

Original Paper

Establishing Functions of Myth Through the Lenses of

Euhemerism: Achebe's *Arrow of God* in Focus

Alhassan Yakubu¹, Mohammed HabibSibaway¹ & Oparebea Nelson¹

¹ Department of languages, E.P University College of Education, P.O. box 16, Bimbilla, Ghana, West Africa

Email: alhassanyakubu594@gmail.com, anisasimli@gmail.com, onelson@pwce.edu.gh

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Abstract

This article discusses the functions of myth in Achebe's Arrow of Gods using Euhemerism as a reality measuring stick. The article considers the form and nature of myth through what it calls "definition of perspectives". Using this definition of perspectives, the paper considers the myth-ritual perspective, the structural approach perspective and the functional approach perspectives in defining myth. Having established that Euhemerism is the believe that the gods are men deified for their good deeds , and that Africans believe they can speak and seek assistance from their dead ancestors , the article postulates four different functions the gods can perform. The paper argues that the gods are capable of protecting our forest and water bodies as well as be able to ensure peace and unity between and among people in a community. It further opines that not only do the gods have healing powers, and that the Priests serve as "medical doctors" in the African traditional communities, they equally ensure prosperity for the people who believe in them.

Keywords

Euhemerism, myth, folktales, gods, Levis-Struss, Malinowsky

1. Introduction

The term mythology can refer to either the study of myths or a body of myths. For example, comparative mythology is the study of connections between myths from different cultures, whereas Greek mythology is the body of myths from ancient Greece. The term "myth" is often used colloquially to refer to a false story. However, the academic use of the term generally does not refer to truth or falsity. In the study of folklore, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form. This idea of myth explaining how the world and humankind came to

exist is what Joseph Campbell (1966) means when he writes that “Mythology is the picture language of metaphysics [. . .] the womb of mankind’s initiation to life and death” (*Bios and Mythos*, pp. 19-20).

So what is myth? This question may sound simple, but answers to it can be very complex. There are many definitions of myth as there are its authors, but the best way to look at these various definitions is to put them into what we call *Definitions of Perspectives*, and what Stith Thompson refers to as “Practical Definitions” (see Sebeok, 1995). By definition of perspectives, we mean definitions from the ‘ Myth-Ritual controversy Perspective, the Structural Approach Perspective, the Functional Approach Perspective. Even though there are many more perspectives from which myth can be defined - psychoanalysis, evolutionism, diffusions, symbolism, and the qualitative approach (see Okpewho, 1983), this article limits the scope to the first three above.

Perhaps, the oldest of all these perspectives of definitions of myth is the Myth-Ritual Theory. **The theory** holds that myths are oral narratives which explain a certain ritual performance, as such “myths are second to rituals in terms of evolution” (Okpewho, p. 45). Robertson Smith, in his *The Religion of the Semites* (1956), holds the view that “so far as myth consists of explanations of ritual, their value is altogether secondary, and it may be affirmed with confidence that in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth” (pp. 17-18). Lord Ragland in his *Myth and Ritual* (cited in Sebeok, 1995, p. 76) quotes Hook as saying that “The essential truth of the myth lies in the fact that it embodies a situation of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent, and which calls for the repetition of the ritual which deals with the situation and satisfies the need evoked by it”.

Ultimately, it is in the nature of this “repetition of ritual” that myth finds its relevance, because in the performance of any ritual, there certainly must be a myth behind it. Ragland himself supports the view of this myth and ritual theory in as far as he argues that myth is “a narrative associated with a rite” (Myth & Ritual, p.76). But the standard definition of myth uniting rituals of all shades, according to Okpewho (1983), may be found in Thersites (p. 328). He quotes from Thersites regarding myth as “the spoken correlative (*legomenon*) of the acted rite, the thing done (*dromenon*)” (*Myth in Africa*, p. 47).

In effect, this paper holds the view that myth and ritual should be seen as the *per formative (the what)* and the *narrative(the why)* respectively. The performative being the manifest activity, the ritual, that is undertaken or carried out by a group of people, a community or an individual, and the narrative being the reasons or the explanations behind what they do(the myth). Such performative acts are normally not a daily routine, but an occasional and periodic occurrences in funerals, festivals and other traditional and cultural occasions.

1.1 The Myth-Folktales Debate

There has been a raging controversy about whether or not myths and folktales are one and the same thing. Those who argue for their sameness base their arguments on the form and structure of either the myths or the folktales. The structural approach to myth, largely attributed to Levis-Struss, claims that an understanding of myth is to seek generic distinction more within the body of the material itself, not

on the basis of what Okpewho (1983) calls “the advertised views of the society” in which it is found. This view limits myths to tales, and claims that only a sequential arrangement of specific tale motifs can determine the type of a tale-the type of myth. The basic underlining principle of Levis-strauss’ Structural Approach is that myth “is a type of tale which stands midway between history and fiction, and it is characterized by being based on a firm structure of a binary opposition which is progressively lost to either of those other genres” (Okpewho, p. 54).

