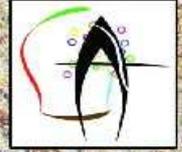




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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI
إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

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**Crystallizing Idyllic Africa: Prophetic Myths
in Selected Fiction of Ben Okri**

Sola Ogunbayo
Redeemer's University

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Introduction

Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is not to be acquired;
It is born with us

- William Blake, *On Reynold*

A good life is the masterwork of the magic intelligence
That dwells in us. Faced with the enormity of this thought
...failure, despair, unhappiness, seemed a small thing...

- Ben Okri, *In Arcadia*

Understanding Trends through Mythic Cognition

In the search for a panacea for Africa's socio-political and economic malaise, social, scientific and artistic critics have embarked on odyssey of thoughts. From the literary polemics, recent critical opinions have attempted to grapple with the continent's yokes with a bid of leaving a blueprint for progress. They have done this by using the fictions of Ben Okri, renowned Nigerian novelist, as a template. With *The Famished Road*, Sam Raditlhalo suggests a breaking of "civil and ethnic identities bequeathed by colonial rule" (2005:182); Mathew Green, armed with *A Way of Being Free and Mental Fight* (Romanticism, 2008) argues for an imaginative engagement with the economic base of history while Mabilia Kenzo, in his exegesis of *The Famished Road*, opines that there should be a borrowing of "insights from resources that are both endogenous and exogenous to Africa and their on tribal contexts" (2004:1) such that the travails occasioned by religious bigotry would be forestalled. In her comparative analysis of *The Landscapes Within, Dangerous Love, Songs of Enchantment, Astonishing the Gods and Infinite Riches*, Sarah Fulford (2009) highlights the spiritual-reawakening strand that connects these narratives. To her, Okri's transcendental revivalism is politically bent. From a literary perspective, Douglas McCabe and Esther de Bruijn (RAL, 2005, 2007), in the context of *The Famished Road*, are in counter dialogue of whether Africa's bankruptcy should be resolved by "New Ageism" or "Cosmopolitanism". In fact, speculations about an ideal Africa in this century have become divergent and are increasingly becoming problematic themselves, like McCabe and Bruijin's intellectual hassle, because there are no perfect submissions.

However, there seems to be an area often scoffed at but which has the potential of contributing to the search for an epistemological order for the African continent. That area is the use of myth as a predictive tool.

The term "*myth*" has been variously delineated and defined by sociologists (Emile Durkheim, E.B Tylor), political theorists (Georges Sorel, Max Muller) and structuralists (Claude Levi-Strauss) and African philosophers (Wole Soyinka, Isidore Okpewho) but what unites their views is the idea that a myth is a story. However, for the purpose of this study, a myth can be described as an imaginative account, animated by human and supernatural beings, which is projected towards explaining a phenomenon in life. The meaning-seeking tendency in humans enables them, at every moment of uncertainty and despair, to invent stories which tend to reveal the underlying patterns of things. A myth is invented through the imagination, the faculty that enables us to think of something that is not immediately present.

There are different kinds of myths. Broadly speaking, they can be classified into various categories such as cosmic myths, myths of gods, hero myths, religious myths, political myths, social myths, literary myths, philosophical myths and even scientific myths. Eliade contends that an account is mythic insofar as it "reveals something as having been fully manifested and this manifestation is at the same time creative and exemplary since it is a foundation... of a kind of behaviour" (2004:18). This idea is corroborated by Eleazar Meletinsky who opines that "Myths are a means of gaining insight into the human spirit" (2000:56). The complexity of the human behaviour is borne out of diversity, variety and unpredictability but literature, through myth, presents, plots and situations which are exemplars of probable human behaviour. An action or "a kind of behaviour" can be foretold through the medium of myth since the primary function of myth is to explain, to describe. This correlates with Alan Watt's statement that "Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories...which for various reasons, human beings regard as a demonstration of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life" (1953:7). The future is also a "kind of behaviour" and it can be foretold through myth. The "demonstration of the inner meaning" of the universe is expressed through the creation of myths. But when this "demonstration" tends to explain "a kind of behaviour" in the future, we have a prophetic myth.

The explanatory function of a myth makes it relatable to prophecy which primarily means a prediction. Prophecy can also be described as the foreknowledge of future events. Prophecies

could carry the message of a warning, a return to a kind of behaviour, an advice to desist from an attitude, or an outright proclamation of impending doom. We have social prediction, psychological prediction, religious prediction and political prediction. With the deployment of human and non-human characters, myth fashions themes, plots and situations which serve as analogy or imaginative representation of “a kind of behaviour” in the future. This is what is meant by a myth explaining the future or predicting latter occurrences.

