


Frye's Thought and Its Implications for the Interpretation of Nigerian Narratives

Ignatius Chukwumah
Federal University Wukari

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Chukwumah, Ignatius. "Frye's Thought and Its Implications for the Interpretation of Nigerian Narratives." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15.1 (2013): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2061>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 771 times as of 11/07/19.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 15 Issue 1 (March 2013) Article 11
Ignatius Chukwumah,
"Frye's Thought and Its Implications for the Interpretation of Nigerian Narratives"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss1/11>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 15.1 (2013)**
Thematic Cluster **Black African Literatures and Cultures**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss1/>>

Abstract: In his article "Frye's Thought and Its Implications for the Interpretation of Nigerian Narratives" Ignatius Chukwumah applies Northrop Frye's theoretical work on archetypes, mythos, and modes for the analysis of Nigerian literature. Chukwumah's application in the interpretation of Nigerian literature results in the understanding that the hero as conceived by Frye is not exactly the same with Africa's or Nigeria's and requires that scholars and critics of African texts fill up the ellipses generated by Frye with an autochthonous, resistant, rewarding, African-related symbolic templates in order to make the sense of the hero in both traditional and postcolonial African/Nigerian literatures in a manner that is somewhat substitutive, but mainly complementary. It is hoped that helpful inferences could be drawn from here to the advantage of the Nigerian literary tradition in particular and African literature in general.

Ignatius CHUKWUMAH

Frye's Thought and Its Implications for the Interpretation of Nigerian Narratives

Using the concept of the central hero, Northrop Frye developed a tier of five literary mimetic modes: the mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic modes. The last category exhibits traces of the first forming a cycle of modes. In the first three modes the hero's ability is the consequence of or influenced by the triadic relationship between what he can do, superiority over his environment, and the consequential likeness or relationship to other men. All of these bear on the structure, the mythos of the work: "Of all images in literature, the most important are characters, the personalities that do most to mediate between the author and his public" (*Words with Power* 71). A criterion of the third mode is that if the central character is "superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 33-34). In Frye's schemata the structure of imagery initiated by the central character is one way by which cosmology infiltrates narratives. This imagery is not entirely universal without first, and enduringly too, being particular, taking Africa, especially the Nigerian symbolic template, as the structure for sense-making by the character in these works and which scholars should identify. In Nigeria, three main tribal nations are of great importance: the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa. The Igbo and Yoruba cosmologies on account of their richness and pervading influence in modern Nigerian literature as against the Hausa form the basic cosmologies necessary for representing the African symbolic template. The Igbo hold that "whatever has a beginning will have an end (Ezikeojiaku 38) and it therefore prescribes "what the Igbo ought to do and what they ought not to do ... what they actually do as manifested in their overt and covert behavior" such as ethical beliefs and practices, morals, norms and taboos, respect for constituted authorities (Ezikeojiaku 38). The Igbo believe that two worlds are comprised in the universe, with each — the visible and supersensible world — interacting with the other (Ezikeojiaku 38). While the first consists of natural phenomenon, the latter has the spirit world: God, deities, malignant spirits, ancestral spirits. In spite of these seemingly lucid identifications, there is no clearcut demarcation between both worlds.