On the account of myth being a tale, Propp in his *Morphology of the Tale* claims there are thirty-one functions to a fairy tale and one hundred and fifty constituents elements “going side-by side with these functions and which can be sequentially arranged”. He actually distinguishes fairy tales from other tales when he writes,

If we took all the names of the hundred and fifty elements of the fairy tales, and tabled them in the order which is set by the tales themselves, we could enter every fairy tale in existence on the chart; conversely, every tale that could be entered on the chart is a fairy tale, and every one that cannot belongs to another class of tale (*Morphology of the Tale*, 1968)

On the contrary, reading closely Levis-strauss’ *Structural Anthropology*, it appears that myth and folktale are actually not the same, and that one could attempt a separation between the two. He argues that

In the first place tales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myth. The latter are not cosmological, metaphysical, or natural, but more frequently, local, social, and moral. In the second place-and princely because the tale is a weakened transposition of myth-the former is less strictly subjected than the latter to the triple consideration of logical coherence, religious orthodoxy and collective pressure. The tale offers more responsibilities of play, its permutations are comparatively freer, and they progressively acquire a certain arbitrarily character. But if the tale works with minimized opposition, these will be so much more difficult to identify (1967, p. 132)

Definitions of my thvary significantly from each other. At one extreme, myths are sacred or symbolic stories; at the other, they are stories which misrepresent facts and can therefore be said to be fictitious. Furthermore, the Encyclopedia Britannica (p. 1133) defines myth as; “a story handed down in oral form from our forefathers which explain reality, concepts and beliefs and further serve as explanations of nature events such as creations, origin of things, history of a race or a people”. This shows that myth is not just a creation of human fertile mind and imagination (which folktales are) but a direct expression of reality. “man is a being that cannot bear to live with certain questions unanswered that is why he sits

down to formulate myths to make those questions answerable” (Jaja, p. 10).

In an attempt to distinguish myths from folktales, (Jaja, 2014, p. 10) writes that myths are results of the revelation of “thou” and are often founded upon an original experience that reaches beyond the sensorial and rational, but they are not illogical. Jaja, citing (Kirk, 1974, p. 60) concludes that a critical analysis of many myths will only reveal **something** that shows that “they are actions of gods and heroes”. However, there is a meeting **point** between myth and folktales because they are both stories. The point of myth being, or likened to a tale, has been pressed home to the extent that Alan Watts, in his *Myths and Rituals in Christianity* has reduced myth simply to a story. He posits that “Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories-some no doubt fact, and some phantasy-which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life” (p. 7). Myths are among the earliest stories we know; they are interpretive and therefore inherently subjective accounts of natural phenomena (Dorothy Simins, 2014). Jaja (2014) in particular has distinguished three kinds of stories which are myths. He argues that “myths contain three kinds of stories namely, stories of origin, explanatory stories and didactic stories”. Each of these stories is meant to explain a particular phenomenon’ (ibid p. 10). The implication here is that both myths and folktales are stories ,but not all stories are folktales. largely, didactic stories that are for human amusement and don’t seek explanation **of** the phenomenon of human existence, neither about gods or heroes, will be termed *Folktales*.

Burkholder (2011, p. 9) is very equivocal in declaring the difference between myth and fairy tales. **He argues that** “Fairytale are not myths and myths are not fairytale”. Myths in the original, unstretched sense were stories of gods or heroes that usually had a religious or moral purpose”. Burk holder argues further that myth **does not exist only in** a literary form, **but also covers a** concept that theologians, psychologists, Anthropologists, and philosophers all have something to say about ,because of its connection to the human experience and worldview. Fairytale, to some extent, do the same thing **as myths**, but not to the same end (**achieving the same results**), which is why myth cannot be a subcategory of **folktales**; it is too powerful a form to be subjugate (Burkholder, 2011, p. 10).

These quotations go to emphasis that the collectivity of the human race, the psychological and spiritual activities of a nation can only be explained by a story, and this story is what becomes the myth of a nation, and the common activities of the nation are suggested by myth. In this way-myth being stories, the human being is able to explain issues regarding himself and the origin of the earth. This is what Mark Schorer means when he writes that “Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend”. (*The Politics of Vision*, p. 29)

Perhaps one would be right to roll up all the discussions on myth being a story, or story being a myth, into what Virve Sarapik in his *Artist and Myth* has termed *poetic or narrative myth* and *explanatory or cognitive myth*. He writes further, that

One possibility allowing myth to survive today lies in its ability to continue as a narrative. This is what we find for example in film series, comics, detective novels or other stories produced by mass culture (for example Eliade, 1963, 191 ff), Another possibility lies in its ability to continue as a cognitive element, that is, the part of the myth used to explain the world (p. 39).