That novelists and prophets have something in common is an idea with a long history. A cursory look at Western literary tradition, for example, reveals great poets such as Dante, Milton and Blake as having in one way or the other, viewed themselves and presented themselves to the world as endowed with prophetic gifts or divinely inspired speech. However, these literary giants were the inheritors of earlier traditions of literature as prophecy, one that is evident through the Middle Ages in Christian Europe and Muslim Spain and the East and ancient Greece. For instance, pilgrims from beyond the Greek city-states flocked to major oracles, such as at Delphi, to ask for divine advice about marriage, children, money matters, and even foreign policy. The responses were always in riddles, poetry, verses, images, symbols and esoteric expressions because gods were too complex to reply clearly to mere human beings. These narratives of the gods were often animated by imaginative characters like the Olympian gods that, after critical or religious analysis, were reflective of certain realistic happenings

In deploying myth as prophecy, Okri, in *Astonishing the Gods* (1995) and *In Arcadia* (2002) takes recurring patterns of the human imagination and repetitive historical happenings to form archetypal templates that foreshadow the future. This artistic style aligns with Levi-Strauss’ structural delineation of myth as a diachronic narrative that records the historical past and a synchronic means of explaining the present and even the future. Okri’s artistic construct is to show the cause-and-effect of recurring archetypes and to suggest preventive approaches which can forestall human socio-political and economic disasters. For instance, in *In Arcadia*, we see the fictional constitution of universal archetypal themes and experiences such as quest, journey, betrayal, adventure, pain and reward, forming a plot that can be read as showing the things to come as they apply to Africa and the global context. Whereas in *Astonishing the Gods* history is mythologized in a way that the exegesis of the texts, reveals their rootedness in material happenings, with a view to underline the contradictions of the future.

The mythic imagination serves as a vehicle for understanding trends and current affairs because the current degeneration of reality is a function of somebody's imaginative making. Dictatorship, for instance, is a myth conceived by an inhumane, insensitive government just like terrorism and kidnapping are the mythical constructs of religious fundamentalists. It is against this backdrop that we argue that a myth can be not only to understand another myth but also to anticipate and predict the consequences of following a current, acceptable myth. But in the course of mythologizing the ideal pattern for the future, Okri, through mythmaking also re-states, re-brand and re-invent the image of Africa as a continent of hope, progress and creativity. This supports Simon Gikandi's view in "Foreword: On Afropolitanism" that Africans should tell their stories not only to address their local travails but also to "respond to transnational challenges, of the complicated relationships between regions and traditions within Africa, and ...in building cultural bridges between countries, language and localities" (2011: 11).

Mythmaking is often seen as a mere mental exercise that has no relevance to quotidian experiences. Till now, some people still see myth as a "lie", a made-up story from an escapist. While the fictitious attribute of myth cannot be denied, it is imperative to note its epistemological potential. Myth is the human way of understanding life: a way of knowing and a way of expressing. By this token, myth can be used to figure out how things would be. Myth is therefore steeped in reality. Alistair Fox corroborates this view while defending the postmodern utopianism in *In Arcadia* that:

In constructing the fictive (that is the mythic) vehicle for his philosophical speculations, Okri blends the utopian genre with a number of other intertexts and fictive modes that deepen the representation at the symbolic level (2005:3)

In the light of the destruction of lives and human values in Africa, the potential of the mythical imagination to foresee certain events should be considered as integral factor in corporate development. In support of Georges Sorel (*Reflections*, 1961) and Wole Soyinka's (*Myth, Literature and the African World*, 1976) position on the pragmatic nature of myth, this research is concerned with the idea that with mythic imagination, the ability to decipher recurring patterns, Africans can come to recognize the universal in any set of material circumstances. It is then that we can anticipate danger from Western "generosity"; it is then that we can spot the making of a

dictator and, of course; it is then that we can foresee dearth and starvation borne out of an archetypal patterns of waste and instant gratification.