The Yoruba connect to other gods — *orishas* (very many of them) — through their spirits in an ultimate quest to link up to their creator, Olorun, while holding the same view of inseparability of the presence of spirit forces amongst the living as the Igbo believe. The spirits as embodying trans-spatial capabilities is also held as a belief amongst the Hausa. The belief system of these groups could be summed up that there are gods. These gods through whom the Great God must be worshipped are intermediaries while the Great God is the author of birth and death and the spiritual and the physical. Both the spiritual and physical coexist with the living who, one day, in the course of time, would become the spiritual ancestor. These imbue the Yoruba and Igbo with many symbols with which they make sense of the world. Moreover, there is neither "hell" nor "heaven": all there is is where the creator is, a place where all humans came from and to which all humans must return. Life, simply, is a continuum where a child may have been with spirits, before he was born but when he is born he forgets all about it (see Olupona). However, that religion as cosmology has great impact on the structural formation of a narrative "constituted by two basic elements, the action and the agent" (Akwanya 144). It is in this light that Kwame Anthony Appiah asserts that "the drama in Oyo [in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*] is driven ultimately by the logic of Yoruba cosmology" (78). Appiah does not seem to mean that cosmology is recoverable from literature and we can only infer that it is the creative radix and imaginative model that lap and sustain the narrative images and imagery, which, in turn are helped in configuring the hero to size, the size that is peculiar to African or particular to Nigerian narratives. Nevertheless, if we take this cosmology as a literary form in agreement with Frye we come close to glimpsing at the overwhelming impact of this cosmology on the various structures of society, including literature, where it is clearly manifest at some submerged depth.

The summed feature of the two worldviews of the major tribal nations in Nigeria, as symbolically reified in literature, is that there is life after death. This life is neither heaven nor hell, neither Hades nor Tartarus, but just somewhere, referred, sometimes, in Yoruba as "heaven" as in Daniel Fagunwa's

The Forest of a Thousand Daemons, "deads' Town" as in Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* or some others, which differ from the Christian heaven in that in literature it is reachable on foot or by turning into a stone as is the case with Oduduwa, where live God and a people's ancestors whose influences are over those alive. Of course, this is reductive considering that many differentiating peculiarities pertaining to these cosmologies as regard the place of life after death are obvious enough (its reachability appears to bear the import of synchrony and intermingling of the worlds of the living and the dead). However, a reduction to a few major principles or features serves as an advantage given that it is from these beliefs from which the various responses emanate and upon which is those disparate and contrasting elements hinge in the Yoruba and Igbo cosmologies (on Yoruba religion, see, e.g., Awolalu; Lucas). In other words, whether it is in worshipping of deities or in setting up of those deities in the first instance, be they natural or closely aligned to natural elements or valor, hard work, love for one another, morality, or honoring of ancestors with myths originated to accentuate or give credence to these, both Yoruba and Igbo cosmologies are gripped in the fact of the Igbo maxim: "whatever has a beginning will have an end" (Ezikeojiaku 37): whoever was born into this world and is alive would definitely be looking forward to that final day when his/her life — which consisted of his/her cohabiting with spirits under the watch and care of the dead (ancestors) — would be put to an end. Every activity is therefore geared towards responding to these two events. These cosmologies influence the generation of myths with symbols that are specific to the group to whom these cosmologies pertain.

By the time myth and literature pick up from here, these autochthonous cosmologies having acquired and shown forth the above basic principles of cosmology as hindsight through myths — especially with respect to the first to third mimetic modes — they are no longer the myth and literature which are innocent of past overlays and are subject to the influence of Western cosmology which scholars could easily trace out as having been absolved. And they are no more myth and literature which are free from autochthonous African and Nigerian cosmologies in all their ramifications even with respect to the concept of the hero and *mythoi* as structures of imagery. Here, we are in the realm of the hero with its African template of signification, the symbolic template of meaning requiring critical attention.

