

Myth, Archetypes and the Rise of Modern African Poetry

By

MADUMERE, Laurel Chikwado (Ph.D.)

School of General Studies

University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo

07038038139

maclaurel@yahoo.com

Abstract

African oral traditions have been reputed to be sources of material and inspiration for most modern African poets. Some African literary critics have tried, also to draw parallels between the elements of African oral tradition and the literary symbols found in modern African poems. Surprisingly, only a few understand the psychopathological relationship between the modern poets' imagination and those of the creators of the oral traditional narratives. This paper, taking Carl Jung's and Maud Bodkin's archetypal theory in poetry, examines the correlation between poetic imagination and collective unconsciousness. The study is qualitative in approach and is aimed at portraying the link between African oral performances and their written/modern poems. It strives to situate the study of African mythological archetypes into Jung's theoretical perspective. It discovers that part of the reasons for some of the reoccurrences of certain archetypes in the mythopoetics of modern poets, across the cultures in Africa, is not merely because of borrowings and appropriations, but also because of a certain shared collective unconsciousness.

Keywords: Archetypes, Carl Jung, Mythopoetics, Psychopathological, Unconsciousness.

Introduction

In attempting to explore the influences of the African Oral tradition on the development of African poetry, it is necessary to be clear about what constitutes African

oral tradition. Oral traditions in Africa are the spoken cultural practices that are performed in Africa to educate, entertain, inform and inculcate good values and moral ethics in the people. These Oral performances include myths, legends, folklores, incantations, libations, songs and so on. They unarguably constitute an attempt in pre-literate and contemporary Africa to create forms in which, through aesthetic and pleasant arrangement of words personal and collective, experiences are preserved through this narrative culture.

Theoretical framework

This paper adopts the archetypal literary theory. Archetypal literary criticism (in poetry) was brought to limelight by the publication of works by Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934). In her work, she tries to reconcile Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theory with the process of poetic composition. She sees a link between Jung's concepts of the collective unconsciousness with the poets' creation of primordial characters. Jung rejected the idea that man is born *tabula rasa* but insisted that at birth, there are psychological images and symbols that are in existence in the child which the child inherited, like instincts from the child's forebears. Those images are primordial archetypes and mythic characters that would later shape the child's attitude towards life.

Carl Jung has argued that "primitive tribal lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way" (3). The tribal lore include teachings of the cultural myths of a people, and once they are taught verbally "they are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching" (3). With the above comments, Jung dissociates cultural lore from unconscious lore. He means that cultural lore is the lore that has been removed from human unconsciousness, reformed and overhauled in the physical consciousness and is taught as part of a group's ethos. The unconscious lore was once archetypal symbol or figure which existed in our subconscious minds. Figures about primordial events (like wars, natural disasters, etc.), wild beats attacks and experiences which we did not take part in but which we inherited from our ancestors like instincts which cannot be traced physically unless by psychological examinations or therapies.

The archetypal lore sometimes manifests in dreams and at certain peculiarly charged electrifying moments – the image of the mother and child archetypes, life/rebirth archetypes, etc. For Jung, "rebirth is an affirmation that must be counted

among the primordial affirmations of mankind. These primordial affirmations are based on what I call archetypes” (58). Rebirth is innate in man and is part of the numerous prefigures of the conscious. Northrop Frye supports the moments of the manifestation of the archetypes and adds that they come at certain “epiphanic moments” and inaugurate “the flash of instantaneous comprehension” (510). What they mean is that those archetypes we inherited from our forebears, are unconscious, but they come to consciousness when we least expect them, at certain tensed moments.

In African cosmology, especially that of the Yoruba people in Western Nigeria, the rebirth archetype is demonstrated via the Abiku concept. The circumstance of the Abiku is one in which a child is born into the physical world, but the child retains his/her links to the supernatural. The child’s life is torn between his/her physical environment and the other half, which, like Jung’s unconscious environment, cannot be touched or probed. The two concepts correlate – Jung’s rebirth archetype and the Yoruba Abiku.

