A MYTHICAL ARCHETYPAL FORM

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Myths and Archetypes, among others, are two major aspects of Oral Literature which serve as useful raw materials for the artists and artistes alike. While Archetype is a primodial image of a figure, a thing or even a process, which repeats itself in the course of history; Myth is a fabulous story offering explanations and convictions of a people about such archetype figures and other metaphysical phenomena. Obaloyan, an erstwhile very big and popular town in history, is reduced to a mere village by the activities of super-gnomes. The myth surrounding this incident has spanned several decades. This work confirms the potency and efficacy or otherwise of Myths, Legends, and Archetype as very useful raw materials for the narrators, artists, and artistes.

(A)

Introduction

Myth is defined by Idowu (1962:7) as:

> The explanatory answers to the questions posed to man by the facts of his confrontation with the physical universe and his awareness of the world which though unseen, is yet sufficiently palpable to be real to him.[1]

Myth is the most sacred and most inviolable form of prose narrative because it attends to the real as to the supernatural and super sensible. The world of Myth has the Supreme Being, the lesser gods and goddesses, spirits, ancestors and human beings, as its cosmology. Man in search of Cosmic harmony, his attempts to come to terms with his cosmology create mental and cultural images of the likelihood of the supernaturalness of gods – whether as part of his world view or of the unknown. In every culture, for example Africa, continuity is ensured through the inextricable link between and among the dead, the living and the unborn.

The unborn in the African psyche re-incarnates the dead and the whole concept of ancestorhood which is symbolized by the mask dramaturge. It is a manifestation of a continuity of the past, to the present and to the future. Akinpẹlu (1991) quoting Obafemi says:

> Since Myth, therefore constitutes the metaphysical reality of existence handed down from age to age, it is about beliefs not necessarily supported by logic or reasoning. They are therefore sacred and held in awe ...

> Myth surrounds some mysteries and great events through which societies and communities are historically involved and are held in total belief handed down from generation to generation across the ages of cultural legacy. Myths therefore are like religion. They are about beliefs. Hence, their sacredness and inviolability are not in doubt.[2]

Perhaps, this is why, Adewoye (1993:47) also defines Myth as

> The term ... applied to an anonymous story or stories having roots in the primitive folk-beliefs or races or nations and presenting supernatural Episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of human beings or a cosmic view.[3]

With the fore-going definitions one can deduce that Myth is an attempt at explaining some metaphysical phenomena in the life of man in the society. This is why Thomas Knipps in Ogunjimi and Na'allah (1994:32) says that "History is the re-organization of the past according to the present".[4]

It is therefore, not surprising that Modern African Artists use Myths in their creativity. Examples are, the Agikuyu myth of creation and inheritance in Ngugi's novel; Weep Not Child: the Chichidodo Myth of Ghana by Ayi Kwei Armah in his novel, The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born: and the Agurumo myth in Olu Obafemi's A Night of Mystical Beast. Needless to mention the many numerous Myths in Amos Tutuola's novels like The Palm-wine Drinkard.

It is the imaginative potentials in Myths in the hands of the narrators and writers that have made Myths survive ages, as part of Oral Literature. The Myth recorded down in this narration is not different. Hence, the issues that recur in myths include the creation of the universe, gods, divine personages, religion, divinities, rites of passage – birth and death etc. Perhaps this is why Emeaba (1987:126) says:

> Myth is a fable, a traditional story or legend, offering explanations and embodying the convictions of a people as to religious or supernatural phenomena such as gods, and other divine personages, their own origin and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world.[5]

All these are important in the socio-psychology of man in creating social changes.

Archetype

Adewoye (1993:6) defines Archetype as:

> The Primordial image which taps the prelogical mentality. It is the original type or model from which all other things of the same kind are made – a perfect example of a type or group.[6]

To Maud Bodkin in Ogunjimi and Na'allah (1994:101):

> Archetype are as narrative designs, character types, or images which can be identified with varieties of literature, myths, dreams and ritualized modes of social behaviours.[7]

What must be emphasized from this definition is the importance of archetype which thrives best in Oral Literature. The latter is the creative skills and potentials of man in non-literature societies. It is a literature which identifies with the origin of societies, - their beliefs, institutions, mores, artifacts, motifs, practices and so on that is not yet polluted by the intricacies of modern civilization. Thus, Archetypes originate in the age-long culture and civilization of the people. They are therefore useful in the hands of narrators, artists and artistes in reshaping the ancient attitudes, activities, materials, cultures etc without unnecessarily changing inherent ideas that they project or symbolize.