The hero in African literature resists greatly this relapse and qualifies best to be read against the symbolic formatives informing Africa's myths whereby these myths having been supplied by their cosmology. Here comes the problem arising from the blind lifting of Frye's theoretical category of the hero of the first and second modes and the application of same in the interpretation of African and Nigerian literary works without first on the part of critics of these works projecting backwards and to examine carefully in the first and second mimetic modes of the Nigerian literary tradition whether the hero could be identified and, if yes, how is he/she constituted and what practical interpretive benefits he/she stands to offer if he/she is used in schematizing the modes of this literary tradition. In Nigerian tales the cosmology influencing them is very clear and almost always easy to point at and out: that is, one thing collocates with the other and, therefore, correlates to another, as the symbols of evil and good play out themselves. A case in point is Akpu, a character in "Why Men Die" (Okereke 27-32) whose lack of restraint and indiscretion is responsible for his inability to escape from the wicked fairy's charm of death. Similarly, discretion resulting to Mgbechi's kindness, humility, and truthfulness which is what makes her pass the old child-giving fairy's test while working in her farm in the forest, a thing, Obidiya, with opposite qualities of character, assaying to do and prodded by the success of Mgbechi meets with failure, disgrace, and eventual dismissal from her matrimonial home. Discretion is a symbol of good as indiscretion and brings about deleterious consequences to both Akpu and Mgbechi. Through what happens to the heroine, an influencing worldview of this tale is the moral necessary for community building: the avoidance of jealousy in polygamous families and upholding of good neighborliness in a family unit. It is a common feature in Africa and its literature, like Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims* (1970). Mgbechi, the first wife has an unrepentant attitude of envy, a case of intransigence in holding on to her envy. The code of morality is very well grounded symbolic structure in the cosmological make up of the Igbo of Nigeria, which views the world as consisting men and spirits as supported by the fairy woman's presence in this tale.

The entire community of the poor fisherman in Amina Adams's "The Fisherman and His Wife" is punished with a plague when the king is bent on keeping the fisherman's wife, the beautiful mermaid who chooses to be the wife of a deprived fisher and with whom the fisher has found favor and by whom he has been made rich. This tale feeds from and lives off the superstition or belief held by traditional Nigerians that the mermaid is marriageable and able to make a man or any person so liked rich. In this belief, therefore, she cuts of the image or the symbol of wealth, which is a good thing. But there is another side to this symbol, that of nemesian punishment of the wrongdoer: the hostage-taking king and the entire community. One of the councilors has said: "I think we are being punished because you took another man's wife for yourself" (Adams 11). The symbol is specifically African. Intransigence in holding on to his greed makes the hunter who through the benevolence of a magic antelope and in exchange for saving its life becomes rich to eventually become poorer than he was before he met the antelope, the spirit of the forest in "The Hunter and the Antelope" (Adams 41-50). Three times, he asks whatever he wishes a very big farm, five hundred bags of gold, and to be one of the chiefs of the town, and these three times, he is granted them. But at the fourth when he comes with his threat to kill the antelope as he is wont to do unless he is made the king of the entire town, he is told: "You are a foolish, greedy and wicked man ... You'll never be king! ... Nobody can kill me; I am the spirit of the forest. And I will punish you for your greed. From now on, you will be poorer than you were" (50). The above two instances where the symbols of good also embody alternate quality of evil by which victims are punished are specifically African. This same hero is found in Omelumma and Omelukpagham, characters who are punished by being enslaved for disobeying their parents in the days of slave raids after neglecting to take precautions that would have saved them torture and kidnap in "Omelumma and Omelukpagham" (see Inyiama; Ndubueze).

