



## Ajubaba: Shakespeare and Yoruba Goddess

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### Abstract

Yoruba belief system has conceptualized the place and power of women, long before Feminist fervour swept through the European world and beyond. In his oeuvre, Shakespeare also inadvertently alluded to this “power” of the feminine by recognizing that the combination of womanhood, motherhood and the female principle can, and do have significant influence on the individual’s destiny. In conceptualizing this female power, descriptive phrases such as “aje”, “atunnida” “iyami osorong”, “iyami ajubaba” are used by the Yoruba, who fear, respect and loathe these powers one and the same time. By creating unforgettable characters who are “not modified by the customs of particular places, or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions” (Johnson,1931), Shakespeare’s “women” are, through oral texts from Ifa, the Yoruba “system of divination, which also offers humans the possibility of knowing”(Fatunmbi,1994) examined, in order to show the relationship between literature and religion, how drama can effectively be utilized as a cultural material of universal appeal and how beliefs separated by time and clime interconnect, particularly in relation to the Yoruba world and Shakespeare’s Elizabethan/Jacobean society.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, Yoruba, ritual, Ifa, culture, female principle, power, duality

### 1. Much ado about “this” Shakespeare

Shakespeare often necessarily subsumes the essence of his dramaturgy in the unknown, and, the imaginative at one and the same time. This is the mark of a great artist: the ability to shock, entertain, teach and “confuse” at the same time. For example, we often find in his tragedy the masterful combination of passion and reality, carefully intertwined in the emotion that runs through them; while in his comedies, we find the very clear absurdities that we cannot reconcile, yet laugh about. But, what we find particularly exciting and “revealing” is Shakespeare’s ability to paint a very vivid picture of the Yoruba world, from his own specific Elizabethan/Jacobean environment and culture, through portrayals, thoughts and actions of his characters and; like the sage and initiate of the mysteries that he remains, without even slightly pointing in that direction in any obvious manner---yet they are there.

This unusual capability draws attention to the interconnectedness of the Yoruba world with Shakespeare’s spiritual cosmos that we glimpse from some of his texts. For example, the tragic story of Prince Hamlet is propelled by factors beyond the ordinary. Shakespeare’s vision of the tragic is made more profound and awe-inspiring in *Hamlet* by the presence of the Ghost. We are awed by the Ghost as

The representative of that hidden power, the messenger of the divine justice set upon the expiation of offences which it appeared impossible for man to discover and avenge; a reminder of a symbol of the connection of the limited world of ordinary experience with the vaster life of which it is but a partial appearance (Bradley,1990: 141).

The Ghost---sharing explicit similarity with the Yoruba concept of *Akudaaya*, or reincarnation--- commands Hamlet to avenge his death in order that the Ghost may rest in peace in the ancestral world.

Imagine the feeling we have when Calphurnia begs Caesar against going to the Capitol for “horrid sights seen by the watch”(II.ii.16),and Caesar’s capitulation to Decius’s treaty; “How foolish do your fears seem now Calphurnia?/ I am ashamed I did yield to them/Give me my robe, for I will go” (II.ii.103-5). Do we also cringe in fear for Duncan who says; “This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/Numbly and sweetly recommends itself/Unto our gentle senses”(I.vi.1-3), knowing that both of them are soon going to be murdered? Or, we just take a recourse to a Yoruba philosophical thought that “Emi ti o ni d’ola, to n d’osu mefa”, that is, a life that will not “see” tomorrow bargaining for eternity, or simply get stupefied by the “un-ordinariness” of the whole experiences?

Walter (1972) argues that it is this same understanding of the world which governs the actions in *Macbeth*. By usurping the throne, Macbeth disrupts a natural order thereby leaving the state in anarchy. King Duncan is God’s own representative; the Yoruba concept of Kings or monarchs as *Alase, Ekeji Orisha* (the Sovereign; second in rank to the gods). Such disruption and how it affects the physical plane of existence and kingdom of animals, is properly described by Shakespeare; “And Duncan horses (a thing most strange and certain)/Bounteous and swift, the minions of their race,/Turn’d wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,/Contending ‘gainst obedience, as they would make/War with

