

THE TRAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN ELECHI AMADI'S *THE GREAT PONDS* AND *THE CONCUBINE*.

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APPROVAL/CERTIFICATION

This Project has been read and approved as meeting part of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (M.A.) Degree in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Onyejekwe, Ezioma Stephanie a post-graduate student of the department with the registration number PG/MA/12/61796 has satisfactorily completed the requirements for the course and research work for the award of Master of Arts (M.A.) Degree. This project to the best of my knowledge has not been submitted to any award giving institution on any grounds.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Engr. Unaeze Emmanuel Uche for the extra strength to
move on.

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ABSTRACT

The tragic and the supernatural are key issues in African literature. The sense of the tragic is embedded in the belief that man is not happy by nature. The concept of the supernatural and the tragic have been explored by writers and critics of African literature from different perspectives. This study however looks at the tragic as a mode of experience. The influence of fatalism on the characters in the selected texts suggests that man is helpless before external powers that determine his destiny. The actions and inactions of the characters bring them to the fulfillment of their destinies. Amadi in the selected texts presents the supernatural as a force that regulates the activities of men within his fictional world. The researcher's examination of concepts such as the quest myth, fatalism and determinism brings to the fore the relationship between the tragic and the supernatural.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Approval/Certification page	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vi
Table of Contents	vii
 CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	5
1.3 Objectives of the Study	5
1.4 Significance of the Study	6
1.5 Scope of the Study	6
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	7
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS	
3.1 Theoretical Framework	24
3.2 Research Methodology	29
CHAPTER FOUR: THE TRAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE SELECTED TEXTS	
4.1 The Influence of the Supernatural in <i>The Concubine</i> and <i>The Great Ponds</i>	30
4.2 The Tragic and the Supernatural in <i>The Concubine</i> and <i>The Great Ponds</i>	38
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	
5.1 Summary	43
5.2 Conclusion	44
 WORKS CITED	 45

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Tragedy and the tragic can hardly be discussed as independent variables. A brief review of tragedy is necessary to introduce the tragic concept. The tragic and the supernatural are both recurring themes in African literature. Tragedy is used in the mundane sense to refer to situations that induce fear and sympathy. In this regard, an auto crash is referred to as tragedy thereby making tragedy a close synonym for accident. This mundane conception of tragedy is responsible for loose expressions such as human tragedies, domestic tragedies, highway tragedies etc

Tragedy in relation to literature, involves actions that go beyond accidents and strange coincidence. Aristotle in *The Poetics* presents tragedy as

an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament....with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions...(27).

Aristotle goes further to state that: “tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action not a quality...” (27).

The plot of the Aristotelian tragedy has two major parts: the reversal and recognition, and “the scene of suffering” (32). Aristotle posits that:

A well constructed plot should, therefore be single in its issue, rather than double as some maintain. The change in fortune should be not from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character... (33-34).

M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* on the other hand is of the view that tragedy is “broadly applied to literary and especially to dramatic representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist” (371). Tragedy as an experience of life transcends the Greek and Roman views on tragedy as involving men of high social standing whose fall from royalty and power induce sympathy from their loyal subject. The tragic hero in contemporary literary productions is that character whom the author chooses for the tragic experience social status notwithstanding. The tragic however consists of all experiences that limit human happiness.

Richard L. Rubens in “Psychoanalysis and the Tragic Sense of Life” is of the view that:

The central, defining characteristic of the tragic sense of life is its insistence on the balance between the striving for rationality on the one hand, and the recognition of the underlying irrationality of existence on the other (2).

Rubens’ opinion on the tragic sense of life provides a functional definition of the tragic. This “insistence on the balance between the striving for rationality on the one hand and the recognition of the underlying irrationality of existence on the other” shapes the scope of the experience of the tragic hero. It is this search for rationality in a seemingly irrational situation that builds up the tragic myth.

This myth makes the tragic hero to push beyond his limit as a mortal being. The tragic myth also sets the tragic hero on course to explore territories that are a reserve for the supernatural and the man of courage. Rubens further states that:

In tragedy, there is a tremendous value placed on the attempt to find answers and to understand one's experience rationally.... It is in tragedy that the most fundamental questions of existence are repeatedly raised. It is job asking, "What is man? And Oedipus, "who am I?" These most basic of existential questions form the foundation on which tragedy is constructed (2).

In trying to find answers to these basic existential questions the tragic figure crosses the boundary line set for mortals to the realm of the supernatural. At this realm of the unknown the tragic figure becomes aware of his mortal nature and the irrationality of human existence. However he is unable to retrace his steps because the thirst for answers which is a strong force operating within the tragic figure, structures his psyche to remain on the quest for truth no matter how irrational the situation around him might be.

The tragic experience according to Rubens is "createdin between the time when there is both a commitment to the search for rational understanding and the recognition that not all of experience is reducible to rational understanding "(3). Sewall's opinion that the rational world is "secure only to those who do not question too far" is relevant to the understanding of the concept of tragedy.

The tragic figure is set apart from other characters in a literary text by his ability to "question too far". This search for answers brings the tragic figure to the boundary line which should be his limit. This confrontation with the human limitation is what Karl Jaspers describes as the "boundary situation" which upholds a confrontation with the rationality of human existence than resignation to absolute fatalism.

Rubens quoting Paul Tillich states that "the human boundary situation is encountered when human possibility reaches its existential limit, when human existence

is confronted by an ultimate threat” (3). The tragic therefore is a “mode of experience” involving a protagonist or protagonists driven by the tragic myth to cross the boundary lines set for mortals, to the realm of immortality. Once this boundary line is crossed the tragic hero emerges, now aware of his mortal nature but unable to restrict himself from getting to the end of the road which is his tragic end.

The supernatural is also a broad term with no absolute definition. It suggests the possession of qualities which are beyond human comprehension. It also suggests a sense of the divine. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines supernatural as “relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe, especially relating to God or a god, demigods, spirit or devil”.

The concept of the supernatural is one of the key themes in African literature. The African moral and religious belief system is influenced by the concept of the supernatural. This concept also shapes the ideological inclination of the characters in the texts selected for evaluation in this research work. The belief in the One Supreme God is central to the African religious belief system.

This belief in the one Supreme God has been explored by writers of African literature. The relationship between man and the supernatural is part of the African literary experience. This relationship has been explored in different ways by writers and critics of African literature. Some writers present the One Supreme God as an omniscient guardian of the African race whose actions or inactions affect the wellbeing of man. Some writers however present these supernatural forces as capricious beings meddling in the affairs of men.

The gods or religious deities as powerful as they appear to be are there to meet the needs of man. Their activities are moderated by humans. They need human mediators to validate their authority. Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* observes that:

Man rising up to something Titanic, is victorious over his own culture and compels the gods to unite with him, because in his self-controlled wisdom he holds their existence and the limits to their authority in his hands (9).