Let us take "The Proud Girl and the Devil" as another instance (Ohiaeri 88-93). She suffers for being conceited because of her beauty after rejecting many worthy suitors until the country of the devils gets wind of her high-headedness and decides to send one of their own. Again, it is almost the same heroine that obtains in the Yoruba "The Leopard Man"; only that in the present case the strange suitor who eventually finds favor in the hands of the maid is a devil and not a leopard-turned-man. In "The Proud Girl and the Devil" while Adamma — meaning "queen of beauty" in Igbo — is rescued, her type in other tales are not being so lucky going through their ordeals until they finally die. The "far country" where the devils live is near enough for the notoriety of Adamma to get to. Hence, with all their abnormal natures once the devil-suitor is chosen he sets about to appear in bodily form human enough to be believed, liked, and loved by Adamma by borrowing complementary body organs from humans/devils. The symbol of evil is conceit and the ultimate code of this tale is to warn every conceited young woman to be careful because the possibility of marrying a devil and his clan as a punishment for being conceited still lurks. Again, men in "Why the Sky is Far Above the Earth" (Ehiede 11-12) need not toil before they eat. Cutting a piece from the sky and cooking it to make a meal was all that was needed but the intransigence that borders on greed changed all that. We are told that "From that day forth, all men were doomed to perpetual toil" (Ehiede 11) with greed representing the symbol of sin, evil, worthy of attracting unending punishment from God. Not only is that this man would appear to suffer what others are going through after offending God, he has brought pain to those who know nothing about it. Intransigence in covetousness, a situation manifested in Adams's "The Hunter and the Antelope" and "The Fisherman and His Wife" is what yokes this Yoruba tale with Odudúwa as anchoring point (see Wyndham). In these narratives, the cohabitation of both the natural and the unnatural with regard to the punishment for breaking the codes given by a superior being is clear enough. God, the superior being in this occasion is the one who created our world and his abode as deployed by the Yoruba myths. "The man" is the resurfaced image of Odudúwa, whose intransigence, in like manner, brings suffering to the world of men. Similarly, since there is no hell, any offender must suffer his punishment here in this world, the world of men, in form of toil, a symbol of evil that is viewed by African cosmology as *karmic*. That there is life hereafter — which is neither heaven nor hell, but a distinct place, which may be called the "vaults of heaven" where God and the ancestors are — does not deprive their access to this world of nature as we find in the questers of Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. One of them, Akara-Ogun says that "it can hardly be regarded as a place on earth, because the dwellers of Langbodo hear, in the most distinct notes, the

crowding of cocks from the heavenly vault" (72). Here, the vault of heaven is neither the "heaven" Frye had in mind nor the Judaeo-Christian tradition kind because in this heaven there are cocks and they crow.

In the above cases, superhuman characters for whom the laws of nature are suspended, as Frye theorized, are manifest, but by way of images of good, evil, beliefs about heaven, God, punishment, and what should constitute these as different from what these are in Western cosmological parlance, have the cosmologies autochthonous to the African worldview helped in positing African characters as heroes. The intransigence visible in Odudúwa's and Ogun's cases stands in great contrast to Prometheus. The hero exhibiting intransigence is not far from operating a universal model, yet Prometheus, like most heroes in Western literary traditions seem to differ — with respect to particular details and informing symbolic processes — from those found in the African literary tradition. Prometheus is just one hero out of many in the Western literary tradition and his intransigence differs because of his empathy for humans which leads him to offend Zeus and the whole lot of the gods of the Greek Pantheon unlike Odudúwa who lacks it, but yet exhibits intransigence. It is such that Prometheus can hardly be mentioned without mentioning the other gods with whom he relates and interrelates. Again, he differs from Odudúwa in that the punishment occasioned by Oduduwa's deed is not only borne by himself alone but he also shifts same to other gods and men who would, consequently, grope in ignorance without access to the withheld bag of lore. The "gift of fire" but not of "lore" is the symbol of generosity and enhancement of living, having occupied an uppermost place in the thinking of the Greeks, while lore is of corresponding symbolic value to the Yoruba. With these situations of contrast under the operation of a common principle of trying to help/unhelp, it sounds reasonable to point out and pin these other African mythic heroes' — Odudúwa's and Ogun's — intransigence against the symbolic framework autochthonous to Africa in that their heroic status happen to really and fully emerge from it. That both are Arámfè's (Yoruba god of thunder and father of the gods) children — the first, child and the second, grandchild — whose progeny are still alive today in one long stretch of continuous history and existence should not miss our attention, as well.

