



## Objective Correlative as Aesthetics in Indigenous Rites

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### Abstract

The transition of the dead to the world of the ancestors in indigenous societies goes beyond the burial and physical disintegration of the individual. The rites attendant on the absence of the deceased in the Ugbo/Benin milieu culminate in the final journey to the world of the ancestors. This can be termed apotheosis which may be considered the general recognition that the deceased can be considered an ancestor and could sit among other ancestors. While using aesthetics as a springboard, the paper establishes the fact that indigenous ritual performances may amount to what Eliot T. S. terms “the objective correlative”, and other new generations of aestheticians such as James Shelley call “sensible pleasures, rational pleasures”, and Wonderly terms “transcendent desires.” The signs and symbolic gestures attendant on the rite of passage that are potent means of establishing belief and amplifying a picturesque presentation of what may seem abstract are instrumental in upholding transition rituals in indigenous societies. The rites of passage further amplify the belief of indigenous people that necessary rite must attend the demise of every person upon the yield to the power of death and the negation of which could bring fatal consequences on the offspring of the individual.

**Keywords:** *Aesthetics, Folklore, Ritual, Transition, Performance*



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### Abstract

The transition of the dead to the world of the ancestors in indigenous societies goes beyond the burial and physical disintegration of the individual. The rites attendant on the absence of the deceased in the Ugbo/Benin milieu culminate in the final journey to the world of the ancestors. This can be termed apotheosis which may be considered the general recognition that the deceased can be considered an ancestor and could sit among other ancestors. While using aesthetics as a springboard, the paper establishes the fact that indigenous ritual performances may amount to what Eliot T. S. terms “the objective correlative”, and other new generations of aestheticians such as James Shelley call “sensible pleasures, rational pleasures”, and Wonderly terms “transcendent desires.” The signs and symbolic gestures attendant on the rite of passage that are potent means of establishing belief and amplifying a picturesque presentation of what may seem abstract are instrumental in upholding transition rituals in indigenous societies. The rites of passage further amplify the belief of indigenous people that necessary rite must attend the demise of every person upon the yield to the power of death and the negation of which could bring fatal consequences on the offspring of the individual.

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### Introduction

Three rites of passage constitute the foci of this paper. They confirm what Eliot T. S. (1965) considers to be a means of matching the ideal with the reality. According to him, “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative;’ in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that

when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked (through) ...the accumulation of imagined sensory impressions...” (134-135). The first rite of apotheosis was held for the wife of a High Chief named Madam Dedun Olamiti-Jawosinmi. The second was the final rite of passage for her daughter Madam Comfort Legben Omomunmi and the third was held in memory of Omomunmi Joshua. The first two rites were held the same day in June 2020 at Seja and Gboroye respectively in Ondo State, Nigeria amid the Covid19 pandemic which restricted the ceremony to a pocket of individuals in strict observance of the social distancing regulations and the third rite was held the following month at Ebute.

The rites established the belief of indigenous people in the potency of rituals as a means of ushering the dead into the world of the ancestors. Perhaps a word may be said about the need for a final ritual after the death of the individual. It is the belief of the folks that the dead may not be admitted into the realm of the ancestors until the necessary rite is performed. The belief stipulates that such dead members remain on their knees all through the period until the ceremony is performed. The belief goes further to claim that such individuals may not wine and dine with other ancestors until the performance which establishes their qualification to sit among other ancestors. Only then can prayers be made in their names and efficacy could be conferred on such quests.

What may not be clear to members of the audience, especially those who might be attending the ceremony for the first time and probably belong to other cultures are diverse: what could be the significance of the rite and the attendant dance? What would be the purpose of the dance to the transition of the deceased? Are the two hundred and one songs and drumbeats a form of communication to the deceased or the world beyond? What might be the meanings of the signs to the audience and the import to the rite? These questions establish the peculiarity of tradition as a significant aspect of folklore.

Robert Jerome Smith (1975) observes that imputed to indigenous performances “purpose and meaning cannot be observed with any degree of objectivity” (69). This may not be far from the truth but beneath the seeming meaninglessness is the tradition of the people that is instrumental in the social behaviours of the folks over the years: “festival behaviour is, of course,

meaningful, and it acquires its meaning in the same way as any other normative behaviour, through repetition in a certain context, that is, through repetition” (Robert Jerome Smith, 1975: 69). What may be needed to internalise the performance of the rite is regularity at the festive arena. In other words, a single attendance during the ceremony may not be enough to confer semanticity on any member of the audience. What Robert Jerome Smith (1975) may have missed is the need to engender reality through the performance, especially “this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*” (Eliot, T. S, 1965: 135).

