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Contents

1. Propaganda in Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*
E. A. Babalola 1
(Dept. of English, University of Lagos)
2. Responses to Poverty in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide
Kola Eke 35
(Dept. of English, University of Benin)
3. Proverbializing Society: Tradition versus Modernity in the Novels of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo
Felicia Ohwovoriole 50
(Dept. of English, University of Lagos)
4. Elements of Narrative in Prose Fiction
Grace Itoro Ibanga 68
(Dept. of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University)
5. Features of Contemporary African Gynotexts: An Archetypal Reading of Ifeoma Okoye, Fafa Nutsukpo and Florence Attamah's Writings
Doyin Aguru 100
(Dept. of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University)
6. An Analysis of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*
A. Lekan Dairo 122
(Dept. of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University)
7. Cohesion and Coherence in Yoruba Texts
Tunde Onadeko 133
(Dept. of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University)
8. Politeness Strategies in Nigerian English Compliments
Abolaji S. Mustapha 153
(Dept. of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University)

Features of Contemporary African Gynotexts: An Archetypal Reading of Ifeoma Okoye, Fafa Nutsukpo and Florence Attamah's Writings

Doyin Aguru

Introduction

Several studies in feminism confirm that perspectives on the contemporary woman continue to change. This is as a result of the evolving status of the female in the society. This article examines the archetypal images, themes and characters portrayed in three African gynotexts (women-authored texts). The narratives selected from Nigeria and Ghana are characterised by the underlying themes such as romance, mate selection, relations between men and women, betrayal of trust, and illegitimacy in the African society. This article examines the current disposition of West African female writers to the new image of the African woman. It takes as reference point, the feminist movement that began at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and examines some of the peculiarities of African feminism. The archetypal approach has been found suitable for the analysis of this work because it provides psychological and philosophical explanations for the actions and the inactions of the African woman. Employing right paradigms is a crucial factor in erecting the appropriate structures for teaching feminism in Africa. Positive portrayal of female characters and feminist related issues would give an instructive quality

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

to the redefinition of the image of the African woman in this millennium.

Several definitions have been given of studies about women and their collective struggle for liberation. Feminism is one of the many ways women have reacted to the oppressive gender relations in various societies. Feminism has become a globally accepted movement that has provided a base for other feminist movements like womanism.

Supporting this view, Mannathoko (1998) states that feminism is a broad term for a variety of conceptions of the relations between men and women in society. 'All feminism' she continues, 'pivots round the recognition of existing women's oppression and addresses the prevailing unjust and discriminatory gender relations'. (p.32) According to Aduni (2003: 61), feminism is 'a worldwide ideological and political movement directed at changing the existing power relations between men and women'

However, a major critical theory that emerged from feminism is the feminist criticism. This approach to literary criticism is "one concerned with analysing the depiction of women in literature' (Barnet et al 2004:1613). This level of analysis concerns itself with the images male authors present of their female characters and the reappraisal of these images in female-authored texts (gynotexts).

Bonnie Smith's historical compendium chronicles the challenges the woman has had since her existence. It provides the details of the evolution of women folk in Europe before the eighteenth century. Women, the study reveals, have always been and will always continue to be essential to the existence of humankind. In the eighteenth century 'agricultural production and reproduction of population ensured the survival of the society. Both efforts were coordinated by the family' (Smith1989: 19). Little wonder it was the women folk that were saddled with work – domestic work, demanding fieldwork- as well as the responsibility of reproducing the working population (12).

Extracts from the proceedings of the July 1848 Seneca Falls Convention confirm that women had laboured under severe weights for millennia before they came together to chart a course out of their tumultuous sea of life. (Stanton et al 1881). The Seneca Falls Convention focused on the social, civil, religious conditions, and rights

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

of women. The mission statement of the four ladies that facilitated the event states that all men and women are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Amongst these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Stanton et al, 1881).

These women also reasoned along the lines of governance and were able to establish certain facts: that governments are instituted to secure the rights of the governed, that the same governments derive their power from the consent of the governed, that it was the responsibility of the women to refuse allegiance to any form of government that becomes destructive to the lives of women. The women were, therefore, persuaded that the most important task they had was to constitute a new government by which they would be governed. Such a government would operate upon principles and codes that would ensure their safety, happiness, and reassurance of their future security.

The Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention includes, amongst other things, an endless list representative of the injuries and afflictions endured by women globally. Irrespective of the fact that not all the issues have been or ever will be resolved, the document became a successful mission statement and vision for feminist fighters to work with. Over the years, paradigms have continued to shift such that feminist cruces such as human rights, reproduction, ownership of property, custody of children, employment, education, lawsuits, legislation and male preference were partially resolved.

The African woman's experience is a variation on the European experience. Savane (1998:8) points out that African feminism has not been

... fundamentally different from the worldwide feminist movement. This is not to deny the fact that forms and degrees of oppression and exploitation of women vary by socio-economic, cultural and political statuses, these variations in experience are the bases for divergent strategies and brands of feminism.

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

She goes on to say 'categories of African women like peasants: married women, mothers, women household heads, women in the formal and informal sectors, in professions, women politicians to name but a few, experience specific forms of gender inequalities and exploitation' (1998:8).

Diverse views and perceptions of women in Africa remain the basis of character portraiture in the writing of both sexes in Africa. *Ab initio* male writers dominated the literary scenes in Africa. For instance, the works of Nigerian Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka centre on themes such as the struggles of the African people to free themselves from foreign influence, responses to inaccurate characterization of Africans and Africa by British authors. Cyprian Ekwensi, who portrays the challenges of a prostitute in *Jagua Nana*, is the exception to these male writers who consistently portray the woman in the traditional stereotyped role. Umeh (1995) however insists that

For most part, Nigerian male authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Cyprian Ekwensi depicted women living under a rigid sex-role segregation system with no individuality, personhood or power.

The Ghanaian example does not differ much from that of Nigeria perhaps because the two countries are from the same continental sub-region. The works of Awoonor Kofi and Ayi Kwei Armah are celebrated for their strong commitment to cultural and political concerns. They primarily focus on the prevailing issues in the new postcolonial West African societies. Therefore social critiques of corruption in the newly independent African states dominate the works of these writers. Ama Ata Aidoo, a female Ghanaian writer, is one of the first female African writers whose work, *Dilemma Of A Ghost*, was published before Armah or Awoonor's writings. She has continued to be a leading voice in feminist writings in Africa.

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

Mabel Tوبرise in a comparative analysis of the activities of female playwrights in the West African sub -region, (Ghana and Nigeria in particular) notes:

African written literature has been the preserve of male writers and critics. This dearth of works by women has been attributed to the factors of age, education, gender, sex and marriage (1998:2)

Carol Boyle Davies does not only concur with Tوبرise's assertion but is of the opinion that the colonial structures also made it difficult for the woman to be involved in writing and in criticism. She observes that

- The colonial institutions fostered the selection of males for formal education.
- The sex role distinctions common to many African communities supported the notion that Western education was a barrier to a woman's role as a wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status.
- With few exceptions girls were kept away from formal and especially higher education.
- Colonial administrators imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance.
- 'Clearly' Davies concludes, 'European colonialism as well as traditional attitudes of and to women, combined to exclude African women from educational processes which prepare one for the craft of writing (Davies 1998; 49)

The significance of Flora Nwapa, the first female Nigerian writer, cannot be overstated in the cannon of literary writing in Africa. 'Nwapa gave African women an authentic identity in literature by introducing a female literary tradition at a time when little or nothing of realistic nature had been written about African woman (Umeh 1995) She therefore set the stage for her literary followers like Zulu Sofola, Buchi Emecheta, Mabel Segun, Tess Onwueme, Ifeoma Okoye,

Zaynab Alkali and a host of others. Her work offers an authentic characterization of African womanhood.

The efforts of these women confute the earlier archetypal roles and representation of women as second-class citizens in their own homes and societies. The status and roles of women have continued to change and contemporary writings in the last decade or so continue to bring fresh perspectives to feminist criticism in Africa. This study examines the themes and archetypal essence that constitute the status quo in Nigerian and Ghanaian romantic gynotexts

Applying An Archetypal Approach To Feminist Criticism.