What this means is that stories in the category of folktales, fairy tales, legends and all the nine semantic domains by Jolles (see Okpeho, p. 55), would be termed as poetic or narrative myth, and stories to explain how the world gained its current form and how customs, institutions, and taboos were established in the world would be termed cognitive myth.

Next is the functional approach to defining myth. This approach is largely attributed to Bronis law Malinowski, and it holds that whatever reason we may have to defining myth must be rooted in the system and usage of the people who practice them. Malinowski himself was prepared to base his analysis of a society mainly on the views expressed by its informants. But one may want to interrogate exactly what constitute a functional approach to defining a myth by first asking what “*function*” is. According to Radcliffe-Brown “the function of any recurrent activity . . . is the part it plays in the social life as a whole, and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of the structural continuity” (1935, p. 396). Malinowski himself had earlier opined that the function of Anthropological facts is the “part which they play within the integral system of culture and the manner in which they are related to each other within the system” (cited in Okpeho, p. 21). What this means is that everything a society does has, not only a practical use for its citizens, but is also situated in a specific place within the fabric of social norms. Okphwhorefers to this “*fabric*” (or the functional unity’) as the sum total of needs individually and collectively.

Malinowski’s functionalist position on mythology-the functional definition of myth-is that tales reflect the great mythical generations; they are accepted as true, for everybody knows and tells them, and they serve as sanction or charter for proper conduct because they preserve the ways in which the society has always behaved since time immemorial. If myth is a charter, says Okpewho, “then there must be a version of it that is pure and canonical, and surviving the corruption and manipulation of successive generations of tellers” (p. 22). In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski says myth, like songs and fairy tales, are owned by certain sub clans. . . And indeed, it is a rule that a myth will be best known in its locality, that is, known with all the details and free from any adulterations or not quite genuine additions and fusions” (pp. 327-329).

The implication of this quotation for mythology is that whatever details we find in any tale mean exactly what they say, and not fused with connotative undertones. Technically, therefore, myths can be said to be “*tautegorical*”, as a result, we should ignore any notion of symbolism and aim for plain surface message for myths. It is in this basis that we find the Malinoswkian definition of myth not only instructive, but all embracing of the perspectives discussed above which goes hand in hand with

Encyclopedia Britannica which defines myth as;... “a story handed down in oral form from our fore fathers which explain reality, concepts and beliefs and further serve as explanations of nature events such as creations, origin of things, history of a race or a people” (p. 1133).

2. Theoretical Framework

Euhemerist theory holds that storytellers repeatedly elaborated upon historical accounts until the figures in those accounts gained the status of gods. This theory is named “Euhemerism” after the Greek novelist Euhemerus (c.320 BC), who suggested that the Greek gods developed from legends or human beings whose status had been elevated. Euhemerism has thus come to represent the position that all tales, especially of the heroic kind, primarily have to do with antecedent historical personalities and their experience. Euhemerus believed that the gods are men deified for their good deeds. Jean Houston in his *The Hero and the Goddess* takes the same position as Euhemerus, and argues that the gods are “behavioral archetypes”, They are “men and women writ large”. They possess “deified qualities of love, war, fertility, authority and death”. (1992, p. 21, p. 41, p. 42). For Joseph Campbell, a god ‘is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe” (Sue Flowers, p. 28). Campbell prefers to call these deified men “a motivating power”, but has the same idea in mind as his counterparts. This article relies on this notion-that gods are men deified for their good deeds-to draw on instances in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of god* where the people of Umuaro and the other five surrounding villages worship their ancestors as men deified (as men deities).

3. Methodology

By establishing the function of myth through the lenses of Euhemerism in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, this article first of all, will highlight the nature of ancestors who have virtually become deified as gods, and how these ancestors-made -gods are held high or revered by the African. To the African, his ancestor is dead, but alive (*Arrow of God*, p. 14, p. 92). He was human when he was alive, and now dead, he is not only being called upon, but also worshiped for needs of the living. Achebe, in *Arrow of God*, clearly demonstrates this idea of men deified as gods, or what I call dead but alive mentality of the African. In the fight between Akukalia and Ebo, and after the former had entered the latter’s shrine and destroyed everything, Achebe writes. . .

