Concrescence: Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research

Vol. 3, No. 3, 2026, E-ISSN: 1595-9287

Reflecting Yoruba Sacred History through Playwriting: Myth and Ritual as Dramatic Tools in *Oba Koso*

Olawale Olatunde Iteola
Theatre Arts Department
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso
ooiteola@lautech.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines *Oba Koso* within the support of Yoruba sacred history, focusing on the use of myth and ritual as dramatic tools in playwriting. It investigates how the playwright reconstructs historical reality into a determining and spiritual narrative that reflects Yoruba cosmology, cultural identity, and religious awareness. The central aim is to reveal how myth and ritual, function not merely as cultural elements but as structural plans that shape meaning, characterisation, and dramatic development in the play. The study adopts Myth-Ritual Theory as its theoretical foundation, which explains the interdependence between sacred narratives (myth) and performative acts (ritual). Findings from the study indicate that myth serves as a narrative framework that elevates Sango from a historical Alaafin to a divine figure, thereby transforming Yoruba historical consciousness into sacred mythology. Ritual, on the other hand, operates as performative machinery that drives the dramatic structure and engages both performers and audience in a shared cultural experience. The interaction of these elements creates a holistic theatrical form that blends storytelling, spirituality, and communal participation. The study further reveals that *Oba Koso* reflects a separate African worldview in which tragedy is not final but transformative, as death is reinterpreted as spiritual elevation. It concludes that Yoruba playwriting, as demonstrated in the text, functions as an intermediary for preserving indigenous knowledge systems and sustaining cultural identity. The research affirms that myth and ritual remain essential tools in African drama, ensuring the permanence of Yoruba sacred history through performance.

Keywords: Myth, Ritual, Playwriting, Storytelling, and Performance

1.1 Introduction

The coming together of myth, ritual, and dramatic symbol has remained central to African theatrical traditions, particularly within Yoruba culture, where performance is deeply entrenched in sacred history and cosmology. Yoruba theatre, unlike Western dramatic forms, emerges from a continuum of oral tradition, religious practice, and communal memory, where myth functions not merely as narrative but as a living record of collective identity and spiritual awareness. In this regard, playwriting becomes a medium through which historical experiences, cosmological beliefs, and ritual practices are preserved and re-enacted.

In Yoruba epistemology, myth and ritual are inseparable components of cultural expression. Myths serve as symbolic narratives that explain the origins of the cosmos, the activities of deities (òrìṣà), and the moral structure of society, while rituals function as performative re-

enactments that sustain these beliefs across generations. Scholars argue that Yoruba ritual performances often encode historical sequences and social structures, thereby serving as mnemonic devices for communal history and identity (Peel, 2016; Adeyinka, 2025). This active relationship between myth and ritual provides fertile ground for theatrical creativity, in which drama becomes both a reflection and a continuation of sacred traditions.

The growth of modern Yoruba theatre in the twentieth century, particularly through practitioners such as Duro Ladipo, demonstrates a deliberate artistic engagement with indigenous mythology and ritual forms. Ladipo's works, including *Oba Koso*, exemplify how playwrights adapt sacred narratives into performative texts that retain their ritualistic essence while appealing to contemporary audiences. His theatre draws extensively on Yoruba folklore, music, dance, and religious symbolism, enabling audiences to reconnect with their cultural heritage through dramatic experience (Adeyinka, 2025). This synthesis of myth and performance underscores the role of theatre as both an aesthetic and spiritual practice.

Oba Koso, in particular, is rooted in the mytho-historical narrative of Sango, the deified Alaafin of Oyo, whose transformation into a god exemplifies the fusion of history and mythology in Yoruba thought. The play reconstructs this sacred history through ritualised performance elements such as chants, drumming, dance, and invocation, thereby blurring the boundaries between theatre and religious ceremony. Such dramaturgy aligns with broader African performance traditions, in which the stage functions as a liminal space for interaction between the physical and metaphysical realms.