Many interpretations have been given to the theories propounded by Carl Gustav Jung and Sigmund Freud on the psychological approach to the analysis of literature. Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, believed that certain psychic structures called archetypes were common to all peoples in all times and that these reoccurring ideas gave rise to repetition of certain mythological themes (Encarta 2003).

The archetypal theme, quest, motif and character have continued to reoccur in literature universally. Carl Jung's *Contributions To Analytical Psychology* postulates the existence of a collective 'unconscious', a hereditary transfer in our brains that consists of 'countless typical experiences such as (birth, escape from danger, selection of a mate) of our ancestors' (Barnet 2004; 1608). This theory holds and is plausible because often both reader and writer share unconscious memories, the tales told by author move the reader and speak to his collective unconscious. As individuals we experience certain leaps when we read about an effectively presented ancient theme.

Definitions of this theory confirm that it has been found invaluable in the explication of representative themes in literary writing. The *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia* defines this ideology as an 'idealized model of a person, object or concept from which similar instances are derived, copied, patterned or emulated'. From Lorrain Jean's perspective, 'Archetypes are characters and plots that exist the world around and through time, they exist in all cultures' (1999).

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

Barnet et al (2004:1690) simply define it as 'a theme, image, motif, or pattern that occurs so often in literary works that seems to be universal'. Tami Cowden (2005) observes that these images '...are recurring character types who have starred in story after story, entertaining, and informing the human experience for millennium.'

Cowden (2005) identifies sixteen of such distinctive categories of protagonist types who recur in myths, legends, fairy tales, epic poems, novels and films. She claims that at the core of every well-defined hero or heroine is one of the respective archetypes, which determines the most basic instincts of the hero.

...how he thinks, how he feels, what drives him and why he chooses both his goal and his methods. The skilful writer ...conveys these instincts to the reader ... who knowing at a glance the character of this hero, settles down to watch the tale retold anew (Cowden 2005).

Ifeoma Okoye, Florence Attamah and Fafa Nutsukpo's narratives are romantic narratives. Romantic narratives are 'usually characterized by improbable adventure and love' (Barnet et al 2004:1967). These narratives are thematically preoccupied with issues that border on mate selection. The theme is encompassing because all other sub-themes such as motherhood, polygamy, illegitimacy, mother\ daughter or mother \son conflict, widowhood, single parenting are developed from this major theme. The characters of the protagonists of these works, Chimere, Sedina, and Venessa, are built around the theme and it is from their experiences that we learn about the hurts, disappointments, as well as the ecstasy that accompany the process of selecting a mate.

In *Chimere*, Chimere and Jide, young undergraduates meet in school and fall in love. It is clear from the plan to visit Jide's parents that the lovebirds hope something blissful and eternal would be born out of the relationship. On getting to Jide's home, his mother, a 'matriarch', scrutinizes and quizzes Chimere until she ascertains that she is an illegitimate child. She warns her son off Chimere and the trip brings to an end Chimere's hope of marrying Jide. Thoroughly upset,

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

Chimere, who has accepted her mother's flimsy excuses for the absence of her father, becomes determined to get the truth out of her mother, and goes on a search to find her father.

Sedina in a *Path Of Destiny* is betrayed by her flatmate who seduces her fiancé and gets pregnant by him a few months to her wedding. The conflict arises when Sedina discovers and calls off the wedding plans. Disillusioned and broken-hearted, she flees to Cape Coast for a retreat where she meets a dashing young man -Desai- and another romance is born.

Venessa, in *Melodies of a Dashed Dream*, lives in a fool's paradise by 'playing house' with a young man she met in school. She does not realize until she graduates that her closest friend, classmate and confidant and Michael have had a sizzling romance and planned to get married. The unbelievable sight of Michael and Vera stepping down the aisle after being pronounced man and wife sends Venessa sprawling into the capable arms of Edward where she grows up and learns the principles of survival and forgiveness.

Smith (1989:88,89) observes that Jane Austen, an icon in romantic narratives, wove the themes and characterisation of her works around similar issues:

Her heroines navigate through rough waters leading to matrimony; their course is especially rocky because they lack a prudent mother or even any mother at all. Regarding marriage as women's lot... Austen outlined the dangers clearly; passion, greed and weakness of character. Foolish and uncontrollable people made disastrous unions. Austen never displayed sentimentality or undue sorrow over such cases but continued to concern herself with how a heroine might marry someone with the right amount of social status and a proper sensibility. Marrying correctly, Austen believed, ultimately produced happiness, even happiness of a romantic sort.