It is in line with these belief systems that the tragic is linked to the supernatural. Elechi Amadi in the selected texts provides deep insight into both concepts.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Over the years, writers and critics of African literature such as Soyinka 1970; Osundare, 1980; Miller, 1998; Abdou, 2010 etc have explored the concept of the supernatural and the tragic from different perspectives. Most of the critical analyses of the selected texts present the misfortunes in Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* as tragedies. This has continued to raise questions on the eligibility of both texts to be analysed as works of tragedy. The deities in the selected texts are often regarded as capricious beings whose collective actions or inactions account for the destruction of the tragic hero.

The researcher therefore intends to do a critical analysis of the concepts of the tragic and the supernatural having observed that the misfortunes and fearful occurrences in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* do not amount to absolute tragedy but bring to the fore the notion that fate is a strong force that shapes the destiny of man. The supernatural in the selected texts are agents whose activities help the characters to fulfill their destinies

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study include the following:

1. Assess Amadi's representation of the supernatural in the selected texts.
2. Explore the tragic as a mode of experience.
3. Examine the tragic and the supernatural.
4. Examine the influence of fatalism on the tragic hero.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The tragic and the supernatural are interrelated concepts that feature as recurring themes in African literature. Research in this area of African literature cannot be exhausted as writers adopt different perspectives in their representation of the concepts under evaluation. It is the expectation of the researcher that this study would provide fresh insight into the study of Amadi's *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* which have often been reviewed as works of tragedy. This examination of the tragic and the supernatural will also add to the stock of scholarship material on the writings of Elechi Amadi.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research project intends to look into concepts such as the quest myth, fatalism and determinism, etc with focus on the tragic and the supernatural.

This study will evaluate Amadi's representation of the tragic experience and the supernatural in the selected texts. The primary texts under evaluation are Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine*.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

TRAGEDY

Tragedy is a recurring concept in literature. Both concepts have been defined in diverse ways by writers and critics. Tragedy, according to Aristotle in *The Poetics*:

Is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament ... with incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions ...(27).

Howard Barker as quoted by Andrew Bennett et al in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* states that:

In tragedy the audience is disunited... tragedy is not about reconciliation... tragedy offends the sensibilities. It drags the unconscious into the public place... after the carnival, after the removal of the masks, you are precisely who you are before. After the tragedy, you are not certain who you are (105).

Tragedy according to Frye “is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)” (214). Frye divides the tragic process into six phases. The first phase involves the presentation of the central character as one endowed with dignity and courage in a state of innocence. The second phase involves a romantic hero who “survives, so that the action closes with some adjustment to a new and more mature experience” (220). The third phase “corresponding to the central quest- theme of romance is tragedy in which a

strong emphasis is thrown on the success or completeness of the hero's achievement" (220).

The fourth stage witnesses the fall of the hero through hybris and hamartia while in the fifth phase "the ironic element increases, and the characters look further away and in a smaller perspective" (221). The sixth phase deals with images of horror which "shocks as a whole, in its total effect" (222).

Aristotle's definition has continued to raise debates within literary circles yet its relevance to the development and understanding of tragedy cannot be overemphasized. Though some aspects of his definition are not applicable to contemporary tragedies his proposition is still relevant to scholarship. Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* however, posits that tragedy:

Is a vision of what does happen and must be accepted. To this extent it is a moral and plausible displacement of the bitter resentments that humanity feels against all obstacles to its desires (157).

THE TRAGIC HERO AND THE QUEST MYTH

The tragic hero is the man of action who is often perceived to be superhuman. The tragic hero according to Aristotle is an eminent character whose fall from eminence is as a result of some tragic flaw. In other words, every tragic figure should have a flaw that propels the action(s) that brings him/her to a tragic end or catastrophe. This flaw is seen in tragic figures in works of literary art across the globe; from Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The tragic figure or hero is the man of action functioning within his natural environment.

Richard Begam quoting Achebe in an interview with Charles Rowell posits that:

(The tragic protagonist) the man who is larger than life, who exemplifies virtues that are admired by the community but also who for all that is still human... can have flaws, you see; all that seems to me very elegantly underlined in Aristotle's work (15).

Begam identifies some of the qualities of a tragic figure in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to bring to the fore the universality of the tragic experience. He is of the view that:

... like many of the heroes of classical tragedy, Okonkwo's immoderate behaviour consistently places him at cross purposes not merely with his fellow Umuofians, but with the gods themselves – Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody halfway though, not even for fear of a goddess - we must recognize that Okonkwo's faults are essentially virtues carried to an extreme ... (16).

One of the key aims of the tragic experience is to purge the tragic figure of these inherent extreme emotions which pushes for answers beyond the tangible world. These extreme emotions induce fear and pity in the readers and audience. Ezugu quoting F. L. Lucas describes this state of purgation which Aristotle terms "Catharsis" as the end of the tragic experience:

Catharsis does not mean "purification" but purgation. It is a definitely medical metaphor – a metaphor of an aperients ..., It is not the passions that are purged of their impurities; it is the human soul that is purged of its excessive passions (4).

Ezugu argues that this proper purgation of emotions is not a collective experience involving the reader and the tragic figure, but an experience which the tragic hero goes through alone. In his argument; pity and fear do not concern the audience because they do

not consider tragedy to be a harmful experience. He quotes Lucretius to buttress his point:

There is a pleasure in looking out over the great ocean when a storm rages across it and seeing some vessels in distress, not because we are glad that somebody else is suffering, but because we have our own feet safely on the shore. There is a pleasure in watching the struggle of armies upon a battlefield – so long as we ourselves are standing out of danger (6).

The people of Umuofia in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* regard Okonkwo to be one of the greatest men in his time but when Okonkwo commits suicide, he dies alone. His corpse is seen as an abomination to the land. His position as an excellent warrior, wrestler and farmer does not make his death less abominable.

Bill Moyers quoting Joseph Campbell in the introduction to Campbell's *The Power of Myth* states that:

True wisdom lives far from mankind, out in the great loneliness, and can be reached only through suffering. Privation and suffering alone open the mind to all that is hidden to others (xiii).

This implies that the tragic experience opens the mind of the tragic figure to what Aristotle describes as anagnorisis, which is a state of critical discovery or recognition of one's true identity and potentialities. Aristotle in *The Poetics* refers to this state of awareness or self-discovery as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune (14529).

Moyers quoting Campbell again, asserts that "the ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and power to serve others" (xv). Thus the quest myth that drives the tragic experience in is not a journey undertaken

for individual knowledge. The universality of the tragic experience is seen in Aristotle's assertion that tragedy is:

an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse (28).

Aristotle's opinion above does not link the tragic end of the tragic figure to fatalism or determinism rather he states that "it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse". Thus the tragic hero in Aristotle's opinion is not an individual fated for doom by some supernatural elements, it is the character created by the writer for the tragic experience.

Aristotle also posits that the tragic effect:

Is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidence are most striking when they have an air of design (31).