For that reason, reflecting Yoruba sacred history through playwriting involves more than historical narration; it entails a re-creation of spiritual realities through performative means. In *Oba Koso*, myth and ritual function as both content and method, enabling the dramatist to preserve indigenous knowledge systems while engaging with modern theatrical forms. This study thus situates the play within the broader discourse of African drama, where the convergence of myth, ritual, and performance continues to define the aesthetics and purpose of theatrical expression.

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Ritual Foundations of Yoruba Theatre

Traditional Yoruba theatre has its roots in ritual performances that existed long before the emergence of formal literary drama. Scholars such as Oyin Ogunba (1978), Wole Soyinka (1976; 1979), Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981; 2014), and Philip Adedotun Ogundeji (2000) maintain that performance in Yoruba society developed from sacred ceremonies, festivals, ancestral worship, and communal rites meant to establish a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. Soyinka (1979) explains ritual as a medium that bridges the gulf between the living, the dead, and the unborn. Ogunbiyi (1981) further argues that Yoruba drama evolved from indigenous festivals and ritual celebrations deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology and culture. Supporting this position, Bakare (2020) states that "Yoruba theatre is fundamentally a product of religious and ritualistic practices" (p. 14), thereby affirming that early dramatic performances among the Yoruba were primarily sacred acts rather than mere entertainment

Ritual performances in Yoruba culture are characterised by their communal and participatory nature. Adelugba (2006) observes that "traditional African theatre is not a spectator art but a communal experience in which the audience is actively involved" (p. 27). This participatory structure shaped the evolution of Yoruba theatre, where the boundary

between performer and audience is often fluid. Such interaction reinforces the collective identity of the community and ensures that performance remains a shared cultural activity.

The dramatic elements inherent in ritual practices further support their connection to drama. Enekwe (2012) notes that "ritual contains within it all the basic elements of theatre music, dance, costume, spectacle and audience" (p. 52). These elements transform ritual into a performative act that engages multiple senses, creating an immersive experience. This continuity between ritual and theatre demonstrates how traditional practices provided the foundation for dramatic expression.

The perseverance of ritual elements in modern Yoruba theatre highlights their enduring significance. This indicates that the transition from ritual to theatre did not involve a complete separation but rather an adaptation of sacred practices into new contexts. Ritual continues to influence both the structure and meaning of Yoruba drama. This suggests that ritual remains an active and dynamic component of Yoruba theatre, shaping its development in the twenty-first century.

2.3 Myth as a Medium of Sacred History and Cultural Memory

Myth plays a central role in Yoruba cultural expression, functioning as a repository of sacred history and collective memory. Scholars argue that myths are not merely fictional narratives but symbolic representations of historical and cosmological realities. Barber (2000) asserts that "oral narratives in Yoruba society are central to the construction of social memory" (p. 18). This highlights the importance of myth as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. Through storytelling, these narratives shape individuals' worldviews and reinforce societal norms. This dual function of myth as both history and moral instruction makes it a powerful cultural tool. This dynamic nature allows playwrights to draw on traditional narratives while addressing modern issues, thereby ensuring the continued relevance of myth in dramatic literature. Thus, by incorporating mythological elements, dramatists are able to engage with deeper philosophical questions and cultural concerns, enriching the narrative structure of their works.

2.4 Ritual and Myth as Dramatic Tools in Yoruba Playwriting

The combination of myth and ritual in Yoruba playwriting represents a deliberate artistic strategy that enhances both form and content. Scholars argue that these elements are essential tools for storytelling and cultural expression. Osundare (2010) states that "African literature draws heavily on oral traditions, especially myth, as a source of creative inspiration" (p. 41). This highlights the central role of myth in shaping dramatic narratives.

Ritual, on the other hand, provides a structural framework for dramatic performance. Balogun (2013) explains that "ritual concepts such as Ori influence the structure and thematic concerns of Yoruba drama" (p. 44). This suggests that ritual is embedded within the dramaturgy of the play, guiding both character development and narrative progression.