mankind./'Tis said, they eat each other (II.iv. 14-18). Duncan's death is therefore a challenge to the spiritual powers. Macbeth's torture after the incident and his death are punishment from the divine world. Walter states further that as a usurper, Macbeth's fate is no different from that of Claudius in *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare often proceeds, as a well-informed "Yoruba", who understands the redundant effort in trying or the meaningful knowledge, ironically, in not naming what cannot possibly be given a singular name or descriptive phrase that captures its meaning in totality. This fact also suggests his profound awareness of the cosmic, despite presenting them on a physical plane in the theatre. Yoruba awareness of this duality of nature that Shakespeare portrays on stage alludes to the nature of the people's *Orisha* who are at once spiritual and physical at the same time. For example, Awo Falokun (1994:85) writes that Yoruba regard the *Orisha* as "the gathering together or picking up of hidden Forces embedded in and forming the Nature of all things in general, and human identity in particular". He also notes that the moment one says, "*Orisha* is something", the concept automatically dissolves and "becomes limited, rigid and ultimately rooted in illusion".

But Shakespeare names them, and shows them as well, by way of allusive language and characterization, which are more profound in effect. Shakespeare's knowledge of the woman, particularly, and what she represents in her duality has always been a central subject in his dramaturgy. Wilson Knight writes

In Shakespeare woman is both the divine ideal and the origin of evil: because she is more eternal than men, more mysterious, the mysterious origin of life. On that dualism the past agonies revolve. Woman, rather than man, is *the creative essence, the one harmony, from which man is separated, to which he aspires*. On her ultimate serenity and sweetness, not denying but overwhelming her evil, depends the sanity of religion, and the universal beauty (Knight,1990: 316-17)[emphasis added].

Further, 'Woman' as man's essential self Knight acknowledges manifests in the female characters by which the male, especially the tragic heroes, are themselves made relevant. There is no way you talk about Romeo, without mentioning a Juliet; imagine a Macbeth without Lady Macbeth; how can Caliban's riveting victory (in Cesaire's adaptation) be complete without Sycorax; or an Antony separated from Cleopatra? Will Lear's tragic effect be as compelling as it is without his daughters? Or an Othello from whom a Desdemona has been removed? Perhaps a 'better' Hamlet can be achieved without Ophelia? These great men of Shakespeare are only as great and renowned as the influence of their women over their actions. They (women) were the pedestal upon which the men rose to promise and greatness, but, ironically, from which they also tumbled---the world, you will agree, is built on opposites.

This duality of purpose: to elevate and destroy finds perfect interpretation in the Yoruba adage, "Ti'bi ti're la da'le aye", that is, good and evil are inseparable companion; what Shakespeare himself succinctly captures in *Hamlet*, "For there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (II.ii.49). But, these are not just ordinary women, however ordinary Shakespeare appears to have presented them. Within the performance arena, which is itself a realization of illusion, is shrouded their real nature Ifa, the Yoruba system of esoteric knowledge describes as "Iyaami", who "helps maintain the balance of political and spiritual power between men and women" (Fatunmbi,1994:103), and who Opefeyitimi also describes as the "mythological cognomen--a woman recreator of Man"(Opefeyitimi,2009:49). We might really understand this line of argument, if placed by the side of the intention of one of Witches towards Macbeth; "T'll drain him dry as hay/Sleep shall neither night nor day/ Hang upon his penthouse lid/He shall live a man forbid (I.iii.18-21).

This 'special' breed of women is also variously described through Yoruba *ayajo* [1] and various Ifa verses in terms such as *atunnida* (human forces capable of remaking or shaping one's fate), *abatenije* (destroyers of men) and simply as *aje* (witches), who bestride both worlds (Opefeyitimi 49). The Yoruba refer to this earthly plane, this place of contact between the mortals and the divine, as *Aye*, which connotes different things. According to Olupona, *aye* represents the "center of the cosmos where man (eniyan) reigns [...] the point at which all forces and vital powers intersect"(Olupona,2001:56); but to Lawuyi, the term embodies both human relations and its derivative, the physical entity (Lawuyi,1989:3). He argues that *aye* represents "a malignant force which can bring time of opportunities to a standstill". This definition draws our attention to Yoruba concept of fate, freewill and influence(s) that can be exerted on the individual(s) by forces, which in some ways too are subjected to the control of the supreme sanction of Olodumare.