Northrop Frye commenting on the tragic hero in *Anatomy of Criticism*, states that:

The tragic hero is very great as compared with us, but there is something else, something on the side of him opposite the audience, compared to which he is small. This something else may be called God, gods, fate, accident, fortune, necessity, circumstance or any combination of these, but whatever it is, the tragic hero is our mediator with it ... Tragic heroes are wrapped in the mystery of their communion with that something beyond

which we can only see through them, and which is the source of their strength and their fate alike (207-208).

This “something” that drives the tragic hero and also helps to sustain the plot according to Frye, is constant in its manifestations. “Whether the context is Greek, Christian or undefined, tragedy seems to lead up to an epiphany of law, of that which is and must be” (208).

Frye further states that:

The sense in Greek tragedy that fate is stronger than the gods really implies that the gods exist primarily to ratify the order of nature, and that if any personality, even a divine one, possesses a genuine power of veto over law; it is most unlikely that he will want to exercise it (208).

Frye suggests that the catastrophic end of the tragic plot is inevitable and whatever the reader wishes to hold responsible for the misfortunes in the text is insignificant. In the words of Frye:

However thickly strewn a tragedy may be with ghosts, portents, witches, or oracles; we know that the tragic hero cannot simply rub a lamp or summon a genie to get him out of his trouble (207).

This implies that unlike comedy with its happy ending, the chain of events that culminate into what the reader perceives to be tragic, never ends. In other words, there isn't an absolute denouement or resolution of conflict in tragedy. The possible resolution is left to the reader to figure out. The Wonjo disease in *The Great Ponds* had no cure till the end of the text and no solution is found for Ihuoma's misfortunes in *The Concubine*.

Most criticisms on tragedy in African literature are based on Frye's reductive formulas one of which states that:

all tragedy exhibits the omnipotence of an external fate. And, of course, the overwhelming majority of tragedies do leave us with a sense of the supremacy of impersonal power and of the limitation of human effort (209).

Frye does not condemn this approach as he informs his readers that:

Two reductive formulas ... have often been used to explain tragedy. Neither is quite good enough, but each is almost good enough, and as they are contradictory, they must represent extreme or limiting views of tragedy (209).

Frye however, argues that this first approach results in a “fatalistic reduction of tragedy which does not distinguish tragedy from irony, and it is again significant that we speak of the irony of fate rather than of its tragedy” (210). The second reductive theory according to Frye posits:

... that the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of moral law, whether human or divine; in short, that Aristotle’s hamartia or flaw must have an essential connection with sin or wrong doing (210).

The violation of moral laws is a major role player in the fall of the tragic figures in most African Literary texts; starting with Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to works of dramatic art such as Zulu Sofola’s *The Wedlock of the gods* and Ola Rotimi’s *The gods are not to Blame*. Frye commenting on Aristotle’s hamartia or flaw opines that “the great majority of tragic heroes do possess hybris, a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall” (210).

Frye quoting Milton in the third book of *Paradise Lost* asserts that:

Milton represents God as arguing that he made man ‘sufficient to have stood, though free to fall’, God knew that Adam would fall, but did not compel him to do so, and on that basis disclaims legal responsibilities (211).

The quest myth or the spirit of adventure which drives the actions of the tragic figure is what Moyers describes as “the soul’s high adventure, the quest of mortals to grasp the reality of God” (XVIII). This quest-myth in tragedy according to Frye comes to an end when the tragic figure “through hybris and hamartia... cross the boundary line from innocence to experience, which is ... the direction in which the hero falls” (212).

THE CONCEPT OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The supernatural is a controversial concept. There has always been an argument as to what translates to the supernatural in the African context. This argument stems from the African’s deep sense of religion. These deities that constitute what is referred to as the supernatural in the African context are understood by their human mediators who in some cases have some supernatural abilities. The possession of these perceived supernatural abilities by the human mediators raises the question of the existence of an absolute supernatural order.

The efficacy of the supernatural revolves around the African belief system. These beliefs include; belief in the one Supreme God who controls the affairs of the entire universe including the activities of the gods, ancestors, seers, shrine priests and all other human mediators between man and the supernatural realm.

There is also the belief in moral and spiritual or religious laws designed to ensure decorum in the human society and also to maintain a balance in the cosmic order. The

violation of these moral codes of conduct is believed to bring about an imbalance in nature and incurs the wrath of the Supreme Being who administers justice through the agents (gods etc) in charge of that faculty of human existence.

Abanuka in *Myth and the African Universe* posits that:

The gods are the direct representatives of the Supreme Being on earth, supervising more important events like war and guiding man in his profession and the tools he needs for it (30).

The gods have their mortal representatives who are believed to possess some supernatural abilities. These abilities however are either inherent or acquired by understudying established seers, diviners, native doctors and other established eyes of the gods.

According to Abanuka:

... Achebe skillfully employed the concept of Chi, the prevalent motif of Igbo ontology which depicts the individual's essence or reality as a portion of the great Chi, the Supreme Being, and which must be realized through one's achievements and social relationships (50-51).

From this excerpt, it can be deduced that while man may have some supernatural abilities, this aspect of his being is harnessed by him alone. It is "realized through one's achievement and social relationships" Thus if the individual has the responsibility to explore the supernatural aspect of his being, then the characters especially the tragic figures in most literary texts can be held responsible for their actions and inactions.

Labo Bouche Abdou in "The Force of Charms in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*", suggests that man is a helpless victim before the Supreme Being; Abanuka argues that:

The challenge of *Things Fall Apart* may not be grasped without a proper understanding of the idea of Chi. The fortunes and misfortunes of Okonkwo in the novel are seen in the significant way in which he challenges his Chi to battle (51).

Abanuka goes further to state that:

Okonkwo's tragedy may be interpreted to derive from not only his inability to control his ambition to be a success in life but also from his not being able to accept change. His suicide did not spell suicide for Umuofia.

It was only Okonkwo who died (51).

Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, rather than bow to the weight of culture and change defies the sacrosanct nature of human life (which is a divine injunction) and commits suicide. Wago in Amadi's *The Great Ponds*, also, convinced that the contested ponds of Wagaba is an ancient inheritance of his people commits suicide in the ponds rather than live to see Chiolu fish in the rich ponds.

The varied manifestation of the Supreme Being is what Campbell in *The Power of Myth* refers to as "the mask of eternity" (). These manifestations are not peculiar to the African continent alone. These masks are the supernatural forces such as the gods and religious deities, ancestors, spirits, etc. These agents serve as mediators between man and the Supreme Being. These supernatural agents however have mortal representatives who mediate between them and the human communities. These human mediators include; priests, priestesses, diviners, seers, fortune tellers, rainmakers etc.

These deities that constitute the supernatural world order play definite roles in the human society. They function as guardians of the people, and intercessors or mediators

between man and the Supreme Being. They also function as arbitrators; punishing defaulters to ensure decorum in the society.