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

In delineating the characters portrayed by these authors it will be appropriate to categorize the characters based on Cowden's classification.

- The heroine Archetypes: Chimere, Sedina and Venessa
- The hero Archetypes: Weluche, Desai and Edward
- The villain Archetypes (female): Azuka, Ami Vera and Sophia
- The villain Archetypes (male) :Jide, Jojo, Michael
- Other villain Archetypes (male): Mr. Enuma-Chimere's father, Mr Etem
- Other villain Archetypes (female): Jide's mother, Chimere's mother.
- Other flat characters used to support the narrative plot structure. (Cowden 2005)

Cowden identifies sixteen distinct categories of archetypes. The heroines are classified as: the boss, the seductress, the spunky kid, the free spirit, the waif, the librarian, the crusader, and the nurturer. The hero archetypes include the chief, the bad boy, the best friend, the charmer, the lost soul, the professor, the swashbuckler and the warrior.

The dominant heroine archetypal figures that recur in the selected texts are the waif and the nurturer. It appears that these character types are figures that recur most in the subconscious of the readers. According to Cowden (ibid):

The waif is a distressed damsel, she bends with the wind she's the original damsel in distress, her child-like innocence evokes a protective urge in the best of heroes. But...The waif has tremendous strength of will.)

The heroine in Chimere is portrayed as a waif. Okoye achieves this in a number of ways. The reflections, as well as Chimere's thoughts while on the trip to Enugu to meet Jide's parents paint the picture of a timid, and unsure personality. She is apparently

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

overwhelmed by the splendour of Jide's home and mentally compares her 'shabby home at Aba' with it.

Chimere is devastated after the bitter exchange that takes place between her and Jide in his house. She wallows in self-pity and tears. She actually 'adored and worshipped' Jide. (2003:16) The psychological trauma experienced by Chimere is a characteristic feature of a waif. For instance, she found it '...difficult to concentrate on her reading ...'(19) Her lack of concentration becomes so evident to her classmates that she becomes a laughing stock.

Chimere is greatly shocked when the campus magazine gives away her secret and details of the abrupt end of her relationship with Jide in a widely circulated publication. Her life becomes a nightmare.

No matter how much she tried she found
herself always thinking about the scandal....
She was left friendless and lonely ...
remained depressed ... spiritually drained
... had no desire to do anything ...(28)

Chimere has internalised a lot of pain as a child and she recalls how her 'mates in the secondary school always taunted and embarrassed me about the whole affair. 'I've felt isolated ever since ...' she says (30).

Venessa is the waif in Attamah's work. Childishness and impulsiveness characterise Venessa's actions. Like a baby in a trance, she falls in love with Michael, although she thinks he '... wasn't her kind of man ...'. (17) She impulsively decides to start living with him after two years of their relationship; Michael therefore takes advantage of her naivety. Despite several warnings from her mother and friends, and her relatives' displeasure with the relationship, she holds on to a figment of her imagination praying feverishly that the relationship would blossom into something more concrete (18).

Venessa's self-created paradise shatters when her boyfriend dumps her for Vera. Attamah portrays Venessa's frailty by making her break down physically after the bad news. 'Venessa got to her auntie's house a nervous wreck. As she was climbing upstairs... she fainted' (2005:24). At Michael's and Vera's wedding Venessa is so overcome by grief that she faints as she makes her way out of the church. She is

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

about to pass out again when she notices she is alone with the stranger that comes to her rescue.

Venessa continues to be a source of concern to her mother, her elder sister and her aunties who want her to get over her ordeal quickly. Attamah paints the picture of a delicate and sensitive girl who is left to her whims because her relations would rather not upset her. She adopts the same strategy as Chimere who withdraws from her usually sociable life after her unpleasant experience. She takes out her frustration on Edward and when her aunty Louise chides her for it, she snaps, 'I m not prepared for any other emotional engagement now'. (28) This high level of sensitivity may have been the reason for her mother's and aunt's tolerance of her decision to live with Michael; they do not want to hurt her feelings. However, she succeeds in pulling herself together and is able to get a job and cope with other responsibilities after the demise of her mother.