We see Okri's concern for Africa's condition in *In Arcadia* where Lao, Okri's persona and official narrator, introduces us to the archetypal characters involved in the odyssey to Arcadia. Critics, like Violetta Verge (2004:4), have argued that Lao is an African, since his traits align with socio-religious peculiarity of the region. Lao envisions Okri's myth of the search of lost origin, where the past is visited, understood and deconstructed in order to project into the future. Arcadia, in this discussion, is the mythical explanation of what the individual or corporate Africa is in search of: Arcadia is serenity occasioned by sensitive, democratic governance; Arcadia is the dependable justice system and the security of lives and property. Arcadia is the place where Africans can sleep with their eyes closed. Arcadia is the picture, "the desire that each human being cherishes in this short journey called life" (6). Okri, through Lao, mythologizes the future of Africa through the symbol of Arcadia. In like manner, *Astonishing the Gods* preoccupies itself with change through the mythical explanation of the future. For Okri, the future can be anticipated and understood when individuals, or the corporate entity called Africa, decides to liberate (what he polemically means by "astonish") themselves from the false consciousness and the mental inhibition imposed by the ruling mythmakers of our time (the gods). These gods are inhumane power brokers, selfish business moguls who have enormous influence on the economic base. These gods would only be astonished if their myths (laws, trends, policies) are understood, anticipated, and checked before they become the ideologies of the time. Myth is the language of change and the tool for the astonishment of the gods.

Astonishing the Gods and *In Arcadia* are about the use of the mythic imagination to understand trends, to know the antecedents thereof, and to symbolically suggest the likelihood of certain events to recur. To do these, Okri, in these texts, deploys a strong universal archetype called the journey. Journey or quest archetype is akin to Africa's tortuous odyssey, evident by hunger, war, dictatorship, disappointment, inequality, and general pessimism.

Journey as Archetypal Template

Just like academicians, critics and African philosophers struggle to map out a befitting theoretical framework for troubled Africa, Ben Okri, from a creative episteme, adopts the journey archetype for the delineation of the future. Okri's use of this aesthetic template is borne out the influences he receives from African philosophical thought like the "Abiku" metaphysics

(birth and rebirth journey; Western mythical models and mystical masters like Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travel*), Thomas More (*Utopia*, 1516), and Francis Bacon (*New Atlantis*, 1626) who have mythologized the idea of journey to suggest universal themes. In support, Fox reasons that the intention of this collage of European and African cultural traditions is

...to undertake a journey that is speculative and mythical as well as literal and real, designed to find a way of responding to the postmodern condition of humankind that can provide the individual with an alternative to despair(2005:5)

The journey archetype is about the hero in search of some truth to restore order and harmony to the land. It often includes the series of trials and tribulations that the hero faces along the way. Usually the hero descends into a real or psychological hell and is forced to discover the certain truths. While the journey archetype is deployed in multifarious sense, Okri's interest is in the journey archetype of transformation and change. Otherwise known as the archetypes of metamorphosis, the quest for transformation and change personify the process of seeking out new options; tearing down what no longer serves; committing to people, values, and activities; and creating new forms. The utilitarian value of the journey archetype is useful in transitional periods in individual lives (adolescence, midlife, retirement) as well as in corporate organizations (management reshuffling, change of policy statements, recruitment). For the perennial issues in Africa, the journey archetype is apt in capturing the lost values such as discipline, collectivity, respect, communality and hard work. To achieve this, Okri depicts in his narratives that individuals must leave the known to discover and explore the unknown. To save Africa in this century the inner rugged individual must brave loneliness and isolation to seek out new paths. Thus journey archetype is unconventional, unorthodox. Often oppositional, this iconoclastic archetype helps us discover our uniqueness, our perspectives, and our callings.

The journey archetype connects with our idea of prophecy because it suggests a connection with the past and a movement or a travelling into the future. Like prophecy, a journey looks ahead, anticipates ahead and moves ahead. A journey involves a search; prophecy looks for what is in the future. A journey intends to solve a riddle by looking for a solution; prophecy seeks to answer the now by looking at the thereafter. To be successful, the quest for change and transformation must derive its strength from understanding, anticipating, and knowing

recurring patterns of the past and present in order to guarantee a safe future. For Africa, the 21st century will only be a repetition of failures of the preceding one if, in our quest for change, we fail to spot inhibitions, inhumanity and dream-killers.