The artistic contributions of ritual elements are also significant. Adedeji (1978) describes Yoruba theatre as a total theatrical experience in which music, dance, ritual, and drama are inseparable elements of performance. This integration of artistic forms creates a rich and immersive theatrical experience that reflects the enduring influence of indigenous ritual traditions.

2.5 Myth and Ritual in *Oba Koso*: Reconstructing Yoruba Sacred History

Oba Koso serves as a significant example of how myth and ritual can be used to reconstruct Yoruba sacred history within a dramatic framework. The play, which centres on the life and

deification of Sango, illustrates the fusion of historical narrative and mythological interpretation.

The use of ritual performance elements is a defining feature of the play. Music, chant, and dance are integral to its structure, creating an atmosphere that mirrors traditional religious ceremonies. Recent studies continue to emphasise the contemporary relevance of Ọba Kòso. Aluko-Kpotie (2020) argues that the play functions as a cultural memory project through which Yoruba traditions, myths, and indigenous performance practices are preserved for modern audiences. By combining myth and ritual, *Ọba Kòso* demonstrates the enduring power of traditional narratives in contemporary African theatre.

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework

2.5.2 Myth-Ritual Theory

This study is anchored on Myth-Ritual Theory, which provides a suitable framework for analysing the use of myth and ritual as dramatic tools in Yoruba playwriting, particularly in *Oba Koso*. The theory establishes a close relationship between myth (sacred narrative) and ritual (sacred performance), arguing that both are interdependent modes through which societies express, preserve, and transmit cultural and religious meanings. Within the context of Yoruba theatre, this relationship is especially significant, as dramatic performance often emerges directly from ritual enactment and mythological storytelling.

The origins of Myth-Ritual Theory can be traced to early twentieth-century scholars such as James George Frazer, whose work *The Golden Bough* examined the close relationship between myth and ritual in ancient societies. Frazer maintained that myths frequently develop as explanations or narrative expressions of ritual practices, suggesting that rituals enact what myths narrate. This perspective is relevant to Yoruba performance traditions, in which myths about deities such as Sango are brought to life through ritual ceremonies that involve music, dance, and symbolic actions. Thus, myth provides the narrative content, while ritual offers the performative expression.

In Yoruba culture, rituals dedicated to deities often predate written or formalised narratives, indicating that performance serves as the primary medium through which sacred knowledge is communicated. This aligns with the structure of Yoruba drama, where performance elements are central to meaning-making.

Another key contributor to this theoretical framework is Mircea Eliade, who emphasises the concept of sacred time and the re-enactment of myth through ritual. Eliade (1959/2013) argues that ritual allows participants to "return to the mythical time of origins," thereby renewing spiritual and cultural values. This concept is particularly relevant to *Oba Koso*, where the dramatisation of Sango's life and deification can be seen as a re-enactment of sacred history. Through performance, the audience is symbolically transported into a mythic past, reinforcing cultural identity and belief systems.

In addition, the work of Victor Turner provides further insight into the performative nature of ritual. Turner's concept of liminality describes ritual as a transitional phase in which participants move between ordinary and sacred states. He argues that "ritual creates a liminal space where transformation occurs" (Turner, 1969/2017). This idea is applicable to Yoruba theatre, where performances often function as liminal spaces that bridge the human and spiritual realms. In *Oba Koso*, the stage becomes such a space, enabling the transformation of Sango from a historical figure into a divine entity.

Contemporary scholars have also applied Myth-Ritual Theory to African drama, emphasising its relevance to indigenous performance traditions. For instance, Wole

Soyinka, in his exploration of African cosmology, argues that drama serves as a medium for mediating between the living, the dead, and the gods. He suggests that ritual performance in African theatre is not merely symbolic but actively engages with metaphysical realities. This perspective reinforces the idea that Yoruba drama cannot be fully understood without considering its ritual and mythological foundations.