Sedina in *Path of Destiny* is portrayed as a nurturer. Cowden (2005) says that this heroine type 'nourishes the spirit; she is a wonderful listener and a joy to have around. This heroine takes care of everyone. She's serene, capable and optimistic.'

Sedina's good looks and disposition are two of the great qualities portrayed by Nutsukpo. Though she comes from an unusual background and is raised by foster parents, Sedina's personality radiates serenity even in a state of emotional chaos. She takes refuge in Desai's 'miniature park', a place where she has found 'comfort, peace and solace at a time when she thought her own world had collapsed ...' (1996:2) Sedina does not go in raving and calling her deceptive flat mate, Ada, names when she overhears her discussing her treacherous affair with her fiancé Jojo. She walks out of the apartment and plans how the two traitors will be exposed.

When she decides to become friendly with Desai Kambi she is portrayed as a mysterious figure 'I still prefer Mystery. It becomes you, as you are so mysterious ... (24). She is homely, cooks for a ravished Desai who thinks she will make 'someone a beautiful cook and wife' (33) Although she has firmly given herself lectures on rules and regulations 'where ever the male sex was concerned' (30) she is not nasty to Desai or anyone. In fact her friendship with Desai is

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

described as '... an easy camaraderie that was beautiful in every way ...' (34).

She does not contend with Ami who believes she has no right to be with Desai. She is not like Venessa who takes Sophia on and asserts her presence in Edward's life. Sedina simply takes her things and leaves Cape Coast. While Venessa has to be pacified by Edward and appealed to by Vera to forgive her, Sedina forgives Ada willingly.

In view of the portrayal of these female characters, it is evident that the experiences of other characters in the novels are portrayed as direct responses to the attitudes of the heroines as well as the events that take place in their lives. One therefore agrees with Umeh (1995) that the 'actions from female characters catalyse events, and furthermore, the fates of other characters depend on these actions.'

The theme of mate selection, which is the major issue in this collection, affords us an opportunity to see the clear distinctions that exist amongst men. In the texts, *Chimere*, *Path Of Destiny*, and *Melodies of a Dashed Dream*, the plot begins with complication arising out of unfaithfulness, betrayal and cruelty. The conflict born from several complications exposes some of the characteristics of the sixteen villain archetypes.

Jojo in *Path of Destiny* is a playboy; he loves Sedina but cannot resist coquettishness of Ada who eventually gets pregnant by him. He is the characteristic traitor archetype. Cowden describes the traitor as 'a double agent, he betrays those who trust him most'. Jojo's plan is to persuade Ada to abort the pregnancy and proceed with the wedding but Sedina overhears one of their heated sessions after which she opts out of the relationship.

Michael in *Melodies of a Dashed Dream* also falls within this category. He succeeds in covering up his relationship with his girl friend's closest friend. He eventually decides to marry her because of her father's wealth and social status. He says in the letter he wrote to break off his commitment, 'Venessa, certain times in a man's life, love is not the only thing that matters but attaining some social status and having enough security' (money-wise) (2005:21). Knowing that his marrying Vera will devastate Venessa, he writes 'it will only hurt when you know who is involved (21) The couple, Vera and Michael, experience crises in their marriage shortly after it takes place and Vera

confirms that it is a marriage based on wrong principles: 'It had not been desire or love on Michael's part, it was pure greed, he wanted what the Akinola's wealth and connection could fetch him' (47).

Jide in *Chimere* also betrays Chimere's trust. He collects money from her with a promise to pay back, which he never keeps. He also makes her promises that he does not consider for a moment before dumping her. 'Chimere', he says at last, 'I am finished with you ... I can't continue to go out with a girl of your background' (2003:14) After the heated argument Chimere now has a clearly defined picture of Jide: he is 'a conceited mean fellow, for all his good looks and charm, so unreliable under that smooth façade.' (14) Jide begins to date another girl immediately. To satisfy the curiosity of some students and justify his actions he grants an interview to a campus magazine.