In Search of the Future: Mythical Paradigms as Prophecy in *In Arcadia*

Early in *In Arcadia*, Okri announces the state of the nation and the tragedy of every individual as he bemoans:

We had all lost something, and lost it a long time ago
and didn't stand any chance of finding it again. We lost
it somewhere before childhood began. Maybe our parents
lost it for us, maybe we never had it, ... (*In Arcadia*,6)

The predicament of loss at the individual and corporate contexts is the crux of *In Arcadia*. The loss in this narrative is artistically defined as “treasures hidden in Arcadia” (5). By critical inference, these “hidden treasures” refer to the future because the author hints that Arcadia, which denotatively means a place of tranquility, is a place of panacea which must be arrived at by following the instructions of certain archetypal patterns (inscriptions/messages) and characters (Malasso). Arcadia is a lost innocence, a missing factor, a blueprint for progress, a master key for the recovery of purpose and vision. Paradoxically speaking, the future is what is missing in the past. In the context of Africa’s socio-political predicament, the future means cultural loss such as discipline, creativity, tolerance, forbearance, equity and what Okri calls “a refuge from the corrupting cities”(65). Arcadia is not a place: it is an act, a system. When this system is followed, then the bliss in Arcadia will naturally follow. Though the persona laments that he “didn’t feel that we could ever find it again”(6), the mythical pattern of finding a loss through the archetype of journey is immediately set into motion as the narrator begins to chart the way for journey into Arcadia, the future. Hence the story begins as certain disillusioned archetypal characters (Lao, Propr, Dane, Sam, Jute, Husk, Riley) are set on a journey of instructions to Arcadia, the place in their future where, at least, “to get away from our miserable attempts at propping up falling lives, away from the dehydrating boredom of the daily round in this inferno that we call the modern world” (5), a place of meaning.

In Okri’s mythology, this mythical pattern of journey carries with it other archetypes which help to reinforce the pursuit of Arcadia, the future. They are the Oneness Archetype, Void Archetype, and Nostalgia Archetype.

The first motivating archetype which whets the appetite for the future is the Oneness Archetype. This vision of Arcadia is portrayed in "Book Two: Initiation in the Garden" where, like Biblical Garden of Eden, everything is the same "woven in the cloth of mystery" (42). There is no consciousness of good and evil since nothing is labeled in binary opposites. This archetype is symbolic of a material condition where the world can be devoid of tribalism, religious sectionalism, racism and ethnic rivalry. Though this may not be plausible in a quotidian sense, but the pursuit of an Arcadian myth of Oneness is a step to progress. What drives the travelers into the pursuit of Arcadia is the enormity of division in the modern world where the Oneness Archetype is far-fetched, where everything is "in broken pits" (5). The insistence on names, partitioning and divisionary tactics often lead to the pollution and consequence loss of Arcadia. The challenges ahead of the travelers is to see that every human is connected to another just like the vegetation, forestry, tapestry and symmetry of Arcadia. Hence, Lao's dehumanizing description of the co-travelers is technically and mythically corrected by the aesthetics of order, respect and oneness when the character comes to a self realization through the re-birth of the mind. Lao who, at the beginning of the odyssey, cynically dismisses members of the filming crew as "engenderers of chaos...interesting specimens of stressed humanity" (63) now , after experiencing transformation at the sight of Arcadia, opines "Living ought to be the unfolding masterpiece of the loving spirit" (230) What Lao evolves from is the un-Arcadian attitude of setting boundaries, which naturally inhibits cross-cultural exchanges, knowledge acquisition and corporate growth. Using the Oneness Archetype, therefore, Okri foresees a possibility of change in the future if humanity embraces what will guarantee that future: the myth of seeing things in a comprehensive, all-inclusive fashion

Next is the Void Archetype, which is another handmaiden of the journey motif. Void, in mythical epistemology, signifies stillness. Void is akin to the yoga practice of meditation. Void is not mysticism but a human character of self-discipline which involves separation from distraction. It is a condition which fosters inspiration and philosophical moorings because it is a conscious attempt to avoid noise, the very undoing of postmodernism. "In Book Three: Intuitions in the Dark" starts with noise: Lao, Sam, Husk, Riley Jute and Propr (a name suggestive of 'Malapropism') are at the center of pandemonium and perplexity which the author aptly captures as the spectacle of "our receding soul"(64).

Husk and Riley are busy giving significance to the show of turmoil by taking pictures of all the events. This reign of anarchy and fiesta of bedlam is deliberately and immediately set as a mythical binary opposite to the inspiring silence of Arcadia. Hence we see the ideal, the antidote to noise making, the opposing reality to the reign of disorderliness. From the character of Arcadia, Okri describes the Void Archetype as a progressive humanist act where “The vistas of the world disappear, and the world surrenders to an omnipotent darkness...The mind contracts. The spirit folds inward. An open sky gives way to a closed world” (67) because the “tunnel”, Okri’s artistic term for the Void Archetype, “makes us see inward, against our will” (69). The value of the Void Archetype or stillness in the journey towards the future is that revelations, self-criticism and comprehensive awareness are impossible where everybody seeks for attention and where significance is given to outward shows of carnality, improprieties, and vulgarism as exemplified by the ingloriousness of Jute and Sam especially. The Void factor demands separatism, objective clarification, impersonality where one can see “strong sunlight and strong shadow” and perceive the values of their complementarities. It is in Void that we, like Okri, can arrive at the disturbing conclusion that “darkness” (which imagistically means things, ideas and people that are unwanted, unconventional, often wasted and neglected such as farming, forest/ecological preservation, crafts and so on) has immense value.