Equally tied to the significance of the environment and meaningful communication is the place of shared codes, indigenous beliefs and practices and linguistic intonation in every performance. The poetic nature of the renditions is, first and foremost, rhythmical which establishes the nature of performance in the milieu to be tied to parallelism. Ayo Bamgbose (1969) provides a working definition of parallelism. According to him, parallelism is “a juxtaposition of sentences having a similar structure, a matching of at least two lexical items in each structure, a comparison between the juxtaposed sentences, and a central idea expressed through complementary statements in the sentences” (12).

Bamgbose’s (1969) effort is a presentation of the characteristics of parallelism and may not amount to a true definition. Parallelism is, therefore, a creative device, in indigenous art, where structures are repeated laced with efficacy in order to achieve symbolic communication with both spiritual and physical audience. It is believed that the right words and their proper arrangements have the power of conferring potency on a rendition. Olatunde O. Olatunji (2005) observes that critics such as Lowth (1779); Gonda (1959); Jacobson (1966) and Bamgbose (1968) have identified the prevalence of parallelism in oral poetry and performances in indigenous scripts in his seminal publication on indigenous art. (25-26). According to him, parallelism is “rather, a general feature of Yoruba poetry. It is both formal and semantic in nature and needs to be considered at both levels before its poetic function can be fully appreciated (26).

Imputed to indigenous rituals of transition in the Ugbo/Benin environment, one may not be wrong to propose Ugbo folks and style of performance. The study takes a cue from Aaron Meskin (2006). According to him, the styles in the identified environments “play identificatory, interpretive, evaluative and explanatory roles in our artistic practices” (489). A chat with the active practitioner, named Aniyi Doko, whose drumming and singing were meant to invite the deceased to the arena and the consequent decoration or conferment of the title of ancestor, revealed that the performance may be equivalent “to the symbolic functioning of the work...” (Aaron Meskin, 490). The ensemble involved in the performance of the final rite of apotheosis comprises Aniyi Doko, who serves as the leader of the group named *Egbe Omoja Olowo Ajameta Nu'Rerele*. He dictates the pace and determines the tempo of the performance. Daisi Isowa serves as the assistant to the leader of the band. Others include: Orimisan Doko, Tope Oleyoku, Yomi Lemadoro, Olofin Falona, Oye Awodunmila, and Albert Adeyemi.

### Concepts and Definition

Folklore may not be easily defined. The difficulty arises from the question of association or identity. The fact of the association of folk literature with the preliterate forecloses the possibility of its being misconstrued. The inability to give it the deserved identity within art equally ties its fate with culture. What with the prejudice that the civilised harbour for the unlettered and barbaric, every invention from the latter is easily consigned into the dungeon of irrelevance. Otherwise, the creative activities of indigenous folks are artistic deliveries that should be celebrated. Festivals sum up the desire of the folks to celebrate anniversaries amid the need to recall landmarks and entertain one another from the drudgery of planting, harvest and monotony.

Folktales and proverbs exemplify the imaginative capacity of the folks from which creativity among modern scholars detached its umbilical cord. The denunciation, therefore, may not be more than the eyes denying their socket. The first premise arises from the blindness of modern creative artists to their primal origin. Folk literature is consequently the root of whatever scholarship may be made up of. It is equally the foundation of written literature where copious borrowings may not be denied. Dwelling on the definition of Joseph Rysan (1952), therefore, “folklore can be defined as the collective

objectifications of basic emotions, such as awe, fear, hatred, reverence, and desire, on the part of the social group” (18). The subject matter of some of the folktales may have been drawn from “the social group” but authorship may not be ascribed to the folks generally.

These visible flaws and dislocation confront the critic. The association of creativity in folklore with a “social group” opens Joseph Rysan’s (1952) definition to debate. Tales might be communal in nature, as a result of the popularity within the group or the possibility of their being inspired through the group; it is definitely a product of an individual creative endeavour rather than the group collectively. At what point can a group converge on the arena to consciously create a folk item? Is it likely that every member of the group has creative energy to dictate the form and content of a folk song? The authors of the folk items might not be mentioned, but their presence cannot be precluded.