Additionally, modern applications of Myth-Ritual Theory highlight its adaptability to contemporary contexts. Scholars argue that playwrights continue to use myth and ritual as creative tools to address modern issues while preserving cultural heritage. In this sense, the theory provides a framework for analysing how traditional elements are reinterpreted within modern dramatic forms. It allows for an understanding of how *Oba Koso* functions not only as a literary text but also as a performative re-enactment of Yoruba sacred history.

3.1 Textual Analysis of Myth and Ritual as Dramatic Tools in *Oba Koso*

3.2 Invocation of Sango (Opening Ritual Sequence)

The opening movement of *Oba Koso* is structured as a ritual invocation rather than a conventional dramatic exposition, immediately situating the play within a sacred performative tradition. The chant, *"Káwóó Kabíyèsí! Sàngó ọlọ́run kì í sùn!"* ("Hail the King! Sango, the god who never sleeps!"), functions as an incantatory utterance that activates the dramatic space as a spiritual arena. This form of address reflects the Yoruba tradition of *oríkì* (praise poetry), where the identity of a figure is evoked through exalted language. Here, Sango is introduced not merely as a historical king but as a divine presence, thereby collapsing the distinction between history and mythology from the outset.

This incantation also operates as a ritual act that embodies the concept of *àṣẹ*, the performative power of the spoken word in Yoruba cosmology. By calling upon Sango in this manner, the performers symbolically invite his presence into the performance space, transforming the stage into a liminal zone where the human and spiritual realms intersect. The audience, in turn, becomes part of this communal act of reverence, reinforcing the participatory nature of Yoruba performance traditions. Dramatically, this replaces the need for narrative exposition, as the identity and significance of Sango are established through ritual performance rather than descriptive dialogue.

Moreover, this opening sequence demonstrates how myth functions as a living narrative within the play. The assertion that Sango "never sleeps" signifies his omnipresence and eternal vigilance, qualities associated with his status as an orișa. This establishes the tone of the play as one that does not merely recount historical events but re-enacts sacred history through performative means. Thus, the invocation serves as both a narrative and ritual foundation, illustrating how myth and ritual are intertwined as dramatic tools.

3.3 Sango's Assertion of Power

In the early palace scenes, Sango's declaration, *"Èmi ni Sàngó, ẹni tí iná ń bẹ l'ẹnu rẹ̀!"* ("I am Sango, the one who carries fire in his mouth!"), functions as a powerful assertion of identity that blends historical authority with mythological symbolism. The imagery of fire is central to Sango's character, representing his association with thunder and lightning in Yoruba cosmology. Through this statement, Sango is positioned not only as a political ruler but as a figure endowed with supernatural power, thereby reinforcing the mythic dimension of his identity.

This statement also exemplifies the ritual significance of speech within Yoruba culture. In this context, Sango's words are not merely descriptive but performative, actively reinforcing his power and authority. The act of self-naming becomes a ritual affirmation,

aligning with the belief that language possesses the capacity to shape reality. As such, this moment highlights the integration of ritual practice into dramatic dialogue, where speech functions as both narrative and action.

From a dramaturgical perspective, the assertion of power foreshadows the tragic trajectory of the character. The emphasis on Sango's extraordinary abilities suggests an imbalance that ultimately leads to his downfall. This reflects a common pattern in mythological narratives, where figures endowed with divine attributes face consequences for their excesses. The play thus employs myth as a structural device to shape character development and thematic progression.

In terms of sacred history, this moment illustrates the process of mythologisation, where a historical figure is transformed into a symbol of cosmic power. By presenting Sango in this manner, the play elevates his story beyond the realm of ordinary history, embedding it within a broader cosmological framework. This reinforces the role of myth as a means of interpreting and preserving cultural memory.

3.4 Crisis and Catastrophe

The climactic scene of destruction, marked by the exclamation *"Iná! Iná ń jó! Ilé ń bàjẹ́!"* ("Fire! Fire is burning! The palace is in ruins!"), represents the convergence of myth and ritual in the depiction of catastrophe. The imagery of fire serves as both a literal and symbolic representation of Sango's power, illustrating its destructive potential when uncontrolled. In Yoruba mythology, Sango's association with lightning embodies both creation and destruction, and this scene dramatises that duality with intense theatrical effect.