With this kind of an influenceable hero operating under the same principle it is no wonder that some realistic works contain traces of the first two mimetic modes, the heroes of which are either directly or somewhat imperceptibly deciphered in works, with Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and most of his corpus and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, as examples. If one comes down lower to the high mimetic category within the same genre of narrative and convention of tragedy where the major character is a leader or is a member of a leading caucus having authority, according to Frye what is noticed is that the hero loses his first time intelligibility and apparentness as is the case in *The Interpreters*. It requires some labor and the upturning of some clods for meaning to be recuperated because all the while it has been fleshed out by plausible adaptations in terms of characters, settings, and so on. In this high mimetic mode, one's understanding takes into consideration two truthful but paradoxical positions: the sketches of the hero with a specific Nigerian symbolic template are noticeable and, in the same vein, in the Nigerian literary tradition heroes who fade off into universal structures of meaning, especially, into the Western Judaeo-Christian traditional symbolic template can also be found. Works where the first statement holds true are: Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and some others, while Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, A Man of the People, Okpewho's *Tides*, and many others including the greater part of the Nigerian literary tradition of the second and contemporary generation of authors and their works.

Take, as a case in point, the structure of intransigence of Odudúwa, and thereafter, of Ogun which is discoverable as noticeable outlines in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* in the hero Egbo. Even when the latter is recognizably human and not a god he yet supports the first statement of the above paradox. Reasons for reaching the above conclusion are obvious. Egbo is a modern man, much more modern than, say, the Elesin Oba of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. While Egbo is under the tight grip of a segment of Yoruba cosmology, the Ogun myth, Elesin Oba is under the motivation of the fulcrum of the Yoruba cosmology, namely the belief that life after death and what determines better life over there is rooted in this world. Egbo's survival from the water accident is attributed by

rescuers to his "stronga head," a cryptic way of referring to strong and resilient spirit or head articulated in pidgin English: "a stronga-head; for him it was always a term for the stubborn child, and Egbo felt resentful at his helplessness. They said it too when he was rescued — they, the world of grown-ups, of strangers, of wise humanity — they pronounced it as they saved him from the water, fully conscious; this one they said, has a strong head" (Soyinka, *Myth, Literature* 14). The narrator confirms that the "restless spirit" continues to make him change hands for he is not ready to be a conformist to the rules of adult world despite he not being a misanthrope. He is a kind man, he loves palm wine and in a somewhat ritual of deflowering a virgin at Ilugun, in the heat of pleasure, typical of an Ogun, there arises pain, a remote indication of the mythical Ogun who dishes out pleasure by kind deeds and pain by way of killing his own in a drunken confused daze.

As if what has been hidden needed to be unraveled within the text, Egbo makes reference to Ogun's image as Kola represents him in "The Pantheon": "Egbo took his eyes away from what he really wanted to see, his own presence in the overpowering canvas. ... Look at that thing he has made of me for instance, a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo. Is that supposed to be me? Or even Ogun, which I presume it represents? ... He has taken one single myth, Ogun at his drunkenest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage" (Soyinka, *The Interpreters* 234-35). Within these few but vital references, one of the major heroes in *The Interpreters*, Egbo, exhibits the archetypal traits of Ogun, that of restlessness in spirit that sometimes becomes untamable as he crushes friends and foes. It is on this basis of this paradox, an essentially African image or symbol of creative destructiveness which also combines with intransigence that many other heroes in the Nigerian narratives could have illumination shed on. For instance, the discussion of Egbo as a major character cannot be complete without listing out other imagistic elements that relates him to Ogun myth and without also outlining its influence in the Nigerian literary tradition.