The conscious construction of the gulf between the two worlds finding expression in the indigenous folks and the literate modern counterparts may be excused. The era of cultural absolutism may have conferred the pride of superiority on the western world and its culture as the culture of the relatively unknown folks in the rural settings might be dismissed as unconscious fumbling with art. Folklore, therefore, is the compendium of the verbal outbursts of artists in indigenous societies within which could be found rare renditions that conferred the toga of exclusivity in relation to ordinary verbal communications.

Rites are symbolic movements that replicate some original steps that were undertaken towards the resolution of perceived physical and spiritual challenges. They involve movements and gestures that are deployed towards the resolution of nagging environmental challenges. The movements are accepted as valid in the resolution of similar inhibitions or enhancement of physically and spiritually desirable quests. These symbolic gestures are meaningful and thus indispensable to the achievement of communication during the performance of similar rites. They underscore the quest of the folks for identity, replication of laid down rules of transcending the physical to the realm of the ancestors. The symbols are simply instruments through which the meanings of some signs and gestures have been coded in the milieu and these may be geared towards achieving communion with the spiritual realm. It takes more than regularity

during the festive season to understand the imports of the symbols. Michael Meyer (1999) provides a working definition thus: “a symbol is a person, object, or event that suggests more than its literal meaning” (215). What is obvious is the necessity of transcending the literal sense in order to unravel the meaning behind the object or sign when considering symbols.

Abrams M. H. *et al* (2012) provides more illuminating definition of symbol as they associate this with signification: “in the broadest sense, a symbol is anything which signifies something else; in this sense, all words are symbols. In discussing literature, however, the term “symbol” is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself” (393-394). The prevalence of symbolic acts in indigenous performances further amplifies the presence of art in indigenous folklore in Africa. This belies Eurocentric claims that Africans did not have art prelude to colonisation. The ritual greetings are allusive to the direction of the performance and these symbolic gestures recognise the direction of the rite which is the realm of the ancestors but that might not be easily discernible to folks from other environments.

Perhaps a word or two may be said about funeral. This may be defined as a cultural and artistic performance that constitutes the final stage of the rite of transition from the terrestrial realm to the unseen, spiritual world. Funeral is informed by the values the folks in the environment place on life and the belief in the afterlife. These may thus inform how such dead members are treated maybe with disdain or respect in accordance with the laid down practices of the forefathers. The funeral rites of people in different settings may not be the same. This is because of the peculiarity of realities and beliefs across cultures. The rite of exhuming the dead periodically and being fed with food and cigarettes, in some eastern parts of the world, may further amplify the belief in the continuity of existence beyond death. As weird as this may seem, it has been deeply instituted into the unwritten mores of the folks that time may not easily erase it without resistance from the custodians of the customs whose survival is tied to such unwholesome practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the study shall be aesthetics or what Eliot T. S. calls “the objective correlative.” This is an interrogation of aesthetics along the core value of utility, beauty and the value system of indigenous folks. What Eliot T. S. (1965) considers to be “the objective correlative” may be nothing save aesthetics. The interpretation of the rite may be approached from different segments and these may not be different from what is termed aesthetic appreciation. What may be termed introduction to the ritual performance is homage. This is synonymous with aesthetic ingredients where basic recognitions are given to the sages of the land and the reigning monarch. It may not be far from what Eliot T. S. (1965) calls the “objective correlatives” (134-135). This segmentation of the rite constitutes what Plato terms “the beautiful itself.” This is what Plato “calls the eternal, unchanging and divine form of beauty, accessible not to the senses, but only to the intellect” (Christopher Janaway, 2006: 9).

Kant may be considered the first critic to integrate “aesthetic theory into a complete philosophical system...” He was not particularly interested in considering aesthetic “to be a legitimate subject for philosophy”. (55). Kant’s early part of the *Critique of Judgment* highlights and analyses the qualification that may be required “in order to call an object beautiful.” According to him, this qualification may be divided into four “Moments” namely: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Modality. According to Donald W. Crawford (2006), “the fit of the judgment of taste to this table is strained, but the structure serves Kant’s purpose of systematic elucidation of the formal properties of judgments of taste, and these elucidations –rather than the architectonic structure – are the heart of his aesthetic theory: “they consist in detailed analysis of that to which we are committing ourselves in making a judgment of taste.” (56).