This intricate concept in Yoruba belief takes us into the realm of metaphysics and as Awo Fatunmbi explains, by drawing his explanation from Ifa, that "the foundation of any system of metaphysics is the concept of the Self"(Fatunmbi,39), which must be apprehended if one were to live a normal and meaningful life because "Ifa teaches that the world is a balanced system that functions with its own internal guidance system that maintains harmony and growth" and that, "it is the job of each individual to grasp this internal order, then to live in accordance with its inherent principles". Within this same ambience of Selfhood is also, in Opefeyitimi's term, "the celestial world of heaven", where the "predetermined fate or man's lot properly belongs" and, at the same time where "a group of women who use certain powers of the cultic nature to trouble man for certain reasons", equally reside. Thus, possessing an understanding of this intricate nature of the world will certainly help the individual to live life to the fullest in accordance with her/his chosen destiny.

## 2. Shakespeare's 'Sisters' and Elizabethan belief in witchcraft

It is not out of place to agree that Shakespeare's idea of the witches was influenced by the popular myth and belief regarding spiritual and metaphysical power and their influence on people of the Elizabethan era and the various ways of curbing the activities of those accused of witchcraft during that period. The Elizabethan Witchcraft Statute of 1563 titled, "Act against Conjuracions Inchantmentes and Witchcraftes", and the 1604 harsher act of the Jacobean era, "Act against Conjuracion Witchcraftes and dealings with evil and wicked Spirits". The skepticism of a few people about the subject of witchcraft is expressed most succinctly by the publication in 1584, of "The Discovery of Witchcraft", by Reginald Scot who wrote

If it were true that witches confesse, or that all writers write or that witchmongers report, or that fooles believe, we should never have butter in the chearne, nor cow in the close, nor come in the field, nor faire weather abroad, nor helth within doors.

(Scott, qtd in Haining, 1974: 68)

Contradictory opinion of some others was equally expressed by the Vicar of Malden, George Giford who wrote in 1593

There be two or three [witches] in our town which I like not, but especially an old woman. I have bene as careful to please her as ever I was to please mine own mother, and to give her ever and anon one thing or other, and yet methinks she frownes at me now and then. (Giford, qtd in Haining 78)

However, the general population's belief in witches and their capability for malicious harm was symbolized by the writing and publication in 1597 of "Daemonologie" by King James I (then as James Stuart VI), and the series of trials and brutal punishment of accused persons and those purportedly found guilty of practicing witchcraft or anything associated with it.

The entire process of arrest and persecution was characterized by dissenting opinions especially the accusations that the whole exercised had been hijacked by people with selfish motives. Thomas Potts argues that it was an "intolerant world with which the witch had parted company. She was the extreme example of the malignant or non-conforming person against whom the local community had always taken punitive action in the interests of social harmony" (Potts, 1613:632). Some commentators such as Eirenrich and English (1973) believe that the entire trial and persecution of witches stem from "a ruling class campaign of terror against the female peasant population", supporting the opinion that witchcraft was "something which operated with the female social and cultural spheres, or, at least, as a specifically female form of power" (Rowland, 2001:10).

However Gibson's assertion, "the stories in the pamphlets make it hard to escape the conclusion that witch prosecution was often an expression of fears of supposed female power as well as a distaste for the uneducated, impious and criminal "worser" sort" and an expression of frustration from the young to the old" (Gibson, qtd in Sharpe xi), draws attention to the feminist perspective and the role gender plays in the whole episode of persecution. Perhaps this appears to be the point French stresses in her interpretation of Shakespeare's presentation of the Weird Sisters. According to her, Shakespeare might have been drawn into the "fight" by people who believed that some women, through their so-called spiritual/nocturnal (?) activities, scorn male power. She writes; "they are female, but have beards; they are aggressive and authoritative, but seem to have power only to create petty mischief. Their persons, their activities, and their song serve to link ambiguity about gender to moral ambiguity" (n.pag). Yet, in his description and their mannerism--modus operandi--Shakespeare also connects with the Yoruba world.

## 3. Women, Power and the Cosmos: Shakespeare and the Yoruba world

The origin and renewal of life earlier mentioned by Knight allude to the power of the female *Orisha*, that is, Oya and, especially Osun, who is believed to embrace "the source of life, power and authority" (Murphy and Sanford, 2001:8). Therefore, we shall try, as much as possible, to bring out the essential attributes of these two prominent Yoruba female *Orisha*, in the manner Shakespeare has presented these 'women' in Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth who represent, in this context, the Iyaami ajubaba in physical terms, much as the Weird Sisters and Hecate in the spiritual term.