With related hints of the first and second modes available in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* what seems to be similar to intransigence in Ogun's case is taken to be lack of patience, a curt and brusque attitude towards less successful men by Okonkwo, a character that is almost two generations before Egbo in *The Interpreters* and a generation before Elesin Oba in another of Soyinka's work, *Death and the King's Horseman*. Besides brusqueness, he is a diehard goal-getter who, when prodded with a made up mind that has resolved to hold on to sound logic, cannot be restrained by anyone. In this, in addition, is the connection Okonkwo has with both Odudúwa and Ogun, and indeed, with many of his likes in the African literary traditions in terms of positing the universal figural image of intransigence, but with peculiar African symbolic template that brings out the scope of meaning of actions posited by him. Much as Okonkwo enables himself to be approximated to Ogun going by the 'creative-destructive principle' he exhibits through which he also helps to put forward the symbolic template deeply resident in the Igbo cosmology, he aids the offer of surplus opportunities for interpreting and seeing him in different light, different from the suffusing culture-contract appendage mostly ascribed to the work. Okonkwo is, undeniably, a product of his world, in all ramifications. In trying to be creative in shooting of canons with intransigence, he commits a female *ochu* by killing mistakenly one of Ogbuefi Ezeugo's teenage sons. He proceeds on exile as his property is destroyed. *ochu*, here, as a symbol of nemesian evil, abhors the creative destructiveness in Okonkwo, half-negating the Ogun principle. From this time on his fortune begins to dwindle and we discover that where creativeness alone has brought him success, a tinge of destruction — the opening of an Ogunic chapter in collaboration with the Igbo symbol of *ochu*, meaning *taboo* — results in the collapse of all.

I present one more example: "His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father" (*Things Fall Apart* 9). Two sorts of fear bear grievously upon Okonkwo's life — the shallow sort, "the fear of evil and capricious gods" while "the fear of failure and of weakness" which is informed by his clan's attitude to and cosmology of hard work, a determinant of one's social station, is the deeper one. The first level of fear is informed by the communal view of his world as held to be true by his clan. Much as the narrator seems to downplay this fear, the above

communal view being a dominant one, because it is evident everywhere he turns, and it is this that informs his perception: "to abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were ever to happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth" (*Things Fall Apart* 108).

This lesser fear, unobtrusively strategic as it is, can be provoked and activated by the prompting of the other fear, the greater and the lifelong sort. The oxymoron, "effeminate men" a symbol of disdain or taboo, is primarily of the Igbo cosmology and it is one major symbol that has fed into the tragedy of Okonkwo's life. In a way, the lesser fear, the fear of disobedience and abandonment of tradition, always finds a way of linking up to the deeper kind in the overall mission of shaping Okonkwo as the tragic hero. The ancestors are a symbol of propriety and correctness and if one is to succeed as a leader and qualify as a hero repudiating them amounts to repudiating the principles required to be a leader and a custodian of the clan, all these being Okonkwo's aim from the word go. In this, we know that Okonkwo would not have negated these and still gone ahead to maintain his high profile as a hero worthy of a leader or worth his salt. Regarding his ancestors and many other elements autochthonous to his world is the source of his reputation: Okonkwo would have ceased to be a hero if he did not consider his father whose disregard of them qualifies him as Okonkwo's foil. His notoriety of possessing alternate qualities to his son's depends, if we look carefully, rely on neglecting what his son honors and chooses to die for.

From the above it becomes clearer why no un-African symbolic template, however ostensibly adequate, should be fallen back on to interpret Okonkwo and his status as a hero satisfactorily. His rise and fall could be illuminated by the symbols etched by the worldview of his group. With life as one flowing process and with the world beyond not particularly heaven nor hell, but a place where one could be with his creator and still moderate the affairs of those alive, maybe with the kind permission of the creator who knows the duty of those with him and thus it is possible not to see the killing of Ikemefuna in light of not attracting punishment from hell, a Judaeo-Christian place and symbol of evil, so long as the gods and, possibly, the creator are unperturbed by it and his action having fallen within their logic of operation. Okonkwo's swift rise to successes and, somehow, failures too, can be thrown more light on by the structure of meaning-making of his world. Beside the fact that he is hardworking, one reads in the work when he is successful that "Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things" (6). In another instance, we are told that "Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands" (19). However, in the face of declining fortunes, we are informed that "clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi* ... Here was a man whose *chi* says nay despite his own affirmation" (92). By serving as an overruling influence in Okonkwo's life, it also presents itself as an element of consideration — a protean symbol of evil and good as held by a group of people — without which any interpretation of Okonkwo's actions as the leading hero in *Things Fall Apart* would be termed lacking in coverage. Thus, when Okonkwo, in the similitude of the intransigence of Odudúwa and Ogun, works hard "to become one of the lords of the clan" (92), he, by the same token, renders himself impenetrable by theoretical tools of analysis fashioned out of the symbolic structures that are alien, say, of the Western order. The above symbols enable the build-up of his person and the figure this person enunciates. Somehow, he is like the Ogun of the mythical mode that has appeared in the high mimetic mode. Okonkwo does not just take a seat amongst such characters as Sagoe, Egbo, Ezeulu, and Eugene, to list just four, but also has the shadows of Odudúwa, behind him. Ezeulu also, in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, lurks behind the figure that Okonkwo represents.