In Jung’s world, the individual is torn between the conscious and the unconscious and he/she maintains touch with both. The physical world is where the individual lives and the unconscious flashes in forms of dreams and whenever the individual is within the vicinity of that particular archetype, for instance, the mother archetype elicits the maternal response. In a similar vein, the Abiku child maintains touch with the spirit world through dreams and when he/she is within the vicinity of the totems of the other world. What is most striking between the two is that, in both (Jung and Abiku), the individual retains a certain level of knowledge or awareness of images and symbols from the other primordial existence. They constitute the images Frye may call “fragments of significance [which are] oracular in origin” (510)

It is commonly believed among the Yoruba and most of African cultures, that if the first Abiku is born, and marks or incisions are made on his/her body before he/she dies, the next Abiku to be born would retain the scars of the previous marks and incisions that were made on the first Abiku, although the second did not live the life of the first. Our point is that we can draw parallels between the two concepts: Abiku and Jung’s archetypes. Just as the second and subsequent Abikus, the individual in Jung’s opinion retains the psychological scars from the experiences of his/her ancestors which he/she did not experience physically but will retain certain level of unconscious awareness of those innate first or primeval images.

In furtherance of the above perspective, we notice also that the concept of Abiku is analogous to Jung's concept of Rebirth. In his book entitled *Four Arche- types: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster* he avers that "rebirth is an affirmation that must be counted among the primordial affirmations of mankind. These primordial affirmations are based on what I call archetypes" (58). He grouped those rebirth affirmations into five, but the one that is more important to us is the second in his grouping which he calls "reincarnation" (54). For him, "this concept of rebirth [reincarnation] necessarily implies the continuity of personality. Here the human personality is regarded as continuous and accessible to memory, so that, when one is incarnated or born, one is able, at least potentially, to remember that one has lived through previous existences and that these existences were one's own, i.e., that they had the same ego-form as the present life. As a rule, reincarnation means rebirth in a human body..." (54). The excerpt above implies that in rebirth [reincarnation] there is the tendency of an individual remembering that he had been born, he had been here before a previous death. That archetype is also found among the Igbo people and is termed the Ogbanje, in Yoruba it is the Abiku, in general, it underlies the interconnectedness of the three worlds in African cosmology.

Sunday T. C. Ilechukwu has revealed that the Ogbanje is a term used by the Igbo "to describe a child or adolescent that is said to repeatedly die and be repeatedly born by the same mother. The child is said to die before the next one is born in several sequence..." (240). He highlights that the same rebirth reincarnation is popular among the Igbo people, adding that the "Ogbanje may also be used to refer to a living child, adolescent, or adult who was preceded in birth order by a child or children that died early in life and is thought to have this potential to come and go" (240). The prevalence of this is validated by A. O. Faniran and C. A. Adetuyi who describe this child in Yoruba world as one who "dies and is reborn in successive circles of birth and death matrix to torment the mother" (3). The person dies, and is reborn to live and die again. In those circumstances, the African belief in the free movement between the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn is highlighted.

All through the analysis, from the Yoruba Abiku, to the Igbo Ogbanje, to the tripartite world of the Africans and Jung's archetypes, two phenomena are central: death and rebirth. They have influenced the poetry of most modern African poets so much so that they become general motifs that run across the collective unconsciousness of the poets. J. P. Clark, Kofi Awoonor, Wole Soyinka and most African modern poets are not left out of the fascination which the concepts generate, thus

are equally influenced by it.

However it is through the works of Bodkin that this concept finds relevance in the theorization of poetry. In Bodkin's works, she brings the Jungian archetypes to bear on the psyche of the poet. She discovers a correlation between the images and symbols that are recurrent in poetry with the primitive images and symbols Jung theorized as well as Frye's suggested relationship between the "archetypal narrative to the oracle" (510). In her words, "I shall use the term 'archetypal pattern' to refer to that within us, which ...leaps in response to the effective presentation in poetry of an ancient theme" (5). That thing in us is that kinship which we share with a poetic hero in his ordeals that make us feel like we had at certain remote time passed through similar ordeal. It suggests that we had at a remote time lived the life we are reliving now.

Bodkin goes further to add that "the hypothesis to be examined is that in poetry,... we may identify themes having a particular form or pattern which persists amid variation from age to age, and which corresponds to a pattern or configuration of emotional tendencies in the minds of those who are stirred by the theme" (4). The above explains why certain poetic motifs retain their relevance generations after generations in the minds of the audience. It is because those motifs are perpetuated by poetic archetypes which are domiciled in the collective unconsciousness of that particular culture.