The definition of Carl Jung in Ogunjimi and Na'allah (1994:103) will help shed more light on this matter:

Archetype:

> The Primodal image of a figure, whether a demon, man or process that repeats itself in the course of history where creative Phantasy is freely manifested.[8]

So, one can say that Archetypes emerge from the experiences of our ancestors. Such experiences stored in Man's memory lead him to a kind of creative force and imagination. Examples are the Archetype of Quester in Moremi Legend: the seven hunters in D.O. Fgunwa's Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole also portray the same archetype. Archetype of seduction is found in King David in the Bible, and Koranche in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons. Toundi in Oyono's Houseboy is an archetype of a scapegoat sacrificed at the altar of man's inhumanity to man, abuse of power, human insensitivity and sadism. Also, Ananse in The Marriage of Anansewa by Sutherland, is an archetype "Everyman", who mirrors the society's aspiration, shortcomings, moral values and norms. To Emeaba Onuma (1987:16) Archetype is:

> A character who seems to re-enact experiences or ordeals such that readers easily identify themselves with those experiences and even experience a kinship with the human conditions so presented.[9]

So also we have phenomenal archetypes and natural disaster, eruption, earthquakes, and even mysterious disappearances archetypes in Africans' numerous folktales legends and Myths.

(B)

Ogun Olowu of Obaloyan Myth

Date: This interview was conducted on Thursday, 16th September, 1999.

Interviewer: Alabi, A. Timothy.

Interviewer: What's your name, Baba?

Narrator: Alhaji Ibrahim Olomo, Chief Ojomu of Omupo town.[10]

Interviewer: How old are you now?

Narrator: 100 years.

Interviewer: Baba, it will be more than that!

Narrator: Yes, I know ...

Interviewer: Okay let's call it 110 years.

Narrator: Okay.

Interviewer: Now, let's continue with the main issue – Obaloyan.

Narrator: Obaloyan is a very big town. When we were young, we used to go there to fetch ropes from shrubs for Thatched roofs. You would be seeing dilapidated buildings of big, big houses there. Indeed, all this shows that it was really a big town. The king was well known too.

It was Treachery that caused its down – fall. Ogun-Olowu ... Then, God was very close to Man, like He was to olden day's prophet Moses who was speaking face to face with God, like you and I are talking face to face now. Likewise, God was talking with Moses on Mount Sinai.[11]

The case of Obaloyan was like this. Ogun-Olowu charged them to call on him anytime there was war against the town that he would fight and win the battle for them.

Interviewer: That Ogun-Olowu, what was he like? Gnome or what? Was he greater than Man?

Narrator: Yes, but he was rather a super-gnome. (Anjannu). He lived with them. They worshipped him at his Shrine annually.

They gave him whatever he requested. So he charged them as earlier explained. Then, there came a time when the elders in town felt they should make a mock trial of what Ogun-Olowu said, in case of eventuality. That is why he left their town in annoyance and went to Abeokuta. He is the same person being referred to as Owu or Olowu at Abeokuta till today.

So, they called him at his shrine, "Ogun-Olowu! War has come! Ogun-Olowu! War has come!"[14]

Interviewer: Is that how he charged them to call on him?

Narrator: Yes!

And before you know it, Ogun-Olowu appeared with numerous other super-gnomes like himself. He asked, "Where is the war? Where is the War?"

"We're just making a mock trial" they replied. Hei! He grew so much annoyed. The path he took when he left Obaloyan while passing across Omupo town still has his horse's foot prints on the rock, till today. Your father (interviewer's) also knows the spot. He then cursed them that the town would never be thickly populated any more.

Interviewer: Ha!

Narrator: That, if they deliver a new baby today, five people will die in replacement. That is why you have the song:

Obaloyan has few inhabitants; and it doesn't disintegrate
Ogun-Olowo forbids them from developing.

Interviewer: Hei! When he appeared suddenly, was he killing them?