The holarchic model is an examination of behaviour in relation to pleasure. According to the model, behaviour is “tied to the arousal of desires and the belief of the people” (Wonderly, 1991: 314). Schiller, however, claims that aesthetics may be brought about where “will and desire are brought into harmony” (Wonderly 1991: 236). This model considers value to be necessary in any undertaking where aesthetic qualities are to be achieved or aroused in the audience. It is, therefore, necessary that the rite of transition is significant to the way of life of the people because it “relates to their ostensible need value.”

### Application/Analysis

The rite, when segmented through homage, address, recognition, invitation, intercession and approval, as the gradational movement of the performance serves to show, amplifies the “ascending” order or movement prevalent in the thesis of Plato.

*...the ideal lover is portrayed as ascending through a hierarchy of love-objects- first the beautiful, body of a particular human beloved, then all beautiful bodies equally, then the beauty of souls, then that of laws, customs and ideas-and ending as a lover of wisdom and philosopher” (Christopher Janaway, 2006: 9).*

Plato may not constitute a monolithic voice in the examination of aesthetics. Recent efforts in the field of psychology and philosophy have extended the frontiers of aesthetics as a tool of analysis in the study of art. Nickolas Pappas (2006) while commenting on Aristotle opines that the *Poetics* may be considered “...the first extended philosophical studies of an art form.” (15). It is instructive to note that the critical examination of a text may be approached through “psychological aesthetics and philosophical aesthetics.” (Beardsley Monroe, 1958: 3-4). According to this distinction, "psychological aesthetics" resolves issues “about the causes and effects of works of art," while "philosophical aesthetics" deals with questions about the meaning and truth of critical statements (3 - 4).

The identification of the performative segments and the peculiarities of each of them may not be different from the cycle of birth, growth, unhindered quests for all things beautiful, age, the recognition of the meaninglessness of existence and the eventual transition. The rite is synonymous with what Auden, W. H. (1965) considers to be associated with poetry. According to him, a poem like a rite has a “formal and ritualistic character.” What may not be denied is the beauty associated with the performance of a rite which fulfils Auden’s recipe for beauty: “The form of a rite must be beautiful, exhibiting, for example, balance, closure and aptness to that which it is the form of. It is over this last quality of aptness that most of our aesthetic quarrels arise, and must arise, whenever our sacred and profane worlds differ” (215).

The desire for clarity demands further illumination on the aesthetic segments. Homage underscores the performers' association with both the historical and cultural histories of the milieu. This could be in form of a particular reference to the heroes of the environment whose solid foundation is being re-enacted and acknowledged. The homage conjures the memories of the sages consequent upon the belief that the deceased leaders are still relevant components of the environment and that they could partake and sanction the activities of the people when called upon and equally intercede in interpersonal relationships where underhand infractions, life threatening actions may distort the established etiquettes of human relationship. The need for homage may also be considered from the perspective that the rites were directed at enlisting the celebrated folks among the pantheon of ancestors and their forebears must be called upon to witness the apotheosis.

The quest for aesthetic pleasure in the audience depends, according to Hutcheson cited in James Shelley (2006), on “possession of an ‘internal sense’ that we take pleasure in objects of beauty” which he claims depends on “their possession of ‘uniformity amidst variety’ that objects of beauty give pleasure to us” (43). Following the trail of Beardsley (1958), therefore, Hutcheson as cited in James Shelley (2006) makes a distinction between “sensible pleasures” and “rational pleasures” (43). He defines “sensible pleasures” as that which “comprises those pleasures that arise solely from external sources, namely the five bodily senses, and which includes the pleasures we take in colors and in simple sounds” (43). This category of pleasures, according to Hutcheson, may be brought to bear in the analysis of the pleasure inherent in a festival, performance, display or entertainment. The appreciation of this kind of pleasures may be termed beautiful and could lead to sudden outbursts such as laughter or applause.