M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham have argued that "archetypal literary criticism was given impetus by Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934) and flourished especially during the 1950s and 1960s. Some archetypal critics dropped Jung's theory of the collective unconscious as the deep source of these patterns..." (17) of imagination. Chief among the latter critics who dropped Jung's psychological approach is Northrop Frye. Abrams and Harpham add that "these critics tended to emphasize the persistence of mythical patterns in literature, on the assumption that myths are closer to the elemental archetypes than artful manipulations of sophisticated writers" (17).

Jung's theory of collective unconsciousness was eschewed from archetypal criticism to free it from the domain of psychology and what Northrop Frye has called "an unnecessary hypothesis" (112). For Frye, "archetypes are associative clusters, and differ from signs in being complex variables" (110). For him, archetypes are symbols which are recurrent in poetry and constitute a general motif across cultures.

Abrams and Harpham contend that “such recurrent items are often claimed to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader, because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author” (16). Those universal patterns include death/rebirth archetypes found in the African belief in the unending chains between the living and the dead; the mythic archetypes in the images of gods like Ogun (of Yoruba lore), legendary figures like King Shaka of Zulu and others. The patterns are also recurrent in the Christian Bible passage about life and rebirth. They comprise of the hero-gods in Hellenic arts of Homer and others. Thus archetypal literary theory becomes a theory that seeks to expound the essences of the habitual myths, symbols and archetypes in a work of literature. It helps to determine the causes of the continuing featuring of certain oracular images across fictional cultures.

Review of Related Literature

Ernest Emenyonu has argued that “the fundamental foundation of all African literature is the oral tradition, sometimes known as folklore, but more recently called oral performances” (2). Hence African traditions embody the literary aspect of African oral performances such as folksongs, folktales, riddles and proverbs, prayers, including incantations, historical legends and festivals. Regarding the African modern poetry, Emenyonu argues that it “...is the extension of African oral literature. So a major source of inspiration and a model for the modern African poet is the African traditional artist who was both a technician and visionary artist” (2). The above implies that the oral performer is a source of inspiration to a modern poet.

Nkem Okoh subscribes to the above postulation by adding that “in a similar fashion, the overwhelming majority of African writers have drawn from their various oral literatures – whether for imaginatively reconstructing the past, portraying contemporary social experiences, or for propelling the society into some futuristic Utopia” (276). For Okoh, majority of African poets have appropriated the elements of African oral performances, used them to rework their histories, and foreground the future. This is particularly true when we consider what Negritude poets have done with their pasts which they incorporated into their poems. Poets like Leopold Sedar Senghor, David and Birago Diop and other Francophone poets borrowed material from their oral forms and used them to rework the image of Africa.

To this end, Jasper Onuekwusi notes that “Oral practices are important paradigms in the evolution of modern African poetry” (3). Onuekwusi is not alone in his assumptions but he validates Helen Chukwuma’s assertion that “African oral tradition is an art culture of its own and also serves as background props and sometimes formulaic tools of literary creation in the modern era” (19). In other words, African oral performances serve as background to the written African literature. As a result, W. Feuser and I. N. C. Aniebo opine that “‘African oratures in the main, form the ‘diachronic axis’ of African literature while the scribal tradition is its ‘synchronic axis’” (11). These two critics go ahead to state that “although literary politics and the Western metaphysical tradition ascribe subordinate cultural status to the oral word, it is incontrovertible in African epistemology that the oral pre-dates the written and provides an invaluable resource for the latter’s real ontological existence” (11). From the above evaluation we observe that although Eurocentric criticism may deny modern African writings’ indebtedness to the oral practices, the truth of the matter remains that African oral tradition started before written literature, thus nourishes the latter with its mythic archetypes, oracular images and symbols.