In contrast to *The Interpreters* and *Things Fall Apart* in terms of containing autochthonous symbols, but still falling within this high mimetic mode, we have Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and many other works. The second aspect of the paradox holds true in

the just mentioned works because there are no clear traces of the hero of the first and second mimetic modes in them, whether they are purely African or Western. Because the hero identified in this mode can avow a pedigree that is relatable to both Western and African cosmologies at the same time, and with little issue at that, thanks to influences of colonialism, this lack of clarity exposes them to an interpretation that derives from either African or Western symbolic templates. Unlike Okonkwo who is placed between the dawn of fading old ways and the advent of the new, Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* is placed in the context of the established new ways which Okonkwo has rejected. Nonetheless, both are one because both are analogous figures in the handling and ruling of their families, with Eugene in his public life remaining intransigent towards the ruling military authorities of the day. With this and other contemporary Nigerian works yielding to modernity, the high mimetic mode complicates itself, giving way, willy-nilly, to the Western Judaeo-Christian and classical symbolic templates which the two other modes have not been tainted with. One is tempted to assert that, arising here is a situation of cul-de-sac, aporia, a free-for-all situation, and an all-comer's affair. Papa Nnukwu would have made it possible to haul *Purple Hibiscus* back to the influence of African symbolic structure, but he fails to so do due to Eugene relegating him to the background, or even "conquering" him as the colonialists have Okonkwo.