The belief in the supernatural has its origin in myth which is man's attempt to interpret and assign meaning to the happenings within his environment. Belief in fate and predestination also forms part of the African belief system. The African universe falls into two sections – the tangible or physical world and the supernatural world. Both world orders have hierarchies.

At the zenith of the supernatural realm is the Supreme Being or God who controls the activities of the gods and humanity. Beneath the Supreme Being are the supernatural agents – gods, demigods, spirits, - and subordinate to these supernatural agent are human mediators. Each mediator has a specific role to play in the society. The more powerful a god is, the higher the respect accorded its human mediator and shrine.

The belief in religion is a recurring motif in African literature. African traditional religion is an avenue for interaction between man and the supernatural. This interaction occurs through religious rituals such as prayer, worship, and sacrificial offering. Abanuka observes that:

the ritual aspect of religion... is surely a way of expressing the inner intention to be part of or make contact with the supernatural or invisible world... the main aim of ritual is to excite feeling and act on our inner intention... ritual is relevant to the extent it enables the individual to reach beyond self or the attainment of a perfect state of being (17).

Labo Bouche Abdou in “The Force of Charms in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*” handles the supernatural from the angle of fetishes or charms.

Abdou uses fetish to refer to “the inexplicable side of religious beliefs inherited from forebears (215). Abdou claims that:

the preoccupation of Elechi Amadi while treating the theme of fetishes in *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* was, clearly bound to the geographical environment in which the author grew up... and the political events of the time, in that part of Africa (216).

The priests and seers in these novels are presented as mysterious beings. Anyika in *The Concubine* is a mystery to his co-villager likewise Nwokekoro the priest of Amadioha. In the words of Abdou:

Priests themselves are extremely dangerous in the minds of inhabitants and thus deserve a consideration. The insistence of the author on the fact that Nwokekoro has not a wife and a compound of his own proves that intermediaries are mysterious (217).

Abdou quoting Oladele Taiwo is of the opinion that:

Religion in African Society places great emphasis on supernatural agencies. The African himself is superstitious and believes very strongly in mystic rites. He reconciles himself to these forces and treats them with reverence and dignity. He believes that his every action is guided and directed by spirits (217).

Abdou’s reflections on the supernatural forces in *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* in the light of charms, presents the characters as helpless victims of some capricious gods or religious deities. According to Abdou, “no matter how numerous, costly and effective charms are, if the gods have decided, the person will die. That was Emenike’s case” (217). Quoting Bernice Idigbe, Abdou asserts that:

The gods in Amadi's *The Concubine* are neither good nor bad; they are only powerful. They use their power to manipulate man, and man's proud attempt to counteract their influence is mere folly and the effect made will inevitably lead to ruin (218).

The relationship between the gods and the characters as presented by Abdou is that of a slave master and his slaves; where man is a plaything in the hands of the gods. "When compared to the gods, man is helpless"(218). Abdou quotes Niyi Osundare to buttress this assertion:

In no other Nigerian novels have the gods been more dominant than in those of Amadi's. Here the gods, uncanny, implacable and ubiquitous, are not only an essence but a presence, woven as it were into every aspect of human relationship. In *The Concubine*, the sea-king intervenes even before the beginning of the story, and throughout remains the paramount but unseen force manipulating human life and orchestrating the painful course of men's tragic drama (218).

Abdou quoting Idigbe again observes that "Ihuoma is the sea-king's main interest and her male admirers are victims of circumstance and of their own misdeed" (218). These male characters however, are mainly victims of their own misdeed because they all had choices. Abdou's comment that "Madume gets into trouble because he refuses to follow the seer's advice to leave Ihuoma alone" (218), is a confirmation of the choices available to these male admirers. However the tragic upholds fatalism as such the will of the tragic hero is manipulated by the tragic fate.

Abdou further posits that:

In both *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*, Amadi makes a plea for the ancestral religion... there is something mystical and mythical in the African ancestral religion... it is a religion in which the gods participate in the day to day life. They are present anytime they are needed and they are actors in the taking of the clan's decisions, through their shrines and their priest (222).

The concepts of the tragic and the supernatural have continued to attract criticism in the field of literature. This is as a result of the controversies that surround the meaning and application of these concepts in the field of literary art.

THE TRAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL

In each moment of our life we entertain some purpose and to this purpose the synergy of our actions is directed... In these changes of personality, memory, the basis of consciousness is completely destroyed and all that is left to the sufferer as the substratum of his individual continuity, which has now ceased to be personal, is the physical organism (13-14).

This excerpt from Miguel de Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* suggests that man naturally has the will to strive for happiness. This desired happiness however is not always obtainable.

The sense of the tragic revolves around Unamuno's assertion that "apart from the fact that there is no normal standard of health, nobody has proved that man is necessarily cheerful by nature" (16). This implies that the tragic experience is inevitable for man. It is the fate of Unamuno's 'man of flesh and blood' who is representative of humanity.

Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* observes that:

The world is at every moment the attained manifestation of God, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the one who suffers most, who is the most rent with contradictions, the one with the richest sense of protest, who knows how to save himself only in illusion (5).

Nietzsche links the tragic to man's deep sense of religion. This sense of religion is seen in man's reverence for religious deities and also his acceptance of the tragic fate as a divine creation.

Nietzsche establishes a link between the tragic sense of human existence and the supernatural. The supernatural is the divine presence that interferes in human activities. It is the unseen power behind the mask of human existence. Nietzsche posits that:

We can assert that right up to the time of Euripides, Dionysus never ceased being the tragic hero, that all the famous figures of the Greek theatre, like Prometheus, Oedipus, and so on, are only masks of that primordial hero Dionysus. The fact that behind all these masks stands a divinity that is the fundamental reason for the frequently admired characteristic ideality of those well known figures (10).

Nietzsche sees the tragic reality of human existence as a myth. According to Nietzsche:

The content of the tragic myth is at first an epic event with the glorification of the struggling hero... the fact that the suffering in the fate of the hero, the most painful victories, the most agonizing opposition of motives, in short, the exemplification of the wisdom of Silenus, or, expressing it aesthetically, of the ugly and dissonant, in so many countless

forms, is presented with such fondness, always renewed- and precisely in the richest and youngest age of a people (24)

The tragic reality of human existence remains a mystery.

FATALISM/ DETERMINISM

Fatalism according to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* is “the belief that events are decided by fate and that you cannot control them” (425). Fatalism is a belief in predestination. Most African tragedies are analysed as products of absolute fatalism where the tragic figure is caught up in a predestined ordeal that leaves him with no room for escape. Richard L. Rubens in “Psychoanalysis and the Tragic Sense of Life” however is of the opinion that the tragic figure “must possess the courage and stature to act and to see his actions through to their ultimate conclusions, without allowing anything to deter him” (4).

He further states that:

the tragic hero, must, as Paul Tillich has noted, neither yield to fatalism nor humble himself in total guilt, but to press on in his action to find by experience the truth of his own nature and of the nature of man (6).