African oral tradition, no doubt, contributed immensely to the development of written African poetry and James Tar Tsaaio affirms it thus:

An authentic African poetry is essentially that which draws its afflatus, sensibilities and vision as well as themes, images, tropes and entire worldview from the quotidian realities and chequered experiences of African’s historical continuum. The veritable substratum or provenance of this poetry was the oral traditional poetic forms of African songs, proverbs, legends, myths and folklore. (116)

Hence, in the growth and development of modern African poetry, African traditional oral performances are playing very significant roles. This is seen in the modernist poets’ acculturation of the beliefs inherent in those oral performances. Hence, one can say that the oral performances are at the centre of the experimentation and innovations in African modern poetry. The new African writers [new because they succeeded the oral performer] find in the sources of the African oral tradition a new enrichment, a new revitalization of contemporary African writings and they appropriate them into their poems. Like African oral tradition, therefore, modern African poetry can be socialized and will not be meant for a particular set of people, but for all and sundry that have interest in art, examples can be found in the poems of Kofi Awoonor William and Okot p’Btek. That is why African oral

tradition is perceived by Donatus Nwoga as “that which was a communal event, something performed before an audience, aimed at persuading and entertaining, enlightening the people there, before the poet and reacting to his words and to his general performance” (40). African oral performances were communally owned, but African modern poetry is individually owned – that is one of the striking differences between the two.

Cultural Archetypes in Selected African Modern Poems

In African oral tradition, the archetypes of life and death, or death and rebirth feature prominently. They are at the centre of African conception of life: when a man dies, it is believed, he moves from the physical world to the world of the ancestors through a passage Wole Soyinka has repeatedly called the “transitional abyss” (142). Death is also seen as not the termination of life but the transference of existence which does not end there but will continue through rebirth to another human form. Beyond the physical world is the world of the ancestors (the dead) who do not lie dormant in their graves but influence the living in many ways. Thus the world of the ancestors is active and full of activities. However, linking the dead and the living is the third stage of existence, of rebirth – the world of the unborn.

It is through the conception that takes place in the third world that man reincarnates to his family or to another family. That is why it is popularly believed that when a child is born, his or her umbilical cord is buried into the earth to trace his/her root of origin. The Yoruba people of Wole Soyinka and the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria are well versed in this mythic practice. Concerning the Yoruba people and their myth, Soyinka states thus: the

the Yoruba myth is a recurrent exercise in the experience of disintegration, and this is significant for the seeming distancing of will among a people whose mores, cultures and metaphysics are based on apparent resignation and acceptance but which are, experienced in depth, a statement of man’s penetrating insight into the final resolution of things and the constant evidence of harmony. (151)

That disintegration which was inaugurated by the first act of revolution by a jealous slave, in Yoruba cosmology, affirms that no one is truly dead but may disintegrate from one stage to another. That brings us to the myth of the Abiku – the spirit child who is never dead or truly alive but constantly traversing “through the transitional gulf” (145) to the world of the living, the dead and/or the yet unborn. As a result of its spread and cultural essences the Abiku motif becomes a mythic **archetype**

in modern poems of the Yoruba. It consequently could be said to be the archetype of death and regeneration.

It is true that modernism for the four major regions of Africa was influenced too, by the peculiarities of the countries of those regions. In Southern African region for instance, modernism coincided with the apartheid era in South Africa and was influenced by the experiences of apartheid. In East and West Africa, it coincided with nationalism and independence. While in East Africa, it was a time when land was at the centre of major conflicts; in West Africa it was cultural affirmation that dominated popular literary cultures. In the North, the years of Islamic religious orientation had eroded most of the indigenous values of the countries. Regarding the North, James Tar Tsaaior avers thus, “when it comes to North African poetry, indeed, North African literature, there is a visible trajectory of exclusionary politics against the region” (129). What he calls “exclusion” from authentic Africanness is informed by and “...is largely dependent on its [Northern] Islamic cultural provenance and Arabic linguistic influence” (129). Yet in all those four regions, there was this prevalence of the themes of life, death and rebirth. For instance, in the poems “I Won’t Pass Away” by the Sudanese poet Alhadi Adam Elhadi; “Cycle” by the South African poet Mazisi Kunene; “She Has not Dreamt” by the Kenyan poet Jared Angira and “Songs of Sorrow” by the Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor and others, there are certain recuperations of those archetypes that define the African oral tradition.