Unlike in most cultures, the Yoruba actually respect and give reverence to women as reflected in the liturgy and worship of the female *Orisha*. Badejo avers that in *orin odun* Osun (festival songs in honour of Osun) are embedded "culturally-bound cosmic premise [which] authorizes the position of women politically, socially, and economically within the Yoruba worldview and social praxis", which also points at the "validation of complex human interactions", that bother on "gender functionality" (Badejo, 1996:128); and, in the words of Abiodun, "Osun's authority, specifically, lies within this complex ontological nexus". Originally, also, when women in the Yoruba cultural context begin to experience diminish in the power to nurture children, as Fatunmbi explains, they take up the role of *Iyaagba*, that is, "older mothers", a phrase which embodies the connotation of "warrior-mothers" as those who "preserve the secrets of psychic self-defense".

However, in some cases, the same powers are carried over toward the women's secret society of *Iyaami* (witches), such powers shared with the female *Orisha*; Osun and Oya, in this context. Osun is wealthy, beautiful, and associated with vast expanse of water and royalty, she "affirms the legitimacy and beauty of female power" as well as being "a symbol of life, death, and rebirth of energy" (King, 1990:207). On the other hand, Oya is of volcanic nature, violent change and

the guardian of the cemetery. Shakespeare's representation of these female *Orisha* in the plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* is, no doubt, extremely powerful.

### 3.1 *Cleopatra: beauty, poise and sexual power*

Shakespeare sourced the story of *Antony and Cleopatra* from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*, written in Greece in the first Century AD. But, it is safe to argue that he must have read the English translation by Sir Thomas North in 1579. However, Shakespeare subsumes the human angle of Plutarch's original in spirituality that dissolves into the Yoruba ritual archetype, especially the character of Cleopatra, even though paradoxically, he retains the nature of Antony. This is itself an artistic decision that helps to deepen the extent of Cleopatra's mystical power through her sexual control over the Roman general, which alludes to Osun's "concealed power" (Abiodun, 1989:25), and her title as "leader of the *aje*" (Badejo, 2001:77-80), perhaps what Spurgeon also intends in her own idea of Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra; "what is it that Shakespeare has added [to Plutarch's original]: Movement, the elements making obeisance to the beauty of the great queen" (Spurgeon, 1935:55).

Sagar offers a clearer perception of Shakespeare's intention, particularly with regard to the conceptualization of Cleopatra's character; "Cleopatra is Shakespeare's first attempt to present *the Goddess undivided*. The division is entirely in Antony, for whom she is simultaneously the source of life and the destruction of all the (Roman) qualities by which he has hitherto defined himself and his manhood, so that, with Cleopatra, he 'is and is not Antony' [...]. In Egypt Antony is *valued for his phallus*, in Rome for his sword" (Saga, 2001:1) [emphasis added]. The sexual power that Sagar suggests is acknowledged by Agrippa; "Royal wench/She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;/He ploughed her, and she cropped" (II.ii.236-8), but variously interpreted by other characters like Enobarbus and Ventidius, a fact which shows Cleopatra's "infinite variety" (Kobayashi, 2001:129) and "a profound and comprehensive delineation of essential woman [that] is necessarily varied and built of contradictions" according to Wilson Knight.

Osun and Cleopatra quickly connect in the obvious peculiarities that they share; the former is attributed to an expanse of water "which runs, seeps, flows, moves [as] the perpetually renewing source of life [...] elemental power to make life possible and to preserve life for creation" (Murphy and Sanford 2), that is also venerated through ceremonies, while the latter is synonymous with Egypt of the Nile River and in Sagar's words; "Egypt is a place of mystery, strangeness, infinite possibilities; Rome of that which is fixed, known, predictable, calculable; Rome is aggressively male, Egypt seductively female". This feature plays out Roman psyche and conception of their female divided between two distinct opposing lines of dutiful wives and exciting whores (Sagar, 6).