The multidimensional critique of James Shelley (2006) equally examines Hume's concept of beauty which he claims involves “both senses and reason, and to have not one but irreducibly many causes in objects” with the conclusion that the quest for “a standard of taste” might be nothing save a “hopeless search.” This unfortunate conclusion arises from the fact that “beauty is merely a sentiment” and that perception is not tied to the inherent beauty in the object

itself but the apprehension of beauty is subject to individual beholder (48). This argument that seems to contradict the Lockean concept of beauty may be concluded through Hume's compartmentalising of the concept of beauty within "a perceptual stage, in which we perceive qualities in objects, and an affective stage, in which we perceive the pleasurable sentiments of beauty, or the displeasurable sentiments of 'deformity,' that arise from our perceptions of those qualities" (48). Imputed to the ritual performance, therefore, the two categories spelt out by Hume are latent in both the ensemble and the stages of the renditions. The last stage of the performance induces tears and the offspring of the deceased cannot hide their emotional reactions through mournful demeanour and the resultant tears.

The second category of pleasures involves "rational pleasures." Hutcheson defines this as that which "...comprises the pleasures that arise only when the additional involvement of reason (the only acknowledged internal source), and which is apparently exhausted by the self-interested pleasures we take in acquiring things we believe to be personally advantageous and the disinterested pleasures we take in making intellectual discoveries" (43). The performance of the rite of transition may have no visible pleasure to the bereaved, but the exercise may be considered a form of "disinterested pleasures". It is synonymous with an intellectual discovery as the celebrants are congratulated on giving their parents befitting rites and completing the processes of apotheosis.

The belief of the folks is tied to the immortality of the soul. This informs the need to perform the rites of transition in order to pave way for the dead through the journey to the world of the ancestors. The belief is rife that anyone who does not enjoy the performance may remain on their knees, unable to sit among other ancestors. That belief formed what Wonderly (1991) terms the "conceptual state". There is, therefore, the need to honour their late parents in order to transit comfortably into the world of the ancestors and this could be termed "protective desire". Over time, the need for the final rite of passage assumes what Wonderly terms "transcendent desire" which arises from "threat of isolation" of the diseased in the spiritual realm (197).

The second stage is the address posed to the deceased. This involves a rendition that acknowledges their departure from the world of the living. The folks are obviously not happy about their departure, but they are lamenting this absence through association and celebration. The third stage is the recognition of the deceased as a member of the milieu and whose being is tied to some taboos subsisting in the environment. That singular effort places the personality as qualified for whatever should be accorded every member of the society. With that recognition, the spirit of the deceased will be invited to sit and witness the performance with the assurance that the beating of the drums and singing of the songs confer immortality on the deceased in the milieu. The children of the celebrants are invited to the dance floor and homage would be paid to the dead through dictated movement, back and forth, as a way of concluding the ceremony.

What may not be disputed is the association of the performance with the “folk ideas” held by the people. “Folk ideas” are the sum total of the beliefs that the people in an environment have about issues concerning them. Dundes (1975) becomes a springboard in the definition of “folk ideas”: “what is important is the task of identifying the various underlying assumptions and it is these assumptions or folk ideas which are the building blocks of worldview” (96). The undeniable fact is the peculiarity of the practices in the environment which must have been outcomes of what Dundes (1975) considers being “folk ideas.”

Ellmann Richard *et al* (1965) opines that myths are in public domain and could be expressed and that they are products of “subliminal mental patterns that come close to the “compulsive drives of the unconscious” (617). Even when myths are products of perceptions of reality by a group of people within an environment, they are limited by the awareness of the people about phenomena such as birth, growth, life, death and transition. Lending credence to the claim of Ellmann (1965), Bronislaw Malinowski (1965) opines that history and the natural environment must have necessitated whatever mythical thoughts that indigenous folks had devised in the primordial era (1965).

According to Bronislaw Malinowski (1965), “there is no denying the fact that history, as well as natural environment, must have left a profound imprint

on all cultural achievements, hence also on myths.” The history in this regard may be oral which exists in the memories of the folks. Malinowski further claims that “...But to take mythology as mere chronicle is as incorrect as to regard it as the primitive naturalist’s musing. It also endows primitive man with a sort of scientific impulse and desire for knowledge.” No doubt, it would amount to a fallacy to consider myths as history. Rather “...it expresses the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man” (631). Myths are, therefore, humanity’s first attempt at scientific examination and explanation of phenomena and may contain coded messages about realities in the past, present and the future. Malinowski’s definition of myths may be viewed as the unwritten constitution of cultural life that spells out the *modus operandi* of social behaviours.