The villain archetype often sets the pace for the introduction of the hero archetype that comes after the crises to rescue the heroine from the pains and affliction caused by the villain. The hero archetype that is dominant in this collection is the best friend. In Cowden's words this figure is '...sweet and safe, he never lets anyone down. He is kind, responsible, and decent. This man does not enjoy confrontation and can sometimes be unassertive because he does not want to hurt anyone's feelings. But he will always be there' (Cowden 2005).

The figure of Weluche in *Chimere* fits this description. He meets Chimere and develops interest in her. Despite her queer attitude, put offs and standoffishness, Weluche's interest and commitment to her does not diminish. Okoye portrays a character with a deep masculine voice, 'an easy and good-natured fellow who refused to be put off'. He is 'a pleasant person whose company one would enjoy' (35 and 36). Okoye develops an amiable personality, gentle yet lighthearted figure who is confident, yet not arrogant; whose level of understanding and tolerance beats an average imagination. We are told: 'This man is impossible'... She had not met anyone with such uncomplaining patience and persistence. Neither her rebuff nor rudeness dampened his ardour...' (50).

Weluche patiently waits until Chimere is willing to reveal her secrets. As she makes preparations for the last phase of her search for her father, she pleads once again, 'I will be away from work tomorrow

Gege: Ogun Studies in English

and next. But please don't ask questions. I will tell you later'. Weluche intones her usual phrase, 'In your own good time'. (151) Realising that she has upset him, she inquires if he is angry.

'Oh no' he replied why should I? ... No I m not angry with you, Chimere, I was merely teasing you. I've learnt to trust you. Something in you makes me trust you-something I can't explain (51).

He confirms that he is aware that Chimere has a problem that makes her unhappy, even though he does not know it; he believes she will tell him about it someday.

Desai in *Path of Destiny* is another true replica of the best friend archetype. Humorous and lighthearted, a complete gentleman, he is content with being Sedina's friend without prying into her secrets. He has gone to Cape Coast on a retreat to enjoy some peace and quiet and to escape his father's and his stepmother's scheming to marry 'him off to the daughter of a business associate' (1996:4).

Sedina's initial encounters with Desai have been brief but the first time they have an opportunity to talk is a hilarious occasion. He makes Sedina giggle and even 'burst into peels of laughter ...' (24&25) with his light banter. When Sedina flees from Cape Coast to Accra he becomes upset but makes up his mind to find her. He meets with her at a restaurant dining with a cousin of hers he does not know. Desai keeps his cool and takes it upon himself to search for her escort's identity.

The figure of Edward in *Melodies Of a Dashed Dream* is the archetypal warrior.

A noble champion who acts with honour, he is 'the reluctant rescuer or the knight in shining armour. He is noble, tenacious, relentless, and he always sticks up for the underdog. If you need a protector he is your guy. He does not buckle under to rules and he does not go along just to get along. (Cowden 2005).

Edward is the knight in shining armour who sticks up for Venessa. Edward's physique marks him out as a man of authority. He has a large frame over six foot (Attamah 2005: 9 & 10) and his shape often draws gasps from girls when he goes swimming (55). Edward's jealousy when he realizes Vanessa may still be in love with Michael confirms the true nature of a warrior.

'Are you still in love with him' No'. 'you are lying, I saw your face when he was talking with you'...'What you saw on my face does not signify that I'm still in love with him.' 'You are lying! Just close your mouth...I do not fancy taking a girl out and she goes tearing her heart out for another man' (Attamah 2005: 53 & 54).

Edward sarcastically reminds Venessa of the day he picked her up in church 'The next time you go fainting just remember I might not be there to act as a rescuing angel'. Venessa retorts ' I did not ask you to act as any knight in a shining armour to me, so stop rubbing it in.'(54) Edward remains truthful and faithful to Venessa while they remain platonic friends and they later become lovers. He accepts the news of her pregnancy with joy and weds her a month after to prove his commitment.

Female villain archetypes are also represented in these narratives. These figures, just like the masculine villain, serve as foils to the other heroic characters portrayed in the literary works. The contrast they offer helps to set off other major characters. Figures like Ami and Ada in *Path Of Destiny*, Vera and Sophia in *Melodies of a Dashed Dream* and Azuka in *Chimere* clearly fall into this pattern.