There is also the claim both have to royalty. Osun is the "Alade—the crowned Woman, who dances to take the crown without asking" (Verger 426), and the praise name of Yoruba kings as *Kabiyesi*, *Alase*, *Ekeji Orisa*, *Iku Baba-Yeye*; "One whose authority cannot be challenged; who is endowed with *ase*, and ranks only with the *Orisha*; Death the embodiment of finality, *Ultimate Father—Mother*" (Abiodun, 1989:21) [emphasis added], which draws attention to the male-female paradigm, and Osun's connection to the crown, especially the *ade aforisokun* identified with the crowns of certain monarchs in Yoruba land, in which an *osu* "a tuft or a kind of medicinal package with magical power, attached or sewn to the top of Yoruba crowns" (Drewal et al, 1989:91), remains the priceless emblem of authority.

This is similar to Cleopatra's royal personality, established first from her Egyptian headgear, which sits the Ankh, and can be likened to Osun's as the "hair plaiter with the beaded comb, who controls the outer head and the inner head, or destiny" (2), much the same way Cleopatra controls Antony's manhood, and also his "head" and heart, a fact Canidius attests to; "Soldier, thou art; but his whole action grows/ Not in the power on't/ So our leader's bed/And we are women's men" (III.vii. 67). And, in the play, she never misuses the opportunity to assert her regal position and the fact that she is the Queen of Egypt. To Proculeius she says

If your master  
Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him  
That majesty, to keep decorum, must  
No less beg than a kingdom (V.ii.15-8).

In her musing about Antony, Cleopatra also openly expresses the fact of her sexual control over the Roman general, "I drunk him to his bed;/Then I put my tires and mantles on him, whilst/ I wore his sword Philippan"(II.v.21-3), which aligns with Abiodun's opinion that by examining the Yoruba *Eegun* closely, the hidden power of women that Shakespeare points at can be appreciated, especially with the knowledge that *Eegun* is in actual fact a "euphemism for the female genitalia because they are hidden"(25). The female genitalia as the region from where life originates and in which also lies the most gruesome channel to sudden and painful death is common knowledge among the Yoruba. The myth of Moremi who used her *ele* to secure victory for the Yoruba race in the hands of unrelenting marauders also buttresses this fact.[2]

The power inherent in copulation, that Cleopatra wields over Antony also suggests, in some ways, Shakespeare's understanding of Egypt as the pinnacle of Africa/ Black spirituality, "the dangerous shores of will and judgement" (Sagar,1), with contrasting opposites, "mystery, strangeness, infinite possibilities as opposed to Rome's secular civilization, without roots and dedicated to conquering others"(Sagar,1). This manifests greatly in Act III, Scene XI at the surrender of the Egyptian fleet to the Roman army he led, a scene which shows her manipulative control over him. He says angrily

Egypt, thou knew'st too well  
 My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings,  
 And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit  
 Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that  
 Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods  
 Command me (III.ii.55-60).

In her own response, the woman's wiles are brought to play, which fittingly suppresses his anger and ensures that she continues to have him under control; "O my lord/Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought/ You would have followed" (III.ii.53-5). It serves to explain Coleridge's opinion, albeit admiration, for Cleopatra when he writes of her

...the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot but perceive that the passion itself spring out of the habitual craving of licentious nature, and that it is supported and reinforced by voluntary stimulus and sought-for association, instead of blossoming out of spontaneous emotion (Coleridge,1990:8).

And, Enobarbus would also "praise" her charm and outright understanding of the emotional needs of Antony, which she does not fail to give him in full dose, despite Octavia's contrasting image presented in the play, much in line with the Roman's psyche mentioned earlier. As he (Enobarbus) utters

[Her] passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report. This cannot be conning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove (I.ii.142-6).

Expectedly, such relationships never last. One would tend to agree with Kobayashi here that Shakespeare tries to portray the fickleness of the human mind (and Antony and Cleopatra's relationship) by having the 42 scenes that make up the play change as fast as both their feelings (Kobayashi,125). But, it is with Wilson Knight's idea of "essential contradiction" that we shall turn at the end of the play, especially at the death of Antony and Cleopatra's suicide. "For shame/Transform us not to women." (IV.ii.36-7) that Enobarbus begs of Antony holds no waters at this very last moment since earlier, on hearing her fake death, Antony himself has proclaimed his own death

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only  
 I here importune death awhile, until  
 Of many thousand kisses the poor last  
 I lay upon thy lips (IV.xv.19-22).