Ernest Cassirer (1965) considers myths to be in the same generic class as language and science. As the science of indigenous folks, myths are in the same category as language and the underlying meanings depend on the ability to transcend the literal level of signification to the metaphorical imports in such tales: “From this point of view, myth, art, language and science appear as symbols; not in the sense of mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings, but in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own” (637). As a form of language, myths are to be explored and internalised; depending on the creative ability of the sages of the land. However, this myth of ritual celebration of the dead was internalised long ago and handed down to the younger generation. It is to be noted that folks whose funeral rites negate the stipulated cultural norms may not be compelled to carry out the established rites in the milieu. The faiths of individuals are respected. This is where association by faith comes in.

Jung C. G. (1965) is concerned with the association of myth with “something psychic”. According to him, “the fact that myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the total soul is something they have absolutely refused to see until now. Primitive man is not much interested in objective explanation of the obvious, but he has an imperative need-or rather, his unconscious psyche has an irresistible urge-to assimilate all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events” (643-644). What may not be obvious is the origin of the ritual tradition in the society as the sages of the

milieu may not remember with exactness how the practices began and what might have informed these; but what cannot be denied is the reality or potency of the rites as those whose parents were not accorded such ceremonies are either subject to untimely death or may be subjected to backwardness until the need to perform these necessary rites dawns on them.

This ritual performance is both physical and symbolic. It sums up the art and crave of the folks for aesthetic fulfilment. It is also a representation of the recognition of the divine nature of life and it transits into the spiritual realm. The need to celebrate the journey necessitates a performance laced with the associated drumbeats, songs and dance steps. It further spurs the creative energy in the folks in appreciation of the awe and sublime nature of existence. Auden, W. B. (1965) sums up this nexus between awe and sublime as the force responsible for creativity.

*The impulse to create a work of art is felt when, in certain persons, the passive awe provoked by sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship or homage, and to be fit homage, this rite must be beautiful. This rite has no magical or idolatrous intention; nothing is expected in return (215).*

The assumed creative energy that Auden (1965) alludes to is fundamentally tied to indigenous hermeneutics. This may be explained as the totality of the meaningful summations that have characterised the society through conscious and unconscious expose, as well as what may have been borrowed through cultural contiguity, exogamous marriages and diplomatic ties. The totality of these summations constitutes what may be termed indigenous hermeneutics and the meanings attached to such may be culturally limited.

The question of meaning is multidimensional. This is because of the fact that the internalisation of a gesture is tied to regularity at the festive arena and conscious effort at decoding the shared codes and signs. Robert Jerome Smith lends authorial voice to the claim: “most festival behaviour, however, has neither strictly cognitive nor strictly affective meaning but is rather a combining of the two” (70). Imputed to the performance of funeral rite in the two

indigenous communities, therefore, it may be safely concluded that the ritual gestures have both “cognitive” and “affective meanings”. The imports are deeply rooted in the tradition of the environment from which meaning may not be easily sieved without harnessing the cultural imperatives of the milieu.

The environment that engenders the performance is as important as the renditions. This may amount to studying the beliefs and practices of the folks and the underlying wisdom that might have dictated the total essence of the tradition of the people. The cognitive aspect relates to the first hand exposure to the taboos of the land especially as the performers claim that they are not favourably disposed to a meal of specie of cocoyam called (*koko*): “when you have a meal of pounded yam made of cocoyam, don’t call me. We abhor it here.” The affective aspect involves the symbolic gestures at the ritual arena where the offspring of the ancestor make ritual greetings back and forth with each clutching a horsetail neatly placed on the shoulder with which they greet the spirit behind the indigenous *lawe* (woven clothe) that represents the presence of the deceased.

The narratives behind the rites are subsumed in myth. According to Alan Dundes (1975), “a myth is first of all a narrative...” (93). It is within the exploration of the belief system subsisting in the environment that the quest for significant meaning may be directed. The sacred nature of the performance triggers folklorists to further consider “myth as a sacred narrative, explaining how the earth or man came to be in their present form...” (Dundes, 1975: 93). What may be considered a true reflection of the lore of the people is the association of the performance with “sacred” rite culminating in the belief of the people about life, death, transition and the sacred world of the ancestors and the need to usher the dead with necessary dance, drumbeat and gestures towards acceptance into the exclusive realm that is better conjectured than perceived.