Felix Edjeren in “Determinism: The Tragic Vision of Modern Nigerian Literature”, is of the view that:

The African conceives of tragedy as an unalterable fate which has to be borne quietly. The Western mind conceives of tragedy as a frustrated heroic fight... The African reacts with an attitude of tolerant acceptance at the limit of things instead of jumping over the cliff into the sea (3).

Edjeren again asserts that:

Events in Modern African Literature appear to be compelled or induced by forces external to the fictional characters so that freewill and moral responsibility function within a predictable framework... the characters are helpless victims of malevolent gods, personal spirits or religious destinies(1).

This assertion however cannot be representative of a body of work as large as 'Modern African Literature' neither is the argument that the tragic figures in modern African literature 'are helpless victims of malevolent gods, personal spirits or religious destinies' an absolute truth; not all tragic figures in modern African Literature are helpless victims of some malevolent gods.

A tragic figure like Wago in Amadi's *The Great Ponds*, is able to defy the dictates of the gods and push his course beyond his existential limits without the manipulation of personal spirits. Frye speaking on the Oedipus Myth observes that "in either case, Oedipus has choices, although a pitying reader may not think so; what he does plus what he does not do are significant binary oppositions within the myth". This excerpt suggests that the presence of the supernatural in most African tragedies does not make the deities or personal spirits responsible for the fall of the tragic hero. These tragic figures to some extent have shared qualities with the gods which is their ability to undertake ventures that seem impossible to the average mortal being.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research paper is based on the tragic theory. The tragic theory cannot be discussed without reference to Aristotelian conception of tragedy.

Aristotle in *The Poetics* defines tragedy as:

...an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain, magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds, being formed... in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions(27).

Aristotle opines that tragedy should have six basic elements namely: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song. He goes further to state that tragedy: “Is an imitation, not of men but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality...” (28).

Aristotle emphasizes plot as the chief element in the creation of tragedy because the plot holds the incidents whose presentation determines the tragic quality of the literary text. To ensure coherence in the tragic plot, Aristotle suggests that “a well structured plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles (of wholeness)” (29).

The characters in a tragic text by Aristotle’s prescription are expected to possess four basic qualities: goodness, consistency, propriety and verisimilitude. They should also be people of high social status so that their fall would induce a higher degree of fear and pity from the audience. Northrop Frye’s “The Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy” begins

with an acknowledgment of Aristotle as the source for the interpretation of tragedy stating that:

It is largely through the tragedies of Greek culture that the sense of the authentic natural basis of human character comes into literature... in full tragedy the main characters are emancipated from dream; an emancipation which is at the same time a restriction because the order of nature is present (206-207).

Frye like Aristotle opines that “the tragic effect must be sought... in the plot structure” not in mood. For Frye, the catastrophic end of the tragic plot is inevitable and whatever the reader wishes to hold responsible for the tragic manifestations within the plot is insignificant. Frye links this sense of the inevitable in tragedy to Shakespeare. Frye observes that:

The tragic process in Shakespeare is natural in the sense that it simply happens, whatever its cause, explanation, or relationship. Characters may grope about for conceptions of gods that kill us for their sport, or for a divinity that shapes our ends, but the action of tragedy will not abide our questions... (208).

Frye establishes a relationship between tragedy and myth; presenting tragic heroes as archetypes with shared behavioural patterns and experiences. He uses Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to explain what he refers to as ‘the archetypal myth of tragedy’. Hence:

Paradise Lost is not simply an attempt to write one more tragedy, the real basis of the relation of Milton’s God to Adam is the relation of the tragic poet to his hero. The tragic poet knows that his hero will be in a tragic situation, but he exerts all his power to avoid the sense of having

manipulated that situation for his own purposes... if the hero was not sufficient to have stood, the mode is purely ironic: if he was not free to fall, the mode is purely romantic (211-212).

The concept of the tragic raises the question of what constitutes reality and being. If Delusion, Will and Woe are the mothers of being, then nothing is what it seems to be. The world becomes an elusive place where man lives by personal will power and is consumed by the woes of life. This reality of the destructible nature of man is supposed to make man wary of offending the divine presences. Nietzsche asserts that:

Tragedy sits in the midst of this superfluity of life, suffering and joy; with awe-inspiring delight it listens to a distant melancholy song, which tells of the mothers of being whose names are Delusion, Will, and Woe (20).

The tragic spirit according to Ikenna Dieke:

Is the courage to face something that can infinitely outweigh all struggle and anguish. It is an affirmative vision arrived at through the most uncompromising nihilistic position, in full realization of the negative elements of life. For Baraka the basic elements of this tragic spirit are struggle, pain, and opposition; each is metaphysically grounded in and derived from life and a sense of beingness. They cannot be eliminated without destroying life itself (83).

The tragic spirit sustains the tragic figure through his fight for an ideal state of being. This ideal however is not attainable for the “man of flesh and blood”. Madume’s misfortunes in *The Concubine* end with his death. Wago the leopard killer in *The Great Ponds* escapes humiliation by committing suicide.

The tragic sense upholds predestination and fatalism. The only source of redemption for the tragic hero is self destruction. Nietzsche is of the view that:

Tragedy draws the highest ecstatic music into itself... But then it places the tragic myth and the tragic hero next to the music, who then, like a powerful Titan, takes the whole Dionysian world on his back and thus relieves us of it. Tragedy knows how to redeem us ... and with a warning hand reminds us of another state of being and higher pleasure for which the struggling hero, full of foreboding is preparing himself, not through his victory but through his destruction (21).

Andrew Bennett et al in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* opine that:

The apocalyptic revelation at the heart of the tragic has to do with a sense that God or gods are looking down on the world to see that justice is done, or that, if there are gods, they are profoundly careless, indifferent, even sadistic. The heavens may be occupied or vacant but the world is a terrible place and makes no sense (106).

Arthur Miller's conception of tragedy is a deviation from some of the principles proposed by Aristotle. Miller is of the opinion that the common man can also be a subject for the tragic experience since tragedy according to Aristotle is "an imitation not of man but of an action and of life" (28). This emphasis on action qualifies the common man to be the subject for the tragic experience because life consists of men of different social status playing the roles assigned to them by society. Thus Miller asserts that:

The common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were... and finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass

of mankind should cherish tragedy... let alone to capable of understanding it (1).

The purpose of the tragic hero's fight is to protect his dignity and guard his self identity. Miller proposes that:

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing this-sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet,... the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society (1).

The inevitable tragic conclusion for Miller, "is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly" (1). This total compulsion to evaluate oneself justly can be likened to Aristotle's tragic flaw which brings the hero to a tragic conclusion. Miller however, argues that:

What has been called his "tragic flaw", a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters... is really nothing- and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive... who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless" (1).

The implication of Miller's position is that the right to self realization is a fundamental human right and whatever constitutes a hindrance to the realization of a man's true potentials violates a moral law. According to Miller:

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct... the thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts(2).