Narrator: Yes, he was, but some were left. It is still a few numbers of people it has till today.

Interviewer: You see Baba, when we were younger, we used to go and pluck their sweet 'Agbalumo' on our way to the farm.[13]

Narrator: Yes, it is the same today; their 'Agbalumo' is sweet.

Interviewer: As the village was then, so is it till today.[14] That's what's bothering me!

Narrator: Yes, it is. That is "Gbolohun"[15]

Interviewer: If they build a house another one will collapse.[16] Is that what you call "Egun"? (Curse)

Narrator: Yes, that's it.

Interviewer: The issue of worshiping Ogun-Olowu ...

Narrator: The Shrine is still there. The Shrine has not been abandoned. They still build its walls, observe its festival

annually. They know he has left them but the anguish that their disobedience has cost them, still forces them to observe his worship. However, the village can't develop any more.

Interviewer: Because he has laid the curse and that is it!

Narrator: That leads to:
Obaloyan is not large, neither does it disintegrate. Why won't you become Omupo indigenes!
A poet once sang to indict them thus:
Obaloyan is not large, neither does it disintegrate Ogun-Olowu will not let them increase. Why won't you combine with Omupo indigenes!

Interviewer: But they won't like that!

Narrator and Interviewer: Ha! Ha! (Chuckle together)

Narrator: They can't leave the place any more.
Even if it remains two people at Ibadan, they will be shooting arrows at Ife ... If it remains two people at Ofa, they will be shooting arrows at Ilorin, because of what they suffered from Ilorin people and vice versa.

Interviewer: This Obaloyan incident, happened when?

Narrator: I don't know.

Interviewer: Hei?

Narrator: I don't know. But it's a long, long, time ago. It's an age long incident.

Interviewer: Because when I heard the story, I was small. Whenever we went to Obaloyan, we used to count the number of buildings there.

Narrator: Yes, it's normal.

Interviewer: Ha! It's aright.

Narrator: When we were also young, the compounds upon compounds that we knew have all collapsed and died (forgotten).

Interviewer: That's true. The buildings we knew then have almost all collapsed now. The few new houses are those left now.

Narrator: Yes. Those are the two or more houses they now build towards Omupo side. All the vast land towards Ilala town is left only for farmland.[17]

(C)

Textual Analysis on Ogun-Olowu of Obaloyan Myth.

Though this narration is in the form of an interview. Some analyses can still be made on the next.

The introduction of this Narrator does not take the normal informal type where the narrator would have to devise some means at his disposal to arrest the attention of his audience. Thus, the introduction here is more or less formal.

The plot of the narrator is near linear – from the beginning to the middle and then to the end. However, the narrator at the start makes a quick summary of the whole story before proceeding to narrate it in full.

The setting is two. The place setting is a town, still in existence as a village, called Obaloyan. The time setting of the occurrence is time immemorial. According to the narrator, "it is age long ago"!

The characters involved are the 'Anjannu' (the super-gnome), who is the hero, the Protagonist, a round character, the town's people, other super-gnomes, and the elders of the town.

The Language of the narration is Yoruba. It is here translated into English Language. And of course, much is lost. For instance, I, the translator (Interviewer) found it difficult to get the appropriate English words for some Yoruba words. For examples, "Iwin", "Egbere", "Anjannu" have no equivalents in English. "Gnome" is so weak in meaning to capture all of them. Thus, English Language renders all of them as supernatural beings. No wonder, Benjamin Whorf in Ogunjimi and Na'Allah (1994:80) asserts that "Language is an expression of a people's culture and philosophy of life".[18]

That is not all; the fact that the Oral narration is reduced to writing is another disadvantage. For instance, the various facial expressions of the narrator, his gestures etc and especially when he graphically dramatized the scene where Ogun-Olowu was invoked by the town elders and his coming out with the legion of his like ... can not be captured in Print! It's a loss! And it is painful! Thus, the performance aspect of this narration is lost!

Again, this myth has a phenomenal archetype. It is an attempt by Man to explain why the town Obaloyan remains a village over the years. This can be called its subject matter. It is an attempt to give historical solution to human contradictions in that town.