In Alhadi Adam Elhadi’s poem “I Won’t Pass Away”, the persona contemplates on life and the afterlife. He contends that after his heart stops beating, his soul would take flight like an eagle into the sky. He uses an archetypal symbol of the eagle which stands for the keenest of sight and longevity. He does not stop at that, he goes further to add that he knows what will be said of him, regardless. He would, in his words, “...ridicule it from within my grave” (Line 22). At first, it was the image of an all seeing god – the eagle, then, later, of the all knowing ancestor from the grave. That conception of death as a state of not-quite-dead cuts across the cultures of Africa. That conception is described by Frye as the “archetype of all archetypes” (17). Frye illustrates it with the seasons and agriculture. When a dead seed is buried, it germinates and bears fruits with more seeds that would die and be buried to rejuvenate. It is a continuous process, and so is life.

In a similar vein, those who are buried in the earth become the subject of Kunene’s “Cycle”. As the title may suggest, life is in a circle, and that cycle of life

is divided into two: the now and the hereafter. The poem illustrates this concept with its structure which is also divided into two: Part I and Part II, in line with the two parts of existence. The first line of the first part begins with a reminder that “so many are asleep under the ground/ when we dance at the festival” (Lines 1 and 2). It continues with that sober tone to enunciate that someday the adult who are dancing will dance no more and “the child will dance alone on our ground” (Line 12). The child dancing alone is his metaphor which points to the realities of death. It means at that moment that the elders have grown old and have gone to sleep – for death is to him not a final moment but a condition of sleep. And being asleep means operating in another realm of omni-directional vastness.

In Jared Angira’s “She Has not Dreamt”, he chronicles a typical incident that is typical of the Luo people. In the tradition, the widow of a dead man cannot be given out in marriage unless the spirit of her dead husband has carnal knowledge of her in the dream. The poem typifies that culture which believes that the dead is owed the chance to realize his sexual fulfillment in the body of his widowed wife before being completely parted with her and for him to find peace and satisfaction along his path to the world beyond which he is bound to. Without that, his journey to the world of the ancestors would be turbulent.

Kofi Awoonor’s “Songs of Sorrow” takes this tradition to its epic proportion; to the degree of sending a dead man on an errand into the spirit world. It is interesting to know that Awoonor first wrote the poem in his Ewe language before translating it into English. In both versions (Ewe and English), he does not shy away from incorporating the sensibilities of his culture into the art. The poem is about the tribulations of a man, who is of the view, just as the indigenous Ewe people, that fortune can be bestowed by the dead. Thus in the final section of the poem, the troubled persona sends Agosi the dead man to the world beyond, to the ancestors named: “Nyidevu, Kpeti, and Kove/ that they have done us evil” (Stanza 6). He insists that the ancestors have done them evil as a result of their failure to extend ancestral aid to the living man. That concept signifies, in the tradition, that, the dead and the living are in constant touch.

The Archetype of Archetypes: The Abiku Motif

In their poems entitled “Abiku” and “Abiku” respectively, Clark and Soyinka draw richly from that concept of death/rebirth, degeneration/rejuvenation to contemplate on the pluralism of life. In Clark’s “Abiku”, the persona is a suppliant mother/fa-

mother/father archetype, who is soliciting the Abiku child to stay alive in the physical world. The child's incessant coming and going have wearied his mother as she is repeatedly made to go through the angst of child-bearing or the throes of child-birth without any fruit to show for it. It is alleged that every birthing season, she conceives and gives birth to a child who it is clear would die (someday) and be reborn, through the same frustrating method.

Given the above circumstance, Clark's persona becomes an appellant appealing to the child to reverse his resolution. This sharply contrasts Soyinka's persona (in his "Abiku") who is the child himself. In Soyinka's, we grant that the persona is the child responding to the appeals of Clark's persona/archetype. Soyinka's Abiku is sardonic and derisive, and scornful of the afflictions and trauma of his parents. His resolution is absolute commitment to the supernatural sphere and his intentions vile, without mincing words. The two poems represent the two sides of the same coin. The poems reiterate the pluralisms in African world.