Ritually, the use of fire in this context reflects its significance as a transformative element within Yoruba religious practices. Fire is often associated with purification and renewal, suggesting that the destruction depicted in the play is not merely an end but a transition. This aligns with ritual processes that involve symbolic death and rebirth, indicating that Sango's downfall is part of a larger transformative cycle.

Dramatically, the scene functions as the turning point of the narrative, where the consequences of Sango's actions become fully realised. The collective nature of the exclamations emphasises the communal impact of the incident, reinforcing the idea that the ruler's actions affect the entire society. This communal dimension is a key feature of Yoruba theatre, where individual experiences are closely tied to collective identity.

In reconstructing sacred history, the play reframes what might be understood as a historical crisis within a mythological context. The destruction of the palace is not presented as a mere political failure but as a manifestation of divine forces at work. This transformation of historical events into mythic narratives illustrates how Yoruba culture preserves and interprets its past through symbolic and ritualised storytelling.

3.5 Deification of Sango (Final Ritual Transformation)

The concluding sequence of the play, encapsulated in the declaration *"Oba kò s'ó! Sàngó di ọlọ́run!"* ("The king did not hang! Sango has become a god!"), represents the culmination of the mytho-ritual process. This statement directly reflects the Yoruba reinterpretation of Sango's death, transforming it into a narrative of divine ascension. The denial of his death serves to preserve his dignity and authority, recasting him as an immortal figure within the cultural imagination.

This moment functions as a ritual affirmation, akin to communal chants used in religious ceremonies. The collective proclamation reinforces the legitimacy of Sango's

transformation, demonstrating how sacred history is constructed through shared belief and performance. The audience, as participants in this ritual, becomes actively involved in the process of myth-making, further blurring the boundary between performance and reality.

From a dramatic perspective, this transformation resolves the tension between tragedy and transcendence. Unlike Western tragic forms that emphasise finality, the play presents Sango's downfall as a transition into a higher state of existence. This reflects an African tragic vision in which death is not an end but a continuation within the spiritual realm.

This final sequence encapsulates the central theme of the play: the reconstruction of Yoruba sacred history through myth and ritual. By transforming a historical event into a mythic narrative enacted through ritual performance, *Oba Koso* demonstrates the enduring power of traditional storytelling. The play thus serves as a medium through which cultural identity, spiritual belief, and historical memory are preserved and reinterpreted.

3.6 Consultation with the Diviner (Ritual Mediation and Fate)

In another significant moment in *Oba Koso*, Sango is presented in consultation with a diviner, a scene often rendered through utterances such as: *"Ifá ló mọ̀ ònà; ẹni tí kò bá gbọ́, yóò ṣubú."* (Ifa knows the way; whoever refuses to heed it will fall.)

This statement foregrounds the importance of divination as a ritual practice within Yoruba cosmology. The reference to Ifa, the deity of wisdom and divination, introduces a spiritual authority that surpasses human power. Within the dramatic context, the consultation scene functions as a ritual intervention, offering guidance and warning to the protagonist. It reinforces the idea that human actions are subject to metaphysical laws, and that failure to observe these laws leads to consequences.

From a mythic standpoint, this moment situates Sango within a larger cosmological order. He is no longer merely a ruler exercising political authority but a figure whose destiny is intertwined with divine will. The warning embedded in the statement foreshadows the impending tragedy, thereby contributing to the structural development of the narrative. Myth here operates as a framework that connects individual actions to universal principles.

Ritually, the act of consultation itself is significant. It reflects a traditional practice in which individuals seek guidance from spiritual intermediaries before undertaking important decisions. The inclusion of this practice in the play demonstrates how ritual is integrated into the dramatic structure, serving both as a narrative device and as a reflection of cultural reality.