The bitch and the back stabber readily come to mind, as these characters are unveiled. The back stabber is the

two-faced friend, she delights in duping the unsuspecting. Her sympathetic smiles enable her to learn her victim's secrets, which she

then uses to feather her nest. Her seemingly helpful advice is just the thing to hinder.

Cowden concludes, 'put no faith in her-she'll betray you every time'. (2005).

Vera's figure clearly cuts the picture of the bitch. Attamah introduces her character to readers by describing her facial expression thus: 'Vera who was busy admiring his friends like a bitch on heat' (Attamah 2005:17). She is portrayed as a girl far more knowledgeable about men and relationship than Venessa her friend. Claiming to be more experienced, she tells her friend,

Maybe one day, I'll sit down and tell you some things about myself. How I was used as a substitute and I thought the sky was the limit and the affair came crashing on my head (2005:17).

While counselling an unsuspecting Venessa, she retrieves information that she can use to win Michael's heart. Attamah tries to win our sympathy for the backstabbing - bitch she creates by explaining her psyche:

Venessa, I was jealous of you in those days... you were everybody's favourite. The lecturers, the students and you always got all the attention ... I was over the moon when Michael declared his love for me.... I was thrilled that for the first time in my life somebody was placing me above all... I had always tagged as a second best... I never even considered the pains I was going to cause you, in my stupidity (46 & 47).

Nemesis catches up with her shortly after. She gives birth to an imbecile and Michael deserts her when she needs him most.

Ada in *Path of Destiny* is also an archetypal back stabber. Sharing the same apartment with Sedina does not stop Ada from throwing herself shamelessly at the man her flat mate is scheduled to marry. Sedina cannot quickly get over how to face both Jojo and Ada after she overhears them talking about Ada's pregnancy. Ada regrets her decision when she discovers that even with Sedina out of the way she is destined to the fate of a second best: 'I'm so unhappy. I didn't know Jojo loved you so much, but now I know. He still loves you, you know' (73).

Ami is the schemer in *Path of Destiny*. The schemer is a 'lethal plotter.' In Cowden's words, 'She devices the ruin of others, elaborate plans, intricate schemes. Nothing pleases her more than to trap the unwary'. (Cowden 2005). Ami's plan is to scheme her way into marriage with any young, handsome, and wealthy man. Unfortunately for her, two of the men she targets slip from her and fall in love with the same lady. Ami has worked her way unto Desai's father's heart and the old man thinks a marriage between his son and Ami will foster his business interests: 'A marriage between a Kambi and a Lawson will naturally bring about a merging of two dynamic firms. Think of all the advantages' the old man muses. (49).

Desai disagrees, saying that Ami is 'beautiful, sophisticated' (25) and 'money-hungry.' (4) Definitely not what he wants for a wife. Sedina's engagement to Jojo has wrecked Ami's plan to marry Jojo. She reminds at the next possible opportunity, 'You stole the man I was to have married, Jojo, history isn't going to repeat itself because I'm not going to allow anybody to spoil my plans' (39).

She attempts to ruin the relationship between Desai and Sedina by telling Desai things that will put him on the edge about Sedina. She cleverly drops hints about her job as an airhostess and the details of her relationship with Jojo. Ami casts her last die when she poisons Desai's drink with some white stuff.

Azuka is another archetypal villain in *Chimere*. She is the secretary to the manager of the brewery where Chimere tries to secure a job. She is portrayed as a cold and haughty type. A lady who is 'full of herself and her power but jealous as well' (Okoye 2003:76). She trades in vices like contempt for others, false accusations, and

threats. She also meddles in people's affairs. Chimere believes Azuka has a hand in her transfer to another section; she sarcastically passes a comment about her displeasure with the level of closeness between Weluche, the new engineer, and Chimere.

Azuka takes it upon herself to point out all of Chimere's weaknesses to Weluche:

I don't know what you see in that illegitimate girl,

Chimere. You should know illegitimate daughters usually turn out to be as wayward as their mothers (Okoye 2003; 163).