The journey archetype as a tool for prediction also carries with it the Nostalgia Archetype. In Okri’s mythical construct, Nostalgia Archetype captures the travelers’ longing and yearning for a transformation. Nostalgia as an archetype means a wistful desire to return to a former time in one’s life or a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time. The Nostalgia Archetype is noticeable in Lao’s remark at the beginning that “We had all lost something...” (6). Though they are all enmeshed in almost irredeemable quagmire, each character in *In Arcadia* nurses cherished dreams for Arcadia, the future.

In “Book Five”, the nostalgic feelings of each of them carry peculiar labels such as “Jim’s Nightmare”, “Mistletoe’s Dream” and “Riley’s Regret” and so on. Each designation denotes the missing dream, the lost vision of each character. The intent of this mythic device is to create a thirst for the future, where, longingly the characters believe they can find fulfillment. In “Jim’s Intuition”, for instance, we can read Okri’s concern for the activation of mental potentials as well as the cultivation of natural resources. He foresees a situation in the future where the inactivity

and indolence can, again, lead to a loss, thus making the Arcadia destination far-fetched:

Immensity of the land
And spaces of the sun
They slept too long in paradise
And ended up in prison (178)

Jim intuitively for humankind that the opportunities provided by “spaces” and “immensity” must be utilized, else if they stay “too long” uncultivated, the whole bounties would end up “in prison”. This intuition from Jim’s longing is an antidote to his flaw. Jim, following Lao’s introduction, is “squat and fat and balding” who “Hadn’t directed anything in at least seven years...Incompetent beyond description” (10). Jim needs the Arcadian template of enterprise to get back to his feet; he knows that there is something he has lost, the reason he has not directed a film for many years. The African continent is bedeviled with Jims who are the directors of dreams and corporate visions. They are the parliamentarians who cannot enact a profitable law because they have failed to utilize “Immensity of the land”. There are individual Jims also. There are “spaces”, and ideas that are yet to be cultivated in the community because of indolence. In Jim’s intuition, Okri projects the consequence of following a pattern of idleness: “prison”.

Jute, the puritan and spy, suffers a character deformity which makes her long for a future where she will no more be seen as “the intolerant...the echoing corridors of dreadful institutions”(15). From her intuition of Arcadia, she sees the future implication of sternness, bland inhumanity, wanton callousness and institutionalized calumny which are her chief attributes. Jute is symbolic of organized religion, motivated by the selfish doctrines of charlatanism, bigotry and extremism. She knows what she has lost as the images of Arcadia warn her of the implication of her insensitive fastidiousness. Every overly critical officialdom and suspecting policing institutions have hidden contradictions such as hypocrisy, high-profile secrets and hidden agendas. Hence, they read their fears in other peoples affairs (use Jung’s shadow archetype) But Jute foresees that “...tyrants and dictators all had their Arcadias to cleanse their souls of the brutalities they had unleashed” because puritanical expectations have implications on the Jutes of this world. But shouldn’t organized institutions have laws, monitoring officers and principles? Yes, but every Jute archetype must have an Arcadian human-face where “There are an affront to a world reeking with suffering and starvation”. This is what Jute has lost; hence, the nostalgia.

