so I say to you though you turned away, though your feet carried you from your king, my arms are open. For I forgive you as the gods have forgiven me. Let the past be buried with the sand of grief, and let us rise together to rebuild what was broken.

(The people lift their heads, murmurs of joy rising as they begin to kneel and stretch their gifts before the Oba.)

The people chant together:

Oba gha to kpere!

Isee!

(Oba Ewuakpe rises slowly to his feet, drops the shovel on the palace steps. The narrator downstage appears)

NARRATOR : And thus, through sorrow came rebirth. Through the sacrifice of one, the kingdom was restored. Queen Iden's name lives forever, for her love was the seed of Benin's renewal.

(The people continue their chant, circling around the Oba in joy. The drums rise louder, filling the air with life. The lights slowly fade, leaving only the Oba standing tall at the palace steps surrounded by his people.)

THE END.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 SUMMARY.

This study examines historical sources as subject matter for playwriting: The example of Queen Iden. In chapter one, the research introduced history as a vital tool for preserving culture and identity, highlighting the story of Queen Iden as a narrative of love, courage and sacrifice for the Benin Kingdom. It establish the problem of cultural erosion among

the younger generation, the objectives of preserving history through drama, and the significance of using playwriting to document and transmit Benin's heritage.

Chapter two examines playwriting as both an academic and creative field, defining it as the craft of writing scripts intended for performance. It traced the historical development of playwriting from ritual and classical traditions to contemporary forms, highlighting its literary, performative and cultural dimensions. The chapter also discusses the role of the playwright as artist, critic and cultural historian, highlighting the skills and responsibilities involved in the craft and the process of transforming ideas into scripted works.

In Chapter Three, the play *Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice* is presented as the creative output of the research. Structured in acts and scenes, the script dramatized the troubled reign of Oba Ewuakpe, highlighting themes of pride, leadership crisis, betrayal by his chiefs and the ensuing rebellion that threatened the stability of the Benin Kingdom. Central to the play is Queen Iden, portrayed as a voice of wisdom and loyalty whose ultimate sacrifice restored harmony. Through this narrative, the chapter illustrated how historical material can be reimagined in dramatic form to preserve culture and identity.

4.2 CONCLUSION.

The study has demonstrated that history, when used as subject matter for playwriting, is not a passive record of the past but a living resource that can be reshaped into meaningful dramatic plays. In the case of *Queen Iden: The Living Sacrifice*, historical events surrounding the reign of Oba Ewuakpe were transformed into a dramatic narrative that illuminated themes of leadership, sacrifice, loyalty, and cultural survival. Through dramatization, the play not only preserved the memory of Queen Iden's heroism but also reimagined it for contemporary audiences as a lesson on resilience and the costs of nationhood.

This research contributes to the discourse on theatre and cultural preservation by demonstrating how playwriting can serve as both artistic practice and cultural historiography. The playwright does not merely retell history but interprets, reconstructs and amplifies it to resonate with present realities. Thus, playwriting emerges as a powerful tool for transmitting heritage, challenging cultural erosion and reinforcing identity.

Theatre, therefore, stands as a dynamic site where memory and creativity intersect. While history provides the foundation, it is through the playwright's vision that the past is made present and relevant. By engaging with stories such as Queen Iden's, playwriting ensures that cultural memory endures, not as static record, but as living performance continually renewed for each generation.

3. 3 RECOMMENDATIONS.

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made by the researcher;

1. Creative writing and theatre programs should integrate history into their study courses, encouraging students to transform cultural memory into performance.
2. Playwrights should dramatize indigenous histories and legends, as this helps preserve traditions while making them engaging for modern audiences.
3. Historians and playwrights should collaborate more closely so that plays remain faithful to historical facts while also achieving dramatic depth.
4. Community theatre groups should use historical plays as tools for cultural education, bringing history to life for schools, festivals, and local audiences.
5. Works like Queen Iden should be documented, published, and preserved in cultural archives to ensure they remain accessible to future generations.
6. Government and cultural bodies should provide support and funding for theatre projects that highlight history as a way of safeguarding national heritage.
7. Researchers and playwrights should explore other historical figures and events across Nigeria and Africa, expanding the scope of indigenous historical drama.

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