Both Plutarch and Shakespeare seem to agree that Cleopatra decides to kill herself after Antony's death, but the choice of how to fulfill this deadly decision is decided by her realization that the Romans will rather humiliate her before that happens if she is captured, except she makes the first move and 'steal' victory from their hands. In Bradley's opinion, "the thing that drives her to die is the certainty that she will be carried to Rome to grace his triumph. That alone decides her". In doing this, she goes back into Egyptian ritual to tap from its energy for in the words of Leggatt, "it is in Rome that things disappear, including Rome itself; in Egypt they are transformed"(Leggatt,1990:180).Egyptian ritual realm connects with that of Osun and the Yoruba Orisha—mythology--- and she brings the serpent, whose deeper symbolism includes "the esoteric and forbidden knowledge"(Sagar,3).

The fact that the snake "has the ability to renew itself by sloughing its skin, suggests renewal of the earth itself" (Sagar,2), and Cleopatra's way of saying that in death, she has not only established the authority of feminine presence, but also underlined the fact of mystical nature drawn from ritual imagination that Osun also symbolizes. That Antony also calls her "my serpent of old Nile", might suggest a personality he knows that every other person does not. Leggatt gives a clearer insight into this opinion though from a political drama perspective

Cleopatra goes one stage further. She has defined the heroic Antony for us; she must create for her own death a convincing heroic image of herself, something not just talked of but shown. She does this not by selection, as Hal defined his kingship by cutting out his former life, but a fusion of everything she has been, high and low, grand and comic. She centers it on a political point: it matters now, as never before, that she is Queen of Egypt (Leggatt,1988:246).

Her choice of departure equally draws attention to Badejo(1996:130)'s assertion that Osun, revered for her motherly and warlike duality, deploys both constructive and destructive energies from her bowel (genitalia?) with equal aplomb. Indeed, as Leggatt would say; "*Antony and Cleopatra* ends with a great queen, robed, crowned, and triumphant"(Leggatt,1990:188).

### 3.2 Lady Macbeth: daring and deadly duality.

Lady Macbeth at first appears to pose a rather challenging feature in terms of Yoruba Orisha conceptualization. One would think that, as far as this unique and amazing (fe) male character is concerned, Shakespeare's personal Muse was

virtually adventurous, investing her with a duality that bothers on beauty and lethal weapon, purity and violence, creation and destruction one and the same time. It might be useful to state that Shakespeare sourced the story of the couple from Holinshed's *The Chronicle*.

Of particular interest here is the account as some kind of background, especially with regard to Lady Macbeth's character "[She] lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen", and, "Donwald thus being the more kindled in wrath by the words of his wife, determined to follow her advice in the execution of so heinous an act"(n.pag). Lady Macbeth would provide us a succinct expression of this source-text here "Nought's had, all's spent/ Where our desire is got without content:/ 'T is safer to be that which we destroy,/Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy" (III.ii.4-6).

From the manner by which she takes charge of Macbeth's life the moment the soldier returns from battle, our knowledge of who is "truly" the soldier in the Castle of Inverness, their home, is juggled between reason and emotion, as she says to him; "Art thou afeard/To be the same in thine own act and valour/As thou art in desire? (I.vii.39-41). From that moment onward, especially the process of murdering Duncan, she takes up the duality of Obatala. For a god with many aspects, "'roads', male and female" (Caudillo,1995:11), Obatala embodies "concept of knowledge", and s/he is the "owner of all heads, including the heads of the Orishas", the way Lady Macbeth possesses Macbeth's head, his thought and every bit of his being; the way she subverts authority alludes to Obatala's creativity, especially as the deity that represents the concept of knowing and extraordinary ability to fashion beings. As Adelman(1992) argues, "in the figures of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the witches, the play gives us images of a masculinity and a femininity that are terribly disturbed", but this "disturbance", stems not from Obatala, but from Oya's vicious take-over of that personality.

By the sudden and complete deviation from Obatala's purity of thought and taking up the violent disruption and change that Oya represents; beautiful, dutiful, sexual even, but violent change, goddess of the cemetery where Duncan will be buried; "unsex me here"(I.v.41), points at the urge for violent change; "Come to my woman's breasts/And take my milk for gall"(I.v.47-8), Lady Macbeth's transformation from purity to violence is complete. Oya's praise names buttress this point; "Ayi lo da"; "Obinrin to t'ori ogun da 'runbon si", "Ayaba ni kua", that is, "the one that turns things and changes them", "a woman who grows a beard on account of war", and "Queen of death", as the Yoruba deity that presides over the rites of death respectively. We find a parallel in the praise name "a woman who grows a beard on account of war", with the witches in the play and her easy accessibility to tap into their powers.