In terms of Yoruba sacred history, this scene illustrates how historical events are interpreted through spiritual frameworks. The downfall of Sango is not presented as a случай of personal failure alone but as the result of disregarding divine counsel. This reinforces the role of ritual and myth in shaping the interpretation of historical experiences.

3.7 Invocation of Thunder (Manifestation of Divine Power)

A recurrent motif in the play is the invocation of thunder, often expressed in chants such as: *"Sàngó ń bọ̀! Kí gbogbo ayé mọ̀ pé ọlọ́run dé!"* ("Sango is coming! Let the whole world know that the god has arrived!"). This chant represents the manifestation of divine presence through ritual performance. The announcement of Sango's arrival transforms the dramatic space into a site of spiritual encounter, where the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical worlds are dissolved. The use of collective voice in this chant underscores the communal nature of ritual, as the community participates in acknowledging the presence of the deity. Mythically, this moment reinforces Sango's identity as a god associated with

thunder and lightning. The dramatic invocation of his presence serves to actualise the myth within the performance, allowing the audience to experience the narrative as a living reality rather than a distant story. This aligns with the Yoruba understanding of myth as something that is continuously re-enacted rather than merely remembered.

From a dramaturgical perspective, the chant functions as both a narrative and atmospheric device. It heightens tension and prepares the audience for significant developments in the plot. The repetition and rhythm of the chant contribute to its ritualistic quality, creating an immersive theatrical experience. In reconstructing sacred history, this scene demonstrates how myth is enacted through ritual performance. The arrival of Sango is not simply narrated but performed, reinforcing the idea that Yoruba history is preserved through embodied practices. This highlights the role of theatre as a medium for sustaining cultural memory.

3.8 Lamentation of the Wives (Ritual Expression of Loss)

Following the catastrophe, the lamentation of Sango's wives introduces another dimension of ritual performance. This is often expressed in dirge-like utterances such as: *"Ọba wa ti lọ! Ta ni yóò dá wa l'áàbò?"* ("Our king is gone! Who will protect us?"). This lament functions as a ritual expression of grief, reflecting traditional mourning practices in Yoruba culture. The use of collective lamentation emphasises the communal impact of Sango's fall, highlighting the interconnectedness of individual and societal experiences. Through this, the play captures the emotional and cultural significance of loss. Mythically, the lament also serves to elevate the event beyond personal tragedy. The loss of Sango is not merely the death of a king but a disruption of cosmic order. This interpretation aligns with Yoruba cosmology, where rulers are seen as intermediaries between the human and spiritual realms. Their fall therefore has broader implications for the community.

Ritually, lamentation is a performative act that facilitates the transition between life and death. It allows the community to process grief while also acknowledging the continuity of existence beyond the physical realm. By incorporating this practice into the play, the dramatist reinforces the ritual dimension of the narrative. In terms of sacred history, the lamentation contributes to the process of myth-making. By expressing grief in ritualised form, the community participates in transforming the historical event into a shared cultural memory. This demonstrates how emotional expression and ritual performance work together to preserve and reinterpret the past.

3.9 Final Acclamation and Collective Memory

The concluding acclamation, often rendered as: *"Sàngó ò kú! Ó wà láàyè!"* ("Sango did not die! He is alive!"), serves as a powerful affirmation of Sango's enduring presence. This declaration encapsulates the core mythic transformation within the play, where death is reinterpreted as continuity. The insistence that Sango remains alive reflects the Yoruba belief in the immortality of significant figures, particularly those who attain divine status. This transforms the narrative from one of tragedy to one of transcendence.

Ritually, this acclamation functions as a collective affirmation that reinforces communal belief. The repetition of the statement mirrors practices found in religious ceremonies, where declarations are used to solidify shared understanding. Through this, the audience becomes actively involved in sustaining the myth.