The tragic is one way of experiencing life, and it is indeed a universal experience. The supernatural on the other hand, exists in our collective unconscious mind. The interface between the tragic and the supernatural lies in myth; which is man's attempt to proffer a logical explanation for the catastrophe that befalls the tragic hero. The supernatural agencies become an alternative source for the unraveling of the mysteries that surround the tragic experience.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project is based on the Literary Research Methodology. This study covers two selected texts. References shall be made to other texts in the course of the research. References shall also be made to the primary texts and secondary library sources. The primary research sources are Amadi's *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine*. Secondary sources will include selected critical works on the concepts under evaluation from research journals, magazines and encyclopedia.

Structurally this research project would be divided into five chapters. Chapter one will consist of a general introduction of the topic which serves as a background to the study, statement of research problem, objectives of the study and the scope of the study as well as the significance of the study.

Chapter two takes a review of literature relevant and related to the study. This review looks at critical perspectives on the concepts under study by scholars. Chapter

three discusses the theoretical framework for the study and also the research methodology. Chapter four deals with the analysis of the concept of the tragic and the supernatural in the selected texts, while chapter five rounds up the research with a summary of the entire work.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN *THE GREAT PONDS* AND *THE CONCUBINE*

4.1 THE INFLUENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN *THE GREAT PONDS* AND *THE CONCUBINE*

The supernatural has an overwhelming influence on human activities in the fictional world of *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine*. Every faculty of human life is controlled by supernatural elements. The supernatural has strong influence in the shaping of man's destiny. The destiny of man is designed by the gods before he is conceived. Thus man's actions and inactions only help to lead him to the fulfillment of his destiny. This sense of predestination and fatalism suggests man's helplessness before the supernatural forces that frame his destiny.

The supernatural does not exist only to interfere in the affairs of men; they also have other functions that serve the general purpose of man. Man's sense of religion is born out of the mystery of the supernatural. This fear of the unknown and man's inability to understand the powers that control his existence makes him wary of the supernatural. This belief in the Supreme Being cuts across the universe. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* explores the belief in the Supreme Being and the supernatural mediators using two religions- the African Traditional Religion and Christianity. The conversation between Akunna and Mr. Brown give insight into this belief system.

Whenever Mr. Brown went to the village he spent long hours with Akunna in his obi talking through an interpreter about religion. Neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learnt more about their different beliefs (126).

This excerpt sets in motion a discussion on the nature of the Supreme Being, the supernatural and human mediators:

‘You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth’, said Akunna on one of Mr. Brown’s visits. ‘We also belief in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods’. ‘There are no other gods’, said Mr. Brown. ‘Chukwu is the only God and all others are false. You carve a piece of wood...and you call it a god...’ ‘Yes’, said Akunna. ‘... the tree from which it came was made by Chukwu, as indeed all minor gods were. But He made them for his messengers so that we could approach Him through them... The head of your church is in your country. He has sent you here as his messenger. And you have also appointed your own messengers... It is the same with Chukwu. He appoints the smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person” (126-127).

This debate proceeds to establish the supremacy of the Supreme Being over his mediators:

We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka- ‘Chukwu is Supreme’ (127).

The human mediators are believed to be people of uncommon birth who have supernatural abilities. Anyika the great dibia in *The Concubine* is a mysterious being. His place of origin is not known to anyone in Omokachi:

No one quite knew where Anyika had come from. True he said he came from Eluanyim but that was nowhere as far as the village was concerned. But by now he had stayed so long in the village that people had ceased to care where he had come from. To the villagers, he was just a medicine man and a mediator between them and the spirit world (6).

The communities in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* share the belief in the supernatural and human mediators. They also believe in ancestor worship. Each deity has a human mediator who serves as a channel for communication between him and his worshippers. Nwokekoro the priest of Amadioha in *The Concubine* like Anyika in *The Great Ponds* is a mysterious character:

He had no wife and no compound of his own. His office as the high priest of the most powerful god lent him great dignity... Other rain makers stood in awe of him because he had the direct support of Amadioha (8-9).

These deities are revered based on the power the command. Amadioha is seen as the Supreme Being and guardian of mankind. He is supreme over all other gods and has an organised system of justice. Unlike Ojukwu with the dreaded small pox:

Amadioha enjoyed a greater prestige than Ojukwu because for his vengeance he employed either a thunderbolt or a swift illness. No was intrepid enough to swear by him when he was guilty. After an illness it was customary to offer some sacrifices to Amadioha for all his help (15).

Amadi's world in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* is ruled by the supernatural. The activities of men are influenced and directed by the supernatural. Nothing is done without due consultation with the gods. Whatever happens in the society is accepted as the will of the gods. The gods have absolute power over the life and affairs

of men. As a religious obligation the people offer sacrifices to the gods in thanksgiving for their protection and provision and also for appeasement for their sins.

The Supreme Being through the gods administers justice. It is the incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being that makes man stand in awe of his possible wrath. Thus the need to be at peace with the creator becomes both a religious and social obligation. This is seen in the reverence for Amadioha, Ojukwu, Ogbunabali, Ani and other smaller deities in the fictional world of *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine*.

THE GODS AS GUARDIANS OF THE SOCIETY

The gods or religious deities in the selected texts function primarily as guardians of the society. They protect their devotees and need their material needs. Devout worship and regular sacrifice to the gods is believed to bring good will to the people:

Mini Wekwu, a stream with a powerful god, formed the boundary between two villages. Worshippers from the two villagers could meet and offer their sacrifices jointly. It established goodwill and the gods ensured that no evil crossed from one village to the other (14).

Charms and amulets are used for protection from evil spirits and evil men. Through these media the gods see to the general wellbeing of the people:

After the meal Olumba removed a small black amulet from his neck and substituted a bigger one. The former was for general protection at home, the latter for protection and luck while travelling (8).

Man must stand in awe of the gods who are guardians of the society. Falling out of favour with the gods is like falling off the tree of life. Olumba remarks:

I fear no man. Rather I fear the gods on whom depends the result of any fight... Never play with the gods ... They are powerful and should be respected. I would rather face a whole village in battle than have the weakest of the gods after me (9).

The ponds of Wagaba enjoy the protection of the gods:

During the rainy season the Great Ponds formed one mysterious stagnant sea of reddish and brown water ranging in depth from the waist of a man...

During the dry season the floods subsided. What water was left collected in individual ponds restless with fish (11).

The Erekwí clan in *The Great Ponds* flourished under the protection of their ancestral deities until the war for the great ponds of Wagaba. Household gods and personal spirits serve as mediators of the Supreme Being and ensure that any man who lives in accordance with the dictates of the gods enjoys prosperity and good health. Libations are poured out to the gods as a form of religious ritual. Anyika the priest of Amadioha in *The Concubine* pours libation to the gods before making the sacrifice for Emenike's safety:

Gods of the night, take this;

Gods of the earth, take this;

Ojukwu the fair, take this;

Amadioha, king of the skies this is yours;

And you ancestors, small and great,

Guardians of this compound take this (6).