Come you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty (I.v.40-3).

However, we are also constantly drawn by her speeches into the Obatala duality, the (fe) male character at once tender and vicious, which subsumes the Oya deadly quests for change, achieved through violent disruption of the existing status quo, in emotion and sensual appeal that keep Macbeth constantly under her wiles

What beast was't then,  
That make you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man (I.vii.47-9)

Infirm of purpose  
Give me the daggers (II.ii.51-2).

From Oya's praise name "Iya Yansan", that is "Mother of Nine", derived from legend of her giving birth to the Egungun and four sets of twins, and yet some other myth having it that, in her earthly incarnation she is not blessed with a child, we are taken back into Shakespeare's world of ambiguity in the play, which draws materials from the *Chronicle* and history to fashion an authentic dramatic text, laced with the ambiguity of both the masculine and feminine society that it portrays especially if we considered the fact that the female characters are presented to be terribly evil (Lady Macbeth and Witches) while the male characters are weak, submissive and trusting too much (Macbeth and Duncan), a constant reminder that is well encapsulated in the Witches' statement; "fair is foul and foul is fair/Hover through the fog and filthy air"(I.i.10-11) and, at the same time in Rudyard Kipling (1970)'s assertion that "the female species is more deadly than the male"[3].

Lady Macbeth does seem to challenge the patriarchal world of the play's universe. In her nature as Oya, she functions not just as Macbeth's "dearest partner of greatness"(I.v.11), but, with the connivance of the Three Sisters, seizes power from the masculine and, in the process, overturns the existing order of male domination in that world, even as Macbeth asks; "why do I yield to that suggestion/Whose hurried image doth unfix my hair/And make my seated heart knell at my rib/Against the use of nature?"(I.iii.134-7), taking the knowledge beyond the grasp of both commoner and royalty, a point which could also stress Irwin Edman (1970)'s thought that "God may still be in His Heaven, but there is more

than sufficient evidence that all is not right with the world"[4]. But, this is vintage witchcraft, from Yoruba spiritual perspective; the uncanny ability of these forces to refashion human beings at their own will, against the victims'.

Lady Macbeth also exerts sexual control over Macbeth. By her constant reference to his manhood, Shakespeare suggests, just like he vividly portrays in the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, that Lady Macbeth also exerts considerable influence on Macbeth by drawing powers from her female sexual region. Drewal et al (1989) draw our attention to Yoruba artists' ability to conceptualize this spiritual intersection between the male and female genitalia in symbolic terms. They argue that the artists do this by "rendering the pubic area of both women and men as triangles, representing centers of great generative power, and given praise names such as "path to the otherworld", "power concealed", *egun*, or *oba ninu aye* (the ruler of the world)".

#### 4. Conclusion

From the opinion expressed by Pemberton (1977) that "it is when one considers as a whole, as a total system, that one discerns that the total assemblage of the gods [...] expresses in its totality a world view," Shakespeare's female characters can also be fully appreciated, especially with the level of similarities they share with Yoruba female *Orisha* both in character and ritual signification.

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## Notes

1. *Ayajo* is a special genre of Yoruba incantation, which embodies various mythological facts, addressing the origin/etymology and power of people, supernatural forces and/or other things in the Yoruba cosmology. The esoteric nature of the language confers on it a special place in the worldview. Opefeyitimi is of the opinion that "the potency of the use to made of *ayajo* lies in the secrecy of its uncommon knowledge."
2. *Ele*---as some Yoruba scholars have argued by drawing from Ifa verses which support the claim---is the Yoruba original word for the female genitalia, though now corrupted generally to refer to the female species. The Moremi story shows how, through marriage to Olugbo, the king of the Ugbo raiders, who carried out incessant marauding expedition against Ile Ife, the cradle of the race, she is able to learn the "secret" of their seeming invincibility, have them defeated and finally routed from their hideout. Her power stems from the source of her womanhood; her private part. See; Lekan Balogun (2002) *Moremi Ajaasoro*. Lagos: Afrocentric publication.
3. *The International Thesaurus of Quotation* (1970) compiled by Rhoda Thomas. New York: TRIPP Cromwell Publishers.
4. *The International Thesaurus of Quotation* (1970) compiled by Rhoda Thomas. New York: TRIPP Cromwell Publishers.