From a dramatic perspective, the acclamation provides closure while simultaneously opening the narrative to continuity. It resolves the tension created by the earlier catastrophe, offering a reinterpretation that aligns with cultural values. This reflects a distinctly African approach to tragedy, where endings are not final but transformative. This

moment illustrates how Yoruba sacred history is constructed through performance. The collective affirmation ensures that Sango's story is preserved not as a fixed historical account but as a living tradition that continues to evolve. Through myth and ritual, the play achieves its purpose of sustaining cultural identity and spiritual belief.

Across these dramatic moments, *Oba Koso* illustrates how myth and ritual function as fundamental tools in the representation of Yoruba sacred history. Myth provides the narrative structure that elevates Sango's story from historical account to sacred legend, while ritual offers the performative framework through which this transformation is realised. The integration of chants, symbolic language, and communal participation ensures that the play operates not merely as a literary text but as a living cultural performance.

Through this fusion, the play demonstrates that Yoruba sacred history is not fixed but continually re-enacted and reinterpreted. The use of myth and ritual allows for a dynamic engagement with the past, enabling each performance to renew and sustain cultural values. In this way, *Oba Koso* exemplifies the role of theatre as a powerful medium for preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring their relevance in both traditional and contemporary contexts. *Oba Koso* operates within a framework where myth and ritual are inseparable from dramatic expression. Each scene reveals how spoken words, chants, and performative acts function as vehicles for conveying deeper cultural meanings. The play does not rely on linear narration but on symbolic and ritualised action, through which history is continually reinterpreted.

By embedding myth within ritual performance, the dramatist transforms historical events into sacred narratives that resonate with the audience. This approach ensures that Yoruba sacred history remains dynamic and relevant, capable of addressing both traditional and contemporary concerns. In this way, *Oba Koso* exemplifies the enduring power of playwriting as a medium for cultural preservation and spiritual expression.

4.1 Findings

The analysis of *Oba Koso* reveals that myth and ritual are not peripheral elements but constituting the core structural and thematic foundations of the play. The dramatic narrative is constructed through ritualised sequences such as invocations, chants, divination, lamentation, and collective acclamations, all of which function as performative acts rather than ordinary dialogue. These elements establish the stage as a sacred space, thereby transforming the play from mere theatrical entertainment into a cultural and spiritual re-enactment.

It is also evident that myth operates as a vehicle for reconstructing Yoruba sacred history. The transformation of Sango from a historical Alaafin into a deified figure demonstrates the process of mythologisation, where historical events are reinterpreted within a cosmological framework. The play does not present history as a fixed record but as a fluid narrative shaped by communal belief and ritual performance. Through this, the boundary between history and mythology is effectively dissolved.

Furthermore, ritual serves as a dramaturgical tool that drives the progression of the narrative. Key moments in the play, such as the consultation with the diviner, the invocation of thunder, and the final acclamation, are structured as ritual acts that influence character development and plot direction. These ritual processes reflect Yoruba epistemology, where human actions are understood in relation to spiritual forces and metaphysical laws.

Another significant finding is the communal nature of performance in the play. The audience is not positioned as passive observers but as participants in a shared cultural

experience. Through collective chants, responses, and emotional engagement, the performance reinforces social cohesion and cultural identity. This participatory structure underscores the role of theatre as a medium for communal expression and continuity.

Finally, the study reveals that the play embodies a distinct African tragic vision, where catastrophe is not an end but a transition. The apparent downfall of Sango is reinterpreted as a process of transformation and elevation into divinity. This reflects a worldview in which death and loss are integrated into a broader cycle of continuity, thereby reinforcing spiritual and cultural resilience.

4.2 Conclusion

This study has established that *Oba Koso* effectively reflects Yoruba sacred history through the strategic use of myth and ritual as dramatic tools. By integrating traditional performance elements such as chants, invocations, and symbolic actions, the play transcends the boundaries of conventional drama and becomes a medium for the preservation and re-enactment of cultural memory. Myth provides the narrative framework that elevates historical events into sacred narratives, while ritual supplies the performative structure through which these narratives are actualised.