THE GODS AS ARBITRATORS

There is an organised system of justice in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine*. The gods serve as arbitrators through their mediators. By ensuring that defaulters are punished the supernatural agencies are able to maintain law and order in the society. The violation of moral or religious law is frowned at. In a bid to ensure decorum the gods punish defaulters to warn. This serves as a deterrent to other members of the society.

The people of Chiolu and Aliakoro in *The Great Ponds* set out for battle without consulting the gods who have the final say in the administration of justice. The warriors only tried to “perform small but hitherto neglected sacrifices” to protect themselves at the war front. Their first battle is significant. The warriors use their charms and amulets to protect themselves and destroy their enemies. The Great Ponds of Wagaba is tranquil before the fight: “He saw big trees and massive climbers encircling them in a life – and – death embrace. He saw brightly coloured butterflies floating with oversized wings” (23).

The fight at the ponds distort the serenity of the ponds: “Arrows sped among the trees. Leaves barely ruffled as swift arrows pierced them and flew to strike other targets” (33). At the scene of war life loses its sanctity. Ikechi a young warrior from Chiolu does not respect his opponent’s plea for mercy. In his determination to etch a notch on his bow he disregards the sacred injunction on the sanctity of human life:

Now there was a plea in his eyes, but he had no breath to translate this into words. Ikechi, unseeing in his mad furry, did not heed this plea as his able hands worked his machete this way and that (35).

The battle for the ponds of Wagaba incurs the wrath of the gods just as Ihuoma’s insistence to be with mortals incurs the wrath of the Sea-King. Every act of disobedience is viewed as rebellion and every defaulter must be punished to deter others from

committing the same offense. Ihuoma's punishment is a mortal life of misery. In the fight for the ponds Aliakoro and Chiolu discard clanship for selfish gains. As clansmen they are forbidden by custom to hurt each other. Elendu the leader of the warriors from Isiali reminds his colleagues of the ancestral cord that binds them:

The people of Chiolu are our clansmen and we must respect that link.

Moreover, you know as well as I do that every farm has a god – Ajokuji. If we offend him we shall be fighting tonight not only against men but against angry gods, a situation I do not like to be in (51).

The gods as custodians and ministers of justice are not consulted to settle the dispute over the ponds until the outbreak of the incurable Wonjo disease. The abduction of women from Chiolu by Aliakoro warriors also angers the gods. As a tradition, women and children are not to be harmed during war especially pregnant women. However Olumba's pregnant wife is among the women taken captive during the raid by the warriors from Aliakoro. This act of insubordination is a crime against Ali the god of the earth. Ali cautions the erring people of Aliakoro by sending a signal of bad omen through Eze Okehi's son.

Eze Okehi's young son captures two healthy birds without weapon. Eze Okehi suspects this to be bad omen and his consultation with Igwu confirms his fear:

Ali is angry, very angry... Those women you kidnapped from Chiolu must be returned. One of them is pregnant and the god of the earth as you know does not tolerate violence against any woman with child (63).

Aliakoro continue to fight with Chiolu despite the warning from Ali. Isiali the eldest village in the Erekwí clan join forces with Aliakoro to fight against Chiolu instead of finding solution to the dispute between the warring communities. The peace initiative

by the clan comes after much harm had been done to the warring villages and beyond. The gods are eventually allowed to decide who owns the ponds. Olumba is chosen to swear by Ogbunabali on behalf of Chiolu. If he survives the oath then the ponds would be given to Chiolu. However if he dies Chiolu will forfeit the ponds to Aliakoro. As a tradition whoever tries to harm Olumba will be destroyed by Ogbunabali.

Aliakoro ignores the warning of the priest of Ogbunabali and employ the services of Igwu to harm Olumba. Igwu bows to the pressure from Wago and accepts to harm Olumba though he washes his hands off the consequences of waging war against the gods. Olumba's life becomes a nightmare under the oath of Ogbunabali. Ogbunabali is unpredictable:

One could look towards the shrine of Amadioha and Ojukwu while offering a prayer or registering a curse. Not so for Ogbunabali... non directional, distant, menacing, ubiquitous (130).

The Erekwí clan is punished for their irreverence for sacred ordinances. In their suffering they are able to realise that there is a power greater than their collective will power and that this power which is supernatural is able to bring them to their knees. Ochomma's pronouncement at her granddaughter's funeral points to the role of the gods in the calamity that is about to befall the clan:

Listen people of Chiolu: a great calamity is coming. The gods have run wild and we shall know nothing but tears. I saw it all last night, and I see it now as my child is about to journey to the spirit world. Carry her gently. I need not cry for I shall join her soon, while there are still people to bury me (150).

Achichi's divination confirms Ochomma's prophesy:

The gods are angry with the whole of the Erekwí clan. No individual sacrifice will do. The whole clan must get together to avert further loss of life (151).

The clan's refusal to heed the call for a collective sacrifice worsens their situation as death tolls continue to rise almost on hourly basis. The gods will stop at nothing to discipline the people. In *The Concubine*, Madume receives a due punishment for his greed and assault on Ihuoma. Madume's assault on Ihuoma on her late husband's farm is unlawful considering her position as a widow. This ill treatment of Ihuoma besides his secret love for her angers the Sea-king. His blindness is a punishment for his disregard for customary laws.

Ihuoma on her part also believes that the gods of retribution – Ofo and Ogu - are behind Madume's misfortunes:

It was impossible for the wicked to go unpunished, the ever watchful gods of retribution Ofo and Ogu, always made sure of that. They were not particularly powerful gods but they reminded stronger gods of those due for punishment (77).

4.2 THE TRAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN *THE GREAT PONDS* AND *THE CONCUBINE*

The association of tragic fate with the supernatural is an age long tradition. Since man has little or no power over the situations around him it becomes a matter of necessity to sometimes surrender to the will and purpose of the powers that govern the affairs of man. This power is the supernatural. A mystery beyond human understanding.

The desire to be happy is inherent in man. However external factors act upon this desire for a life of fulfillment. These factors include the supernatural and also man's

inability to remain passive when his dignity is challenged. Since man is first of all a product designed by the supernatural to fulfill a purpose, man has no absolute power over his life. This is seen in the selected texts as the characters fight against their destinies in their quest for happiness in a gloomy world.

Pain and suffering are part of the tragic design for “the man of flesh and blood”. The gods control the affairs of men and to this extent determine the life span of a man:

It was a fact that if Amadioha insisted on taking a man’s life, no medicine man could do anything about it and only a medicine man of great confidence would dare to try (9).

Despite the overwhelming power of the supernatural over human life, man continues to fight to assert his authority and to carve out the desired life for himself. The god of death is described in *The Concubine* as a bad reaper. He decides who dies and when, yet members of Emenike’s age grade at his second burial are able to stage a dance of protest against the god of death:

Here was a dance of passion, a dance of anger, a vehement protest against the god of death, an appeal for the recall of their departed comrade (33).