Crawford (2006) explains the “First Moment” which he tags “Quality” of the “Analytic of the beautiful” and concludes that in order to call an object beautiful, one must judge it to be “the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction.” (56-7). What Crawford (2006) seems to be saying from the analysis of Kant is that “when beauty is affirmed of the object, there is additional content to this affirmation, namely the ability of the object to

provide satisfaction to those who judge it disinterestedly.” (57). Kant begins with the premise that “the judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment, which he contrasts with a cognitive judgment.” (57). In other words, there is a concept available to the beholder to judge. He considers the physical object to be capable of cognitive judgment. The cognitive judgment is later brought to bear in what may be termed “experiential content back to my own subjective state.”

*In judging something to be beautiful,  
what one is aware of (a painting, a  
building, a flower) is referred back  
to the subject and to its feelings of life,  
under the name of the feeling of pleasure  
or displeasure (Kant,1951: 1).*

The pleasure in “the beautiful,” according to Kant, is not borne out of a selfish desire or “interest in the existence of an object; it is merely contemplative” (57). The analysis above is what Kant terms “Disinterested pleasure.” Crawford (2006) concludes the “First Moment” by highlighting Kant’s acceptance of aesthetic as a theory of taste: “The notions of free contemplation and reflection anticipate Kant’s attempt to show the legitimacy of the judgment of taste as a unique type of judgment.” (57).

*For contemplation and reflection are  
absent in the case of what pleases  
merely through sensation, and in judging  
what is useful or moral, the acts of  
reflection and contemplation are constrained  
by definite concepts (57).*

Imputed to oral performance, therefore, pleasure through “sensation” may not be available. The expression of judgment through “reflection and contemplation” is tied to knowledge of the oral climate, the world views of the people as well as the beliefs of the people about life, and life after death.

*He denied the possibility of principle  
of taste, holding that our judgments  
about beauty are based simply on*

*pleasure, and being entirely subjective  
and only a fit topic for empirical  
studies ( anthropology or history).  
...nor did he regard aesthetic  
perception as related to the realm of  
cognitive judgment, understanding and ideas. (55).*

The notion of “universal pleasure” is buttressed in the “Second Moment” tagged “Quantity.” Kant concludes that “the beautiful is that which pleases universally without (requiring) a concept” (Kant, 1951: 9 as cited in Crawford (2006, 58). According to Crawford (2006), therefore, Kant may not be right in tying the appreciation of beauty to a universal appeal: “a beautiful thing does not please everyone.” Therefore, Kant’s claim that “the beautiful is that which apart from concepts is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction” is far from the truth. (58). It is obvious that the appreciation of what may be considered beautiful is subjective, and relative. What pleases different people may not be universally the same. A graphic work of art that attracts millions of dollars may amount to nothing than a haphazardly skewed image of an ill-formed combination of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic beings.

Kant is involved in a self-contradictory exercise in his thesis. His claim “that the pleasure in the beautiful is not wholly subjective but has some basis that justifies our thinking that others should find the object beautiful as well, while fully recognizing that not everyone will in fact agree with us” is a contradiction of Kant’s concept of “the beautiful” (58). Kant’s singular statement that “the judgment of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of everyone” is an indication that he is confused and may not have recognised the difference between subjective appreciation and objective recognition as products of the same relative appreciation. (58). Not even the tag of “subjective universality” is enough to water down the contradiction inherent in the postulation.

The performance of the rite of transition is apparently tied to the milieu. It does not have “universal pleasure.” In spite of this restriction, folks from the environment consider it beautiful, as it contains constituents of pleasure, while upholding and sanctioning the belief of the people: “there can be no rule

according to which anyone is to be forced to recognise anything as beautiful.” What may not be clear to Kant is that the apprehension of “the beautiful” may not be tied to rule but a result of a sensation whether or not that sensual arousal may be due to a misjudgment. This difference explains the incidence of choices in taste among people across geographical divide. In this wise, “the beautiful” may be culturally illuminating. That is, a group of people may find pleasure in some dance steps just as these may not appeal to folks from other environments. This is where the notion of ‘universal validity’ can be debunked without much effort. The belief sustaining the performance is limited to the clime and this is another proof of cultural relativism.