The play also highlights the dynamic nature of Yoruba sacred history, showing that it is not a static record but a living tradition continually shaped by performance and communal interpretation. Through the process of mythologisation, the historical figure of Sango is transformed into a symbol of divine power and cultural identity. This transformation underscores the role of theatre as a space where history, spirituality, and artistic expression converge.

Moreover, the study affirms that Yoruba theatre operates within a holistic framework that integrates aesthetic, religious, and social functions. The use of ritual not only enhances the dramatic experience but also reinforces the spiritual significance of the narrative. In this way, *Oba Koso* exemplifies how indigenous performance traditions can be adapted into written drama without losing their cultural essence.

In conclusion, the enduring relevance of *Oba Koso* lies in its ability to sustain and transmit Yoruba sacred history through performative means. The interplay of myth and ritual ensures that the narrative remains meaningful across generations, serving both as a cultural archive and as a living expression of identity. Consequently, the play stands as a significant contribution to African drama, demonstrating the power of playwriting as a tool for cultural preservation and spiritual continuity.

References

Adedeji, J. A. (1969). The Alarinjo theatre: A study of the Yoruba travelling theatre in Nigeria. *African Notes, 6*(1), 70–89.

Adedeji, J. A. (1969). *The Alárìnjó theatre: The study of a Yoruba theatrical art from its earliest beginnings to the present times* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ibadan). University of Ibadan Institutional Repository. University of Ibadan Repository

Adelugba, D. (2006). *Theatre and audience in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited.

Aluko-Kpotie, B. (2020). Ọba Kòso: A fixed cultural memory project in a changing world. *African Identities, 18* (4), 491–503. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1779657

Bakare, B. A. (2020). The Yoruba theatre from religious and ritualistic perspectives. *Ibadan Journal of Theatre Arts, 6*(1), 12–24.

Balogun, L. (2013). Ori, ritual and Yoruba drama of existence. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 17*(1), 42–47.

Barber, K. (2000). *The generation of plays: Yoruba popular life in theatre*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Beier, U. (1968). *The return of the gods: The sacred art of Susanne Wenger*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Eliade, M. (2013). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace. (Original work published 1959)

Enekwe, O. O. (2012). *Essays in African theatre*. Enugu, Nigeria: ABIC Books.

Frazer, J. G. (2009). *The golden bough: A study in magic and religion* (Reprint ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1890)

Harrison, J. E. (2012). *Themis: A study of the social origins of Greek religion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ibitokun, B. M. (1995). *African drama and the Yoruba worldview*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Kraft Books Limited.

Izevbaye, D. S. (2011). Living the myth: Revisiting Okigbo's art and commitment. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde, 48*(1), 92–104.

Ladipo, D. (1964). *Three Yoruba plays: Oba Koso, Oba Moro, Oba Waja* (U. Beier, Trans.). Ibadan, Nigeria: Mbari Publications.

Ogunba, O. (1978). *The movement of transition: A study of the plays of Wole Soyinka*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press.

Ogunbiyi, Y. (Ed.). (1981). *Drama and theatre in Nigeria: A critical source book*. Lagos, Nigeria: Nigeria Magazine.

Ogunbiyi, Y. (2014). *Nigerian theatre and drama: A critical profile*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Kraft Books Limited.

Ogundeji, P. A. (2000). Ritual and performance aesthetics in Yoruba theatrical traditions. *African Study Monographs, 21*(2), 45–58.

Osofisan, F. (2001). *Playing dangerously: Drama at the frontiers of terror in a "postcolonial" state*. Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan Press.

Osundare, N. (2010). *Literature and cultural memory in Africa*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications.

Peel, J. D. Y. (2000). *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Soyinka, W. (1976). *Myth, literature and the African world*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Soyinka, W. (1979). *Opera Wonyosi*. London, England: Rex Collings.

Turner, V. (2017). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction. (Original work published 1969)

Turner, V. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. New York, NY: PAJ Publications.