The first four (4) lines in Clark's "Abiku" reiterate the above stated pluralism. In it, the persona insinuates the existences that are replete in African cosmology vis-a-vis the world of the unborn and the physical world thus:

Coming and going these several seasons,
Do stay out on the baobab tree,
Follow where you please your kindred spirits
If indoors is not enough for you. (Lines 1-4)

The word "where" as it is used above signifies a "place". The place of the kindred spirit is different from the place of the ancestors we recognize in Awoonor's "Songs of Sorrow". Let us recall that there are three worlds that make up the unbroken chain of existence. They consist of the physical/earthly world, the oracular/ancestral world into which Awoonor's persona sends Agosi, and the third is the world of the unborn which is the third stage of existence. The Abiku child is not an ancestor yet. Thus where he goes to is not an ancestral world but a place full of people who are kindred to him – full of his kin, children unborn.

In the excerpt from the poem above, the persona pleads to the Abiku to make a choice to either stay with his kin in the spirit world if the human home does not please him. The persona begs him to stay, if he wishes, instead of traversing (several times) through that boundary Soyinka calls the "cosmic gulf" (154). Traditionally, this soliciting is not done casually, but through rituals and there are items that are associated with it. The items include bangles, cowries, snail, knife, yam, etc.

The bangles serve as cuffs to chain the wanton child to the homes of the earthly parents.

In Soyinka's "Abiku", the child lambasts the labour of his earthly parents, insisting that, "In vain your bangles cast/ Charmed circles at my feet" (Lines 1 and 2). Their efforts and toil to manacle him to this earth with the bangles have amounted merely to a futile probe, for he is contemptuously an Abiku and will continue to come and go, like the first time, over and over (again). Thus: "I am Abiku, calling for the first/ And the repeated time" (Lines 3 & 4) unobstructed.

On the one hand, in Clark's poem the persona goes further to describe their earthly home which they beg the Abiku to inhabit. He alleges that although their home is not an El Dorado, but it is a home regardless. It is "true, it leaks through the thatch/ .../ and the bats and the owls/ Often tear in at night through the eaves/ And at harmattan, the bamboo walls/ .../ ...tinder for the fire/ That dries the fresh fish up on the rack" (Lines 5-11). It is not a perfect home, but it has been home to many people who have gone up in life. The persona begs the Abiku again not to bestride their doorstep, nor hesitate, "But step in and stay/ For good" (Lines 16 & 17). Those constitute the different appeals that are made to the Abiku in Clark's poem to make him/her inhabit the earth.

On the other hand, the Abiku in Soyinka's "Abiku", describes his home in the spirit, to contrast it with the earthly home. He describes it as a place "...where/ The ground is wet with mourning/ White dew suckles flesh-birds/ Evening befriends the spider, trapping/ Flies in wind-froth" (Lines 21-24). From his accounts, the spirit world is not a place of laughter and merriment. It is a place of untold anguish for which reason he uses the word "mourning" to describe the source of the water that soaks the ground over there. It is a place tears and he has adapted to it, hence, the joys of the earth cannot make him change.

To persuade the Abiku further, Clark's persona reminds him of how much he, too, has suffered in the hands of men at each appearance and during each ritual to make him stay: ...We know the knife scars

Serrating down your back and front

Like beak of the sword-fish,

And both your ears, notched

As a bondsman to this house,

Are all relics of your first comings.

The "scars" and "notched ears" are wounds sustained during rituals. They are

aimed at making the Abiku to look unworthy to the spirit world, to make him ugly and rejected. Surprisingly, each time he is reborn, he comes with those scars still visibly displaying on his back. This corresponds with Jung's concept of rebirth; the individual comes again bearing visible knowledge of the life he led before. In Clark's world, it makes the Abiku easily recognizable. It is assumed that if the Abiku remembers the pains of those incisions, he will be unwilling to die. Ironically, he remembers the pains and still chooses to die.

Similarly, Soyinka's Abiku reaffirms his resolve never to be deterred by the excruciating pains of those ritual performances thus:

Must I weep for goats and cowries
For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
Yams do not sprout in amulets
To earth Abiku's limbs. (Stanza 2)

The "cowries", "yam", "snail", "palm oil", etc., are the material for the ritual exorcism. They constitute the resources which W. Feuser and I.N.C. Aniebo reveal are supplied by oral tradition to the modern poet. In the excerpt above, the Abiku accepts the pain of the ritual exercise with welcoming hands saying: "So when the snail is burnt in his shell/ ... brand me/ Deeply on the breast. You must know him/ When the Abiku call again" (Stanza 3). No matter the number of incisions, with knife like in Clark's poem or with the shell of a burnt snail like in Soyinka's poem, the Abiku insists that he must go, and they will know him when he is reborn through the scars he has sustained.