The “Third Movement” is entitled “Relation.” Crawford (2006) simplifies the argument in “The Moment” thus: “The straightforward part is that pleasure in the beautiful is owing to the perceived form of the *object*, in contrast to sensations or concepts of it.” Kant further falls into more pitfalls by claiming that “...a pure judgement of taste cannot be based on pleasures of charm or emotion...nor simply on empirical sensations such as charming colors or pleasing tones, nor on a definite concept, but only on formal properties” (59). What seems more confusing in the thesis is the difference between what may be termed “universal” and “empiricism.” This study attempts a definition of the two terms through recourse to the acceptability of a concept beyond time and space. The term “universal” means an idea that has no geographical limitation. In other words, it transcends the limit of space and time just as “empiricism” too refers to what may be accepted all through time, season and space. Kant’s earlier claim that the concept of pleasure must be universal seems to have negated the reference to the inadequacy of “empirical sensations” as a factor in the acceptability of “pure judgement of taste” (59).

Crawford (2006) provides further examination of the “Third Moment” of Kant’s thesis on taste. According to him, there are multiple concepts that are brought to bear in the study. He identifies the following concepts that further complicate the study of taste such as “purposiveness without purpose, the mere form of purposiveness, subjective purposiveness, formal purposiveness, formal subjective purposiveness, and purposive form.” (60). These concepts are not immediately relevant to the study of indigenous rituals in the milieu under study. The “Fourth Moment” according to Crawford (2006) is termed

“Modality.” If Kant says “the beautiful” is that “which without any concept is cognized as the object of a necessary satisfaction,” it follows, therefore, that the concepts earlier highlighted in the “First Moment” are a negation of the multiple concepts delineated in the last “Moment.” The idea of what is beautiful may not be directed towards selfish satisfaction just as beauty may not be universally acknowledged. This is where the theory of Kant’s aesthetics may not be totally relevant to the study of indigenous performances.

Imitation is particularly preponderant in the performance of the transition rite. The first instance of imitation is the performance itself. It is a replication of a tradition and the performers earlier mentioned are only rendering an age-long tradition whose beginning is as old as the foundation of the town. It harbours the beliefs of the folks and the importance they attach to the dead among them. What may not be denied in this performance that costs a lump sum through the provision of ritual objects such as two goats of sizeable proportions, twenty five tubers of yam (that are part of the finest in the land), ten wraps of pounded yam, a carton of assorted beer, many bottles of locally brewed drinks known as *ogogoro* in the milieu and *akpeteshi* in Ghana and whatever the relations of the deceased may charge as their sitting allowance reveal the high premium that the folks attach to the celebration of the dead in the clime. The items mentioned above are limited to the performance of *owo aja meta* which may literally be translated to mean *the three dog’s hands*. The cost of hosting friends and club members may amount to one million Naira or more especially when the cost of the service of a first class musician is computed.

The main business of the ensemble is drumming. The group comprises members of the community that are versed in the lore of the land. This expertise may be as a result of regularity during such performances in the past or as a result of tutelage under a known leader in the community or both. Of course, the drumming follows a rhythmic pattern depending on the segment of the performance. Each member of the ensemble beats a regulated sound and all the drummers and the band leader equally sing according to the dictate of the ritual. At a particular stage, women may not be allowed into the ritual arena. This may be prelude to the invitation of the spirit of the ancestor to the venue of the celebration. With the completion of that segment, the celebrants are invited to the dance floor with each having a horsetail and dancing in a procession along

with appropriate gestures and postures to honour the ancestor. This may signal the end of the ceremony at the ritual arena. The entertainment of guests may follow right there or at a designated venue which represents the social aspect of the performance.

## Conclusion

This research further amplifies the relativism of cultural practices across the world. Some of the performances may heavily tilt towards rituals. That is not strange as individual perception of reality may have dictated such practices. The attitude to the dead in the eastern world may betray more glooming facts that tend towards the ludicrous. These may include feeding the remains of the dead to beasts, mutilation of the body and outright cremation. These are acceptable to folks who are bound to the environments and may have no objection to such practices. The difference in the rites across cultures also forecloses the beliefs of the people about existence, the relationship between the physical and the spiritual; the nature of God and other doctrines that intersperse creeds. It becomes debatable if the attitude of individuals to life and death, the knowledge of folks in specific environments and the globalised society may not have been informed by unverifiable submissions of sages of the past. It is to be expected, therefore, that as more exposure is achieved through the Internet, basic reactions may be achieved that can enhance cultures such that some laughable practices may give way. Unlike the practices in the eastern world, the rituals of apotheosis in some indigenous societies in the western part of Nigeria may not be easily erased. This is because of the humanity inherent in these and the acknowledgement of the divine and imperishability of the soul as entrenched in some universal creeds.

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