Propr is nostalgic of the times people used to listen to him but he lost it on the grounds of his indifference to people's voices. He loves to make sound (meanings, statements, ideational remarks) but he is deaf, "tone deaf" to other people's perspectives, corrections and points of view because he spends his time "listening to garbage" (11). He is thus reaping what he has sown. Propr has lost audienceship: he is a player without spectators. On his way to Arcadia, he longs for that missing link in his sound-making career: how to carry people along, how to project, how to be democratic. On a larger scale, he is a leader without followers. Arcadia, to him, is a picturesque of the values inherent in listening by not ignoring "the cries of the people" (178). Here, Okri, in conjunction with the universal law of Karma, uses the Nostalgic Archetype to foresee the future of a non-listening leader as exemplified by Prop's nostalgia. We can intuit the future from Okri's narratives because the characters, accompanied with "fears...failures, the problems that had haunted their fathers" (6) are on a tortuous journey like us. They are looking for commonly lost values, namely discipline, equity, charity and management. These things have been lost as a result of carnality, indolence, hypocrisy as characterized by the miasmas of the travelers. Okri himself affirms that "all the possibilities of our lives run parallel to one another" (Palmer, 2002) He warns, using the foregoing archetypes, of the dangers of repeating the miasmatic attitudes so that the bliss of Arcadia can be experienced. Arcadia is in the mind: it is not a place that can be reached physically. It is only attained through the process of evolving and constant re-birth.

"Challenged Episteme": Unorthodox Archetypes as Predictive Myth

In the kingdom of this world
 We can still astonish the gods in humanity
 And be the stuff of future legends

Ben Okri, *Mental Fight*

There are many ways to die...
 A lot of them have to with living. Living many lies...
 Living the life imposed on you, the dreams and codes
 Of your ancestors

Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free*

Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, like *In Arcadia*, continues the probing of reality through the journey archetype. Unlike *In Arcadia*, however, the narratives revolve around a nameless character that embarks on a quest that leads to the island of the Invisibles. Following the instruction of invisible guides (a man, a child and a woman), he roams through strange terrains and hallucinatory landscapes. Later, he finds a bridge that is characterized by myth, magic, ideas and dreams. Crossing it, he leaps into an ethereal land, a potentially utopian city. While this plot structure is reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's *A Forest of a Thousand Demons*, the point of departure is that *Astonishing the Gods* is about humankind's discovery of personal and institutional flaws. While *A Forest of a Thousand Demons* is preoccupied with the themes of will, survival, tenacity and determination, *Astonishing the Gods* is about the unearthing of individual and corporate potentials in order to challenge a reigning ideology or to "astonish" "the gods" of this world.

The word "astonish" in "astonishing the gods" connotes assessing, anticipating, predicting, challenging and thereby subverting the ways of inhumane establishments in order to counter their narrative. The "gods" means those who hold the reigns of power, not necessarily a divine being. In order to astonish the gods, each individual must embark on a personal quest (it is a collective quest in *In Arcadia*, though the characters received an individual intuition) to probe the future of those who impose pain and difficulty. This narrative, therefore, is about change. The change is to challenge current ideological process which has attributed universality to certain issues that are highly contingent. To challenge the hegemonic structure of institutionalized iniquity and inequity by searching for alternative patterns is the change that the nameless hero of *Astonishing the Gods* seeks for. This change is necessitated by the use of language to paint a desired future.

In searching for an alternative challenging episteme, Okri stretches and strengthens the journey archetype with the use of Unorthodox Archetypal Statement, and Unorthodox Archetypal Sight. In the first, unusual expressions are stated in a way that challenges readers to ponder for a while before they begin to identify with them. The meaning of these strange statements by Okri unfolds in the course of the narrative. The seemingly weird expressions lead the reader on like a guide into the future, the end of book. These unconventional remarks make the readers to share in the burden of the nameless character because there is an inward, unconscious connection with what they mean. They are strange but we can identify with them. They are the statements that are missing in our constitutions, Bibles, Qurans, policies, proposals, publication,

educational curriculums, myths and folklores. They are not there because the ruling ideas have expunged them, leaving the credos of carnality, hypocrisy and instant gratification. While we may call these strange statements “paradoxes”, this discussion designates them as Unorthodox Archetypal Statements because they make us remember deep rooted truths and they inspire the imagination to reflect on the things to come.

In the second, Okri presents novel sights that cast a déjà vu feeling on the traveler/readers. These seemingly strange sights are not really strange because they appear as if they have been seen somewhere before. Though the visual elements presented are different from the pollution of the material world, yet the traveler can identify with them, because they are the ideals that he longs for. These sights are graphical images which generate the intuitions of and the recognition of what is to come. Unorthodox Archetypal Sights are used as prophecy because they are presented as desired visions of what can result from the disturbing values of ruling establishment and what means exist in astonishing, subverting and counteracting the self imposing “gods”.

Actually, the traveler has lost his identity and visibility because his education, fashioned after the curriculum of human imperialists, does not teach him that he exists. Hence, his search is to look for visibility, for meaning.