These gynotexts also examine other archetypal themes, figures and motifs through the lives of other significant but minor characters. For instance, concerns like social stratification and the role it plays in mate selection is illustrated through Jide's mother, whose figure in *Chimere* is that of the matriarch. She is a motherly oppressor who smothers her loved ones, and also possesses the wherewithal to control the lives of those who surround her (Cowden2005). Apart from the issue of illegitimacy, Jide's mother cannot tolerate Chimere's poor social status. Chimere's mother also falls within this category; she does all that is within her means to keep Chimere from knowing and seeking her father. Weluche's mother is the adult nurturer, the real woman who is wise and takes her time to impart the truth about life to her son. Weluche's upbringing defines his attitude, his disposition to life and his morality.

Other themes include death during childbirth and step parenting which are seen in Fidelia Ato'- Chimere's mother's childhood. Widow-dispossession is another theme portrayed through Weluche's mother's experiences after her husband's death.

The issue of illegitimacy, the central theme in *Chimere*, remains unresolved. The steps taken by both Chimere and her mother to resolve this conflict fail and one wonders what the text actually achieves. This is ironic; one expects the author to proffer a solution, especially when writing in contemporary Nigeria where the concept of illegitimacy has neither locus standi nor legal backing. The Nigerian

(1999) constitution stipulates that no child should be discriminated against on the basis of the circumstances of his or her birth. *Chimere* ends on a note where the heroine has not shown any trace of maturing. She is still quite myopic and largely influenced by what the society thinks about her.

From one point of view, it examines the discrimination children born out of wedlock face when attempting mate selection as well as the societal views and significance of such a syndrome. Chimere's father from the start of the novel is portrayed as a traitor who betrays his lover. He puts Chimere's mother in the family way and flees. By the end of the narrative he has matured into the figure of an outcast, 'the lonely outsider who desperately wants to belong. He is tortured and unforgiving, he has been set off from others and really for a good cause.' (Cowden 2005).

Conclusion

Ogunjimi (2003) asserts that characterization is a major element to be considered in a critical analysis of texts. This article has examined selected contemporary feminist writings through a feminist archetypal criticism. It has identified certain archetypal characters and themes in recent romantic writings from two nations in the West African sub – region namely, Nigeria and Ghana.

Perhaps a major weakness of contemporary writing found is in the attempt to create new archetypes, which always repulses a reader's sensibility. Lorrh Jean (1999) advises writers to beware of 'going against archetypes' and resist the temptation to invent new ones. She argues that 'the universal unconscious of humankind is what creates archetypes. Modern feminists', she concludes, 'should be conscious of this'.

The universal unconscious of an African cannot accept the portrayal of Venessa as a heroine. Venessa engages in sexual activities before marriage and actually 'lives in sin' with Michael, the one who betrays her. Although the author tries to condemn her sexual activities in a mild manner, the message that gets across to the reader is that it is a socially accepted norm instead of what it signifies in Africa, an anomaly. One agrees that 'modernity' has permitted a number of such developments, but really not to an extent that a mother will encourage

her daughter to live with 'a gold digger' and use preventive methods to avoid conception.

Historically in Europe premarital sex was not a taboo. Smith's (1989) record of courting rituals indicates that in rural European communities, friendships and premarital encounters were monitored and violation of the norm was censured publicly. However, according to him,

Premarital sex alone ... usually aroused no such censure and was even customary. Premarital sex was only subject to community approval of the suitability of the partners in the union. In many parts of agrarian Europe premarital intercourse was supposed to result in pregnancy. This 'testing' or 'trying out' allowed the prospective husband or community to gauge the woman's ability to reproduce (1989; 24).

When pregnancy occurred before a couple set up a home, the family as well as the community ensured that a marriage was quickly conducted. Recreating archetypal characters/figures and images may not necessarily augur well with the universal unconscious of mankind. Ronda Cobham (1995) posits that there is need for female writers to acknowledge appropriate archetypal figures that will further portray females and female related issues in positive light.

This desire for a more realistic portrayal of African woman in literature can be realized when the appropriate archetypal roles and motifs that are ingrained in the universal unconscious are employed. We can raise consciousness, but we cannot change the subconscious mind. 'It is not under our control' Lorrain (1999) observes that fighting the reader's subconscious no matter how good the author's intention may be, drives readers away, and significantly continues to portray the women folk in negative light.

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