The supernatural has strong influence on Ihuoma in *The Concubine*. Her life is manipulated by her spirit husband the Sea-king. This unnatural aspect of her life is revealed by Anyika during the divination for Ekwueme’s proposed marriage to Ihuoma:

Ihuoma belongs to the sea...Against the advice of her husband she sought the company of human beings and was incarnated...However, because of his great love for her he is terribly jealous and tries to destroy any man who makes love to her... As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life was forfeit and nothing would have saved him... (195).

Ekwueme is determined to marry Ihuoma despite the warning from Anyika. As Nietzsche suggests in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the tragic hero's determination to see his quest to the end is not for self redemption. The drive to go beyond existential limits is for self destruction. Ekwueme confronts his human limitations as Agwoturumbe explains the procedure for the sacrifice to placate the sea-king. Ekwueme is left with two options; he either forfeits Ihuoma or goes ahead with the sacrifice and face the consequences:

If what Agwoturumbe and Anyika divined is true, then I think it is extremely risky for me to take part in this sacrifice on the river. As they say, the Sea-king is all out to destroy me...First the water is his element; second it will be very dark by midnight, and we shall be the only people on the river at that time; thirdly I can't swim (209).

This is a point of critical decision making for Ekwueme. He assesses the risks involved in the sacrifice. His obsession for Ihuoma however is strong enough to make him to take the risk and fulfill his promise to marry Ihuoma. This way he lives up to his name Ekwueme -one who keeps his word - and falls victim to the Sea-king.

Ekwueme is caught in the struggle with tragic fate. Ekwueme's fate has been decided by the gods. His encounter with Emenike in a dream has spiritual implication. Emenike's determination to drag Ekwueme across a dark stream to the farm in which he had been resting suggests that both men share a common fate. It is also from Ihuoma's house that Emenike lures Ekwueme into this journey to an unknown territory:

Suddenly from nowhere other villagers appeared at the scene...they urged him on. When he refused they decided to drag him across...with a frantic effort the captive broke loose and raced back. Progress was painfully slow...he woke to find his hand aching and his body wet with sweat (50).

Ekwueme does not emerge the best alternative to end Ihuoma's widowhood by accident. Fate -which is a creation of the gods- brought them together. The gift of a miracle child to Ekwueme's parents after fifteen years is part of the design of the gods to make up for the tragic exit of Ekwueme who hitherto had been an only son of his parents. This way his father's blood line continues while Ekwueme is used to achieve the Sea-king's vengeance on Ihuoma.

Ahurole the maiden betrothed to Ekwueme has her own peculiar spiritual problem. Anyika attributes her irrational behaviour to her personal spirit- agwu. Anyika is unable to subdue the influence of her agwu. Ahurole's spiritual problem could be seen as a ploy by the supernatural to bring Ekwueme to his tragic end. Her irrational behaviour leads to her separation with Ekwueme. This annulment creates a chance for Ekwueme to marry Ihuoma.

In *The Great Ponds* we see the uniting power of the tragic experience. In hard times enemies become comrades and sympathise with each other. Eze Okehi of Aliakoro accepts the sympathy of the people of Chiolu and is relieved by the idea that someone shares his pains: "Thanks for your sympathies...the old man murmured..." (166).

The calamity that befalls the Erekwu clan is a punishment from the gods for embarking on a senseless war and also for refusing to carry out the joint sacrifice to placate Ali.

Madume in *The Concubine* is a man of extreme emotions. He is fast tempered and quarrelsome. He is not a proud son of Omokachi:

Madume had one fault most villagers dislike. He was big eyed: that is to say he was never satisfied with his share in anything that was good. He would roar until he had something more than his companions' share.

Consequently he was always quarrelling over land, palm wine trees, plantain trees and other such things (5).

Madume is not a happy man. He cannot be described as a successful man. His yam harvest is usually poor. His wife's inability to give him a male child worries him despite the bride wealth his four daughters will generate for him. The gods in their uncanny nature have a way of balancing the circle of life to ensure that there is no vacuum in the order of nature. In the end man is but a creature designed for a tragic fate. What he does plus what he does not do all contribute to bring to manifestation the will of the gods.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 SUMMARY

The tragic and the supernatural remain key issues in African and world literature. The concept of the tragic continues to raise debates because of the difficulty in distinguishing between tragedy and the tragic. However the sense of the tragic is embedded in the belief that man is not happy by nature and that fate plays an important role in the life of man.

This belief in predestination brings in the picture of the supernatural as the architects of the destiny of man. The supernatural control the affairs of men whose survival whole is dependent on them. Man is created to fulfill a destiny and his actions and inactions on earth only lead to the fulfillment of one's destiny.

The belief in the Supreme Being is the basis for religion. Religious deities exist in the selected texts for this study as mediators between the characters and the Supreme Being who is believed to be the omniscient creator and guardian of the whole universe. No human action escapes the notice of the gods. Their gaze is upon humanity; punishing defaulters and rewarding devout worshipers with good health, protection and prosperity.

Man must live in awe of his creator to enjoy good health and prosperity. The tragic and the supernatural are interrelated. Amadi in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* is able to provide an insight into the nature of the supernatural and the role they play in man's tragic fate. The communities in the selected texts function within the frame designed by the supernatural agencies.

Tragic experiences and misfortunes are accepted as tragic fate and no one can question the gods who are believed to be custodians of wisdom. Besides the creation and design of the destiny of man, the supernatural also functions as guardians of the people

and arbitrators. They also see to the wellbeing of their worshipers and also ensure peaceful coexistence among members of the society by making sure that no defaulter goes unpunished.

The communities in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* are testimonies of the influence of the supernatural on the affairs of men. Their lives are governed by their gods and they are wary of the gods on whom depends their daily bread and protection. These communities are religious and do not neglect even the weakest of the gods.

The battles for the Great Ponds attract the wrath of the gods. As impartial judges every community in *The Great Ponds* gets a fair share of the punishment for the desecration of the sanctity of human life. Thus for the people to enjoy good health and prosperity, they must honour the gods by obeying religious and customary laws.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The relationship between man's tragic experience and the supernatural is a long established one. Nothing escapes the notice of the supernatural. Amadi in *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* presents the supernatural as a major force that regulates the life and activities of men within his fictional world.

These supernatural forces are also engaged in the services of men. They function as guardians and arbitrators to the people and also meet the basic needs of their devout worshipers. To enjoy the rewards from the gods man must play his part. Man must work hard to win the favour of the gods by adhering strictly to the decrees of the gods.

Fate plays an important role in the life of the characters in the selected texts. Nothing is done without due consultation with the gods. Devout worship is a condition for one to enjoy absolute peace and prosperity in the land. Amadi also establishes the

supremacy and omnipotence of the gods. Their wisdom and mode of operation is beyond human understanding. Thus the need to be wary of the gods.

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