It was in books that he first learn of his invisibility.

he searched for himself and his people in all the history books

he read and discovered to his youthful astonishment that

he didn't exist. This troubled him so much that he resolved,

as soon as he was old, to leave his land and find the people

who did exist, to see what they looked like. (*Astonishing the Gods*,3)

The statements and pictures that this character has been used to have robbed him of his personhood. He is so psychologically retarded that he does not see himself.

Unorthodox Archetypal Statements

The statements are as follows: first is “You are seeking something that you have already found but you don't know it”, made by “a gentle voice”(6) to the traveler after traveling for seven years. The second is “You must master the art of happiness” (9). Third is “Retain your bewilderment. Your bewilderment will serve you well”(11) while the fourth is “Understanding leads to ignorance, especially when it comes too soon”(30) . Others are “When you make sense

of something, it tends to disappear. It is only mystery which keeps things alive" (30), "Too much beauty is bad for the soul...want some ugliness...some suffering" (77) and, the last guide says, "...things loose their reality if you are not aware of them"(104) . We have taken the statements in the order at which they appear in the narrative and as they relate to Okri's mythic idea of prediction.

From the foregoing it is clear that Okri, through the traveler's travail and the guiding statements he receives, is disenchanted with current protocols. The statements, paradoxical in nature, are geared towards making the readers remember some primordial ideas that materialism and carnality have made them to forget. These words reawaken patterns of wisdom that humankind share but have not remembered. They provide insights into how the future can be better.

Individual and corporate entities (Africa for example) seek for aids, loans and assistanceship that are not necessary because of the abundance of material and human resources needed for progress have been found but the places where these potentials are kept can no longer be remembered. Something else such as oil bunkering, political maneuvering, election rigging, and power tussle have cast amnesia to the creative memory. To guarantee a better-looking future, the continent must take into cognizance, the archetypal statement of looking for the missing future inside the region rather than begging. This is also a way of mastering "the art of happiness". Happiness and corporate well-being are experiences that must be prepared for. Tranquility does not come on a platter of gold. By finding the lost resource from the inside, the happiness of the future is secured.

Okri, with the archetype of "Bewilderment", foresees a future guaranteed by the sustained character of curiosity, wonder, and search which are all connotative of *research*. There is no progress without research. It is inimical to growth if the fundings allocated to instant gratification, materialism, welfares, bonuses, benefits, are larger than the time and resources devoted to research in health and education. "Bewilderment" is an asset, because it imbues in us the progressive temper of curiosity. Therefore, to pretend that there is much "understanding" is the greatest inhibition to postmodern development. The claim to full wisdom on the grounds of pomposity and self-aggrandizement is a threat to the future because it is "only mystery which keeps things alive". A person or society that has lost the sense of "bewilderment"(research) and "mystery"(myth) has lost the future.

Unorthodox Archetypal Sights

The signs and symbols of governing institutions are ideologically marked. These ideas are subtly motivated by greed, avarice, carnality and personal aggrandizement. In Christopher Flood's view

The ideological colouring may be more overt, as in the cases of party-political speeches, broadcasts and advertisements, campaigns by lobbies and political pressure groups, or partisan newspaper editorials...Or...less overt...TV documentaries, writings...teaching of educators, the pronouncement of dignitaries a school ceremonies, preachers of sermon in churches... (*Political Myth*,2002;16)

Over the years, formalized ruling bodies have semiotically ingrained the ideology of selfishness, power drunkenness, and financial recklessness into the system of governance. Unfortunately, these inhumane images have been accepted as the gospel truth for living because the governing myth has become the language used to impose interpretative structure on the psyche of the people. Through signs and symbols, therefore, Okri deploys mythical images which challenge the inhumane motifs of the ruling signs by predicting the contradictions which come with following them.

First, as the traveler passes through the verandah of the Invisible City, Okri gives a description which evokes the vision of order, reminiscent of John the Beloved portrayal of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: "Lost in wonder, he stared at the white harmonic buildings round the square. He noticed their pure angels, their angelic buttresses, and their columns of gleaming marble...He noticed how all things invisible seemed to become attentive to the glorious singing which poured a glow into the limpid moonlight"(7). If there is any anomaly that the ruling ideology is fraught with, it is disorderliness. In Okri's mythic view, therefore, the future can be saved from the incongruence of divide and rule tacticians, if only there is a strong sense of stressing socio-political harmony and institutional coherence. Differences must be understood and as individual part is "attentive to the glorious singing" of other parts. This archetypal sight of harmony is apt in capturing Okri's perspective of how the future is likely to be if orderliness and coherence are stressed.