The Myth also provides psychological comfort through cosmic activities like rituals and sacrifices which the villagers still faithfully offer to Ogun-Olowu at least once a year to ease their conscience (for a sort of therapeutic value effect).

This myth is also didactic. Man can learn the importance of not being treacherous, disloyal or deceitful. It also makes one to reverence the divinities or superiors.

It is archetypal because it is similar to some other incidences in other places, for example the Myth of Basaori in Saki.

There are some Ellipses in the narration, which help to remove any inhibition to understanding.

The narrator employs analogies when he made use of Ibadan and Ife, Ofa and Ilorin in his efforts to explain why Obaloyan people will never leave that place to join with any other settlement, even though such steps may remove the curse from them.

There are serious elements of the supernatural in the Myth. The supernatural elements in Myths are usually stronger or more than there are in the Legends. This is very evident in this myth. The Ogun-Olowu himself and the hoof-prints of his horse on the rock are all supernatural!

Again, that the Narrator refers to the Interviewer's father as an evidence to a fact he is explaining is one of the Narrator's device to assert or register the authenticity of what he is saying in the mind of the Interviewer and the reader.

So, one can say that the story of Obaloyan village is both Mythical and Archetypal in form.

Conclusively, one can see that Oral Literature is full of Myths, Archetypes and others like Legends, Folktales, proverbs, riddles and jokes etc. Despite the fact that Myths contain quite a number of superstitions, fantasies, and even embellishments and or falsity, Myths play very useful roles in re-modelling our world. They are useful in the hands of narrators, Artists and Artistes. They help Man relive his past in the present. Man's socio-psychological and even religious life is attached one way or the other to the myth, as this Obaloyan story shows. When artistes, artists or narrators employ them, man enjoys the art as one is made to intuitively remember his past in loving memories.

Endnotes

[1]Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare! God in Yoruba Belief, (London: Longmans, 1962) p.7

[2]Akinpelu P.O., "The Impact of Legends on Oral Literature in Ile Local Government Area of Oyo State" Unpublished B.A. (Ed.) Thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, 1991.

[3]Sam A. Adewoye, A Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms, (Ilorin: Christy-David Publishing Group, 1993) p. 47

[4]Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdulrasheed Na'Allah, Introduction to African Oral Literature, (Ilorin: Unilorin Press, Vol. 1, 1991 rpt 1994) p. 32

[5]Emeaba O. Emeaba, A Dictionary of Literature

(Aba: A Inteks Press, 1987) p. 126

[6]Sam. A. Adewoye, A Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms, (Ilorin: Christy David Publishing Group, 1993) p. 6

[7]Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdulrasheed Na'Allah. Introduction to African Oral Literature, (Ilorin: Unilorin Press, Vol. 1 1991 rpt 1994) p. 101

[8]Ibid. p. 103

[9]Emeaba O. Emeaba, A Dictionary of Literature. (Aba: A Inteks Press, 1987) p. 16

[10]This narrator is renown in the whole of Igbomina Land of Kwara State. He is reputed for being versed in the histories of virtually all the towns and villages around here. He even boasts of being able to tell the history of Lagos and so on, up to Sokoto!

[11]This ellipsis is one of those breaks of thoughts caused by visitors who came to say 'hi' to the old man during the process of actual recording. Such visitors soon left knowing the importance of what we were doing. However the narrator's train of thought is maintained.

[12]The narrator became dramatic here. Writing could not capture the essence! Even the tone/voice modulation etc at various levels of this scene can captivate one.

[13]'Agbalumo' is another word in Yoruba that English has no equivalent to the best of my knowledge. It is a kind of fruit much like orange in shape but different in contents and taste. The taste is near "sweetened soumess."

[14]The experience the interviewer is sharing here has spanned over 35 years.

[15]"Gbolohun" here implies a level of charm, which is higher than incantations, and "Ogede". It is a level tantamount to a curse.

[16]This statement is not literal. It simply means that there is more or less no improvement or development.

[17]Lala is a town about 3 kilometers away from Obaloyan. It is about 6kms from Omupo via Obaloyan. Thus, Obaloyan is in the middle.

[18]Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdulrasheed Na'Allah, Introduction to African Oral Literature, (Ilorin: Unilorin Press, Vol. 1, 1991 rpt 1994) p. 80.

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