

**EZEULU: A NŌ PLAY**

**(Based on *The Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe)**

*Waki:* A Government Official  
*Waki Tsure:* His Son  
*Shite:* 1. A Village Elder  
2. Ezeulu

*(A stylised climbing-frame and pumpkin vine stand centre-stage and musicians are seated on folding stools upstage. Waki and Tsure enter, wearing richly coloured, damask agbadas and caps.)*

*Waki.* The silent forests of the east *(Shidai)*  
unnerve me.  
They lead inexorably  
towards an unfamiliar past.  
  
They lead inexorably  
towards an unfamiliar past.

I am a government official on leave with my son, *(Nanori)*  
visiting the scenes of my mother's youth.

The land is rich and fruitful, as *(Michi-yuki)*  
wide and wild  
as the images of her memory.

*Tsure.* The land is rich and fruitful, as  
wide and wild  
as the images of her memory.

*Together.* Giant trees and lush undergrowth  
give way to farmland –  
moist, fresh earth,  
red walled compounds  
with tall carved doors,  
and deep-rooted pumpkin vines.

*(They circle the stage.)*

At the village centre,  
the exposed roots of  
the timeless ogbu tree,  
seat of council  
for generations of elders.  
But, the sky is darkening  
The stark and steady  
lightning flickers.



the god possessed him.  
     Transformed into spirit,  
 he stepped forward,  
     compelling even the four  
 days in the sky  
     to give way to him.

Compelling the four days  
     to give way to him.

*Waki.* My father, what are you saying?  
     Why speak with such passion?  
 When roof and walls fall in,  
     the ceiling is not left standing. *(Mondo)*

*Shite.* Who was Ezeulu to tell the god  
     how to fight against Idemili?  
 He was no more than an arrow in  
     the bow of his god.

*Waki.* I have heard of Ezeulu,  
     who refused the white man's warrant, who  
 spat out the morsel  
     fortune placed in his mouth.

*Shite.* Because of that proud rejection  
     Ezeulu was imprisoned.  
 Two new moons came and went,  
     The sacred yams were not consumed.

*Waki.* The six villages  
     were locked in the old year.  
 Under the earth the yams ripened  
     to be devoured by sun and wind.

*(A chorus of six or eight men enters, wearing deep-coloured 'togas' and carrying goatskins on which they seat themselves, stage-left.)*

*Shite.* Ezeulu was confirmed  
     in his own conceit;  
 some of the others  
     turned to a newer faith.

*(The Waki and Tsure seat themselves on the ground, down-stage right.)*

*Chorus.* 'Go, my son,  
     be my eyes and ears  
 among the white men.  
     Master their knowledge until  
 you can write it  
     with your left hand.  
 If there is something in it,  
     bring back my share.'  
 The world is a masquerade;  
     to see it well  
 you must move *(Sashi)*

from place to place.

*Shite.* The white man is the masked spirit of today. (Uta)  
 People from other places control the great markets.  
 We have no share in his offices.  
 We have no share anywhere.  
 We must leave off dancing and join in the race for the white man's money.  
 Why should Ezeulu refuse the warrant?  
 Why betray us?

With all their power and magic white men could not overrun us (Kuri)

*Chorus.* if we did not help them.  
 The sacred yams went uneaten,  
 Ezeulu refused to alter the ritual.  
 Instead of harvest, famine stalked the land.

*Shite.* Customs can be changed when they work hardship on the people.

*Chorus.* Our fathers freed the children of widows from slavery.  
 We no longer carve our faces like *ozo* doors.

*Shite.* Ezeulu would not relent. (Sashi)  
 The harvest was still-born.  
 His wrath was turned on the enemies of Ulu.  
 Umuaro waited in shocked silence,  
 expecting retribution;  
 a hand stretched out against them.

*Chorus.* A puff-adder suffers every provocation before unlocking its seven fangs one by one. (Kuse)

(*Shite dances.*)

Obika, Ezeulu's son was suddenly struck dead.  
 The flute and song of Umuaro which had supported the priest,

shaking the earth  
     with a multitude of voices  
 and the stamping of countless feet,  
     died away altogether.  
 Shaken and reeling  
     Ezeulu retreated  
 into the haughty splendour  
     of a demented high priest.  
 Old rituals and prayers  
     often forced themselves out  
 in eccentric spurts  
     through the cracks in his mind.

*Shite.* I will not be anybody's  
     Chief but Ulu's.

*Chorus.* O God, who protects and punishes,  
     cleanse our household  
 of all defilement  
     spoken with my mouth,  
 seen with my eyes,  
     heard with my ears,  
 stepped on with my foot,  
     and the defilement of my children, my  
 friends and kinsmen.  
     Let it follow these leaves.

*(Shite throws leaves to the ground.)*

*Shite.* The man who brings home ant  
     infested faggots *(Rongi)*

*Chorus.* cannot complain  
     when he is visited by lizards.

*Shite.* He who uproots  
     the pumpkin vine,

*Chorus.* destroys the homestead  
     and leaves it deserted.

*Shite.* No man, however great,  
     is greater than his people.

*Chorus.* No man ever wins judgement  
     against his clan.

*(The Shite exits and the climbing frame is removed from the stage. The Waki faces the audience.)*

*Waki.* Liquid thunder rumbles, stark, *(Machi-utai)*  
     sudden flashes of  
     lightning follow.  
 A man moves  
     in the obscure darkness.

By the flickering light  
     near the exposed roots  
 of the ogbu tree,  
     he recreates a ritual.  
 It is an apparition,  
     perhaps a vision,  
 A figure  
     out of former times.

*(The Shite bursts on the scene, unmasked and in the vigour of his prime. He wears a rafia skirt and carries both a staff and a rattle. One half of his body is painted white and the other eye is similarly circled. He wears a leather headband with an eagle feather hanging from one side.)*

*Shite.*           The whole people assembled  
                     and chose me  
                     to carry their god.  
 Who was I to carry  
                     fire on my bare head?

He who sends a child  
     to catch a shrew  
 will also give him water  
     to wash his hands.

The *ogene* sounds again,  
     the king of drums salutes me. (*Waka*)

*(He dances.)*

*Chorus.*        He re-enacts  
                     the First Coming of Ulu  
                     and the obstacles  
                     in his way.  
 The first day, Eke –  
                     strong men bite the earth.  
 The second, Oye –  
                     who cooks before another  
                     and has more broken pots.  
                     The third, Afo –  
 the great river  
                     that cannot be salted.  
 The fourth, Nkwo,  
                     was overcome,  
 not appeased,  
                     by Ezeulu –  
 the hunchback,  
                     more terrible than a leper.

He breaks into a run, the (*Kiri*)  
 women set up long, excited  
 ululations,  
     waving bunches of leaves  
 round their heads,

flinging them after him.  
Completing his circle,  
He disappears into the shrine,  
triumphant  
over the sins of Umuaro,  
burying them  
deep in the earth.  
The villagers too,  
have run their circle.  
The leaves, so green,  
so lucent with life,  
are crushed  
and trodden into earth.

Crushed and trodden  
into earth.