Apart from the physical building that are visible, everything else in the island is described as invisible. Okri , in his paradoxical style, portrays in books three and four how futile it is to be looking for visibility. Visibility in this context means the quest for validation, acceptance and

society's confirmation; it is the orthodox endorsement of what is normal, beautiful and applaudable. There is much sadness and disillusionment in aspiring for societal acceptance through the medium of their own constructed signs and symbols. The seeking of visibility is a sign of weakness, imitation and parody. We must make our own visibilities or else we would be lost in other people's vision. The more invisible an individual or corporate society is, the more progressive because to be visible is to follow the status quo of depravity and insensitivity of oppressors' visibilities.

The archetypal sight of nothingness or invisibility inspires the quest for growth and meaning-making. Seeing nothing around us should make us want to create, not buying things and proclaiming other people's constructs. Those who set up disturbing appearances have done so to project their mythic conviction which is borne out of greed and wanton calumny. No wonder William Blake (Nicholas Marsh, 2001:88) avers that "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's" To be safe and to guarantee a future worth living, individuals must form their visibilities. In *Astonishing the Gods*, the readers are taken through the travails and tragedies of those who seek for visibility. Okri presents an overdressed lady in her odyssey to the Invisible City. The traveler inquires where she is going and she replies "I am going to where I can see people and where people can see me" (77). But the traveler observes that the more she craves for visibility, the more she disappears: "Just before she vanished into the temple, he thought he saw her smile. It occurred to him that ...she too was a paradox" (78). In order to avoid a future of contradiction, one must not seek for societal acceptance or what Okri connotes as *visibility*.

Conclusion

Inscribing Change: The Imperatives of Individual Messianic Vision

So far, the journey archetype has been delineated as a mythic device used by Okri to construct the image of the lost ideal as it applies to the future. Actually, Arcadia is not a place that humankind can reach because it represents the "idyll" future. But since the "idyll" cannot be attained in actuality, the quest for Arcadia is an impulse to strive towards perfection, orderliness, harmony and corporate beauty. It is an intuition that inspires the perspiration for reconstructing the ill-patterns of the past and by de-constructing inhumane ideologies. The future is always renewed by the unending visitation, researching, reinterpretation of lost ideals. This requires personal sacrifice and self-criticism. The messages, inscriptions and intuitions given to each character in *In Arcadia* is to inspire them to rectify their individual anomalies in the light of

what they want their future to be. Arcadia is an aesthetic vision meant to ameliorate individual and mass disillusionment of humankind. From Okri' mythological stance, the change required in the future must start from the sacrifice of every individual.

Self sacrifice remains a timeless panacea for an ailing society. That is why Okri, in *Astonishing the Gods*, uses a single character to paint a future where each individual would be responsible for his destiny. We need not wait for government policies and democratic ideals to shape the future for us: we can individually predict what is to come and, if need be, change it for positive result. Sacrifice entails the consciousness of the voice of conscience (what Malasso archetype is to the travelers in *In Arcadia* and what the guides are to the nameless traveler in *Astonishing the Gods*), the practice of selflessness, the love of creativity, the use of perception and the engagement of self-reflection which are all characteristics of the mythical art of prediction

But are all these elements in *In Arcadia* and *Astonishing the Gods* prescriptive enough to ameliorate the suffering continent of Africa? Is the myth of prediction capable of liberating the African continent from the shackles of neo-colonialism, corruption and oppression? Are Okri's "pictures" not "sophisticated and unsettling" like Green observes? Well, Okri's prophetic myths of Africa and the world may appear descriptive in the narratives but these visions of "Arcadia" and "Invisible City" are artistic prescriptions which suggest to us the invaluable rewards of the discernment of causes through the observation of recurring pattern either in the past or the present. The utilitarian value of this artistic/psychic attitude is to prevent such undesirable features to recur in the desired future. The gods that create hunger, dearth, dictatorship, kidnapping and terrorism in Africa would be astonished if individuals and corporate bodies can learn how to predict their next lines of action. How would kidnapping succeed if the movements, hideouts and networks of the perpetrators can be predicted? What success awaits a terrorist whom the timing of his bomb is a stale news to law enforcement agents?

We can raise an ideal Africa of the twenty-first century if the lost purity, decency and orderliness which represent "the first foundation of the golden age" (*Astonishing the Gods*, 130) can be mythically deciphered, embraced and utilized to address the problems of insecurity, tyranny and violence and to offer as contributions to global debates on the preservation of the human specie.

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