With Eugene and his likes in modern Nigerian narratives of the high mimetic mode carrying on thus, the permeation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and Western symbolic structures — which entered the domain of Nigerian discourses with the translation of the New Testament Bible into Igbo in 1904 (see Anyika and Achanike) — in consequence of an entrenching colonialism in the Nigerian literary tradition is almost a *fait accompli*. It is at this stage that *Things Fall Apart* and *The Interpreters* — works of the high mimetic mode which bear marked relationship to the second mode — seem helpless in the face of this mode's journey from inclarity to universality as we can see in such works as Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, *No Longer at Ease*, and many of their likes, all representing Nigeria's contemporary works of the fourth and fifth mimetic modes. These texts respond equally to the interpretations emanating from a broad base of symbolic templates whether Western or African. This means that in the practice of mythic displacement Frye could make a reading of the above works which would allow to see the activities of characters of the first and second modes in the third as he takes, as a background, the whole lot of Western cosmology and symbols as his tool. In which case we could see the Head of State in *Purple Hibiscus* as representing the Beast or Satan or some other sinister image while, on the other hand, Eugene operates under the cover of the messiah figure as Prometheus does. But we cannot say the same of Odudúwa, Ogun, Egbo, or Okonkwo. There is just nothing present in these characters to echo such. Okonkwo is neither a deliverer, nor a messiah, nor a quester of the Arthurian order. Therefore, Frye's theoretical influence in the study of postcolonial and Indigenous literatures must be viewed and used with caution.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann, 1966.
 Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. London: Heinemann, 1960.
 Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.
 Adams, Amina. "The Fisherman and His Wife." *The Cunning Tortoise and Other Stories*. By Amina Adams. Lagos: Lantern, 2006. 15-20.
 Adams, Amina. "The Hunter and the Antelope." *The Cunning Tortoise and Other Stories*. By Amina Adams. Lagos: Lantern, 2006. 41-50.
 Adichie, Chimamada Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus: A Novel*. Kwani: Algonquin Books, 2003.
 Adichie, Chimamada Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. New York: Knopf, 2006.
 Akwanya, A[mechi] N[icholas]. *Semantics and Discourse: Theories Of Meaning and Textual Analysis*. Enugu: Acena, 2007.
 Anyika, F., and H. Achanike. "The Church Missionary Society (CMS) Evangelical Enterprise in Igboland: The Genesis and Development of Vernacular Literature, 1857-1941." *Ikenga: International Journal of African Studies* 9.1-2 (2007): 1-13.
 Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.
 Awolalu, J. Omosade. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Pleasant Hill: Athelia Henrietta P, 1996.
 Ehiede, Samson O. "Why the Sky is Far above the Earth." *Revealer of Secrets*. Ed. Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas. Ibadan: African UP, 1975. 11-12.
 Ezikeojiaku, I.P.A. "Towards Understanding Ndi Igbo and Their Cosmology." *Radical Essays on Nigerian Literatures*. Ed. G.G. Darah. Lagos: Malthouse, 2008. 35-48.
 Fagunwa, D.O. *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Lagos: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- Frye, Northrop. *Myth And Metaphor: Selected Essays 1974-1988*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990.
- Frye, Northrop. *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of The Bible and Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990.
- Habila, Helon. *Waiting for an Angel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003.
- Hale, Thomas A. "Bursting at the Seams: New Dimensions for African Literature in the 21st Century." *African Literature Today* 25 (2005): 10-21.
- Ndubueze, P. Chituru. "Obidiya and Mgbechi: The Story of the King's Two Wives." *Revealer of Secrets*. Ed. Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas. Ibadan: African UP, 1975. 23-28.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *The Victims*. Ibadan: Longman, 1970.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *Tides*. Ibadan: Longman, 1993.
- Okereke, Onwuka. (1975). "Why Men Die." *Revealer of Secrets*. Ed. Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas. Ibadan: African UP, 1975. 27-32.
- Ohiaeri, J. Adauga. "The Proud Girl and the Devil." *Revealer of Secrets*. Ed. Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas. Ibadan: African UP, 1975. 88-93.
- Inyiama, T. Aniehe. "Omelumma and Omelukpagham." *Revealer of Secrets*. Ed. Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas. Ibadan: African UP, 1975. 86-87.
- Lucas, J. Olumide. *The Religion of the Yorubas*. Pleasant Hill: Athelia Henrietta P, 1996.
- Okara, Gabriel. *The Voice*. New York: Africana Publishing, 1969.
- Olupona, Jacob K. "The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective." *Numen* 40.3 (1993): 240-73.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*. 1975. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Season of Anomy*. London: Rex Collins, 1973.
- Soyinka, Wole. *The Interpreters*. London: Fontana, 1972.
- Tutuola, Amos. *The Palm-wine Drinkard*. Ibadan: Spectrum, 1963.
- Wyndham, John. *Myths of Ife*. Gloucester: Dodo P, 2008.

Author's profile: Ignatius Chukwumah teaches African literatures and literary theory at Federal University Wukari. His interests in research include Northrop Frye's and Paul Ricoeur's theories and African and African American literatures. Chukwumah's recent publications include "The Figure with Recurrent Presence: the Defiant Hero in Nigerian Narratives," *Acta Scientarium: Language and Culture* (2013) and "Lazarus, Noah, and the Enunciation of the Resurrection Mythos," *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society* (2013). E-mail: <ignachuks@gmail.com>