In conclusion, the persona of Clark's poem begs his Abiku one and final time to come into their home and stay, for his mother's body is tired of carrying him for nine months and giving birth to him and losing him, "Then step in, step in and stay/ For her body is tired./ Tired, her milk going sour/ Where many more mouths gladden the heart" (Lines 23-26). It is not clear if he agrees to Clark's passionate appeal. However, we know that in spite of all the pleas by Clark and his persona, the Abiku, like in Soyinka's poem, is not deterred but exclaims triumphantly in his moment of epiphany in Soyinka's poem: "...Mothers! I'll be the/ Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep/ Yours the killing cry" (Stanza 7). This passage is metaphorical. The mothers will kill the snakes, but they will cry while killing the snakes – out of joy or out of heartbreaks, disappointment or dread. Thus he vehemently refuses to stay with his earthly mother.

Finally, it is important to note that through the exchanges between the personas

of the poems and Jung's philosophy, we attempt to understand the psychology of the Abiku archetype and the images that constitute his collective unconsciousness. The Abiku concept has been freed from religion and secularised as a motif in the arts; and Jung's archetypal theory places it in theoretical context.

Conclusion

African oral tradition has been a source of material for the creation of artistic works such as African sculpture, painting, oral and written literature and, the plastic art. In the modern era, they enliven the poetry of the time, like we see in the poems of Clark, Soyinka and Awoonor, by supplying the materials for poetry. However, the modern poets also indulge in their private mythopoeia which replicates the same archetypes that are found in the insular cultures across Africa. This is because they all draw from the same web of African heritages which influence the kind of images and symbols they foreground.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 10th ed., Boston, Mass: Thompson Wadsworth, 1999.
- Angira, Jared. "She Has Not Dreamt." *Poems of Black Africa*, edited by Wole Soyinka. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1975, p. 38.
- Bodkin, Maud. *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Chukwuma, Helen. *Igbo Oral Literature, Theory and Tradition*. Abak: Belpot Nig. Ltd., 1994.
- Clark, Bekederemo J P. "Abiku." *West African Verse*, edited by Donatus Nwoga. Ibadan: Longman Group Ltd., 1967, p. 61.
- Emenyonu, Ernest. *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Faniran, A. O. & C. A. Adetuyi. "The Textual Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Poem: A Formalist Approach". *Journal of Communication and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-7.
- Feuser, W. and I. N. C. Aniebo. "The Case for Comparative African Literature". *Essays in Comparative African Literature*, edited by W. Feuser and I. N. C. Aniebo. Lagos: CBAAC, 2001, pp. 1-15.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

- University Press, 1957.
- "The Archetypes of Literature". *Criticism: The Major Statements*, 2nd ed., edited by Charles Kaplan. California: California University Press. 1986, pp. 501-515.
- Ilechukwu, Sunday T. C. "Ogbanje/Abiku and Cultural Conceptualizations of Psy chopathology in Nigeria." *Mental Health Religion & Culture*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2007, pp. 239-255.
- Jung, Carl. *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. London, UK: Routledge Classics, 1953.
- Kunene, Mazisi. "Cycle." *Poems of Black Africa*, edited by Wole Soyinka. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1975, p. 48.
- Maduakor, Obi. *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writings*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1986.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. *Language and Theme: Essays on African literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1990.
- Okoh, Nkem. *Preface to Oral Literature*. Onitsha: Africa First Publishers Limited, 2008.
- Onuekwusi, Jasper. *Fundamentals of African Oral Literature*. Owerri: Alphabet Nig. Publishers, 2001.
- Soyinka, Wole. "Abiku." *West African Verse*, edited by Donates Nwoga. Ibadan: Longman Group Ltd., 1967, p. 62.
- *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Tsaaior, Tar James. "Negotiating Modern African Poetry through the Kinesis of History." *Ibadan, Journal of English Studies*, vol. 2, 2005, pp. 115-133.
- Williams, Kofi Awoonor. "Songs of Sorrow." *West African Verse*, edited by Donatus Nwoga. Ibadan: Longman Group Ltd., 1967, p. 73.