At his shrine, he knelt down to have a close look. Yes, the gap where his *Ikenga*, the strength of his right arm, had stood stared back at him-an empty patch, without dust, on the wooden board”. Nnadoh! “Nnadoh!, he wept, calling on his dead father to come to his aid. Then he got up and went into his sleeping room. He was there a little while before Otikpo, thinking he might be doing violence to himself, rushed into the room to see. But it was too late. Ebo pushed him aside and came into the obi with his loadedgun. At the threshold he knelt down and aimed. Akukalia, seeing the dander, dashed

forward. Although the bullet had caught him in the chest he continued running with his matched held high until he felt at the threshold, his face hitting the low thatch before he went down (*Arrow of God*, p. 25).

This quotation epitomizes Euhemerism. Ebo called on his dead father to come to his aid, obviously to give him (Ebo) the power to kill Akukalia. He got the power, and killed him. He was infuriated by Akukalia's destruction of his Ikenga, a symbolic representation of his ancestor. In explaining the significance of Ikenga, Achebe writes

I may explain that Ikenga is the most important fetish in the Ibo man's arsenal, so to speak. It represents his ancestors to whom he must make daily sacrifice. When he dies it splits into two; one half is buried with him and other half is thrown away. So you can see the implication of what our friend from Umuaro did in splitting his host's fetish (p. 38)

Secondly, the article will highlight the function of the gods-what the African believe the gods are capable of doing to bring sanity in the society. Needless to say that it has already been established that myth has to do with stories about gods also, and Northrop Frye who favours a functional definition of myth will nail it to the coffin: He believes that myth is nothing but an "imagination to identify the human with the non human world", and in trying to do so, the "result is a story about a god" (1962, p. 45). The paper has been divided into five main parts: Introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, analysis and conclusion

4. Analysis

4.1 Functions of Myth

Although a myth cannot be proven logically or scientifically, we realize that it has significant value for our attitudes toward the world we live in. Dorothy Van Ghent (1953), explains this meaning and significance of myth:

Myth is a dramatic vision of life, and we never cease making myths, accepting myths, believing in myths. . . Myth appears in a novel when the action and the particular set of manners represented in the book are organized in a total symbolic construct of such a kind that it not only reflects the aspirations and ideas, the attitudes and customs, of a large social group, but also seems to give to these attitudes and customs the sanction of some "higher authority", perhaps the authority of ancient tradition, perhaps supernatural authority, perhaps the authority of some vaguely defined power-and-knowledge concept such as "law" or "government" or "science" or even "society" itself. Finally, this

total symbolic construct is, in myth, projected dramatically . . . Myth does not offer an intellectual system. What it offers is the dramatization of powers that are assumed to have universal authority over the actions of men. The dominion of allegory

The fact that the believe in gods and ancestors by the African does not only reflect the aspirations, ideas, the attitudes and customs of the African people, but also seems to give to these attitudes and customs the sanction of some “higher authority”,—the authority of supernatural, or the authority of Ebo’s dead father, has become the reality measuring stick for reading Achebe’s *Arrow of God*

But if we will return briefly to Malinowski, we can further establish the functions of myth in what he says. He says: “Myth, studied alive, is not symbolic but a direct expression of its subject-matter. . . . Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function; it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency and contains practical rules for the guidance of man.” (Seboek, p. 79)

4.2 Functions of the Gods in Arrow of God

Achebe’s *Arrow of God* demonstrates a tacit believe in the gods by the African ,and how the latter thinks he can achieve a certain positive end by the instruction, and on the reliance, of the former. This article discusses a number of the social ends the African hopes to achieve, or have achieved, through the gods.

4.3 A Protector of Vegetation/Plantation and Water Bodies

Through myths, and the belief in gods by the African, water bodies and vegetation are protected, thereby making the earth serene to live on. Plants and trees grow and blossom into life with spirits infused into them. The African believes that these spirits dwell in the vegetation and water bodies, as such these plants and water bodies are highly protected against destruction of any form. In the African setting, there are some days one cannot visit some particular rivers and forests, and any offense in this regard is regarded an abomination and discretion to the spirits, as such offenders are accosted and summoned before the chief palace to be charged accordingly. The purpose for dragging such offenders to the chief palace ,and charging them same, is to offer an opportunity to pacify the gods through the ransom the offender pays, normally of schnapps and animals (such as goats, sheep, fowls, and so on). In the first place, there was an unwritten, tacit and silent underlining believe by the unlettered African forefather, and even now among the lettered Africans who are custodians of the gods, that the gods/spirits who dwell in the forest and in the water bodies need a day or days not only for resting, but for manifesting themselves physically. This belief in the gods and the subsequent believe in sacred days for them, for which no one neither goes to the river nor haunt nor goes to farm, is not without scientific justification, never mind that the African unlettered forefather never had a scientific mind and therefore would not have thought about it scientifically. If they had, and still have, two days set aside for which no one visits the river side nor the forest, as have already been argued, it presupposes that there will be

eight days in a month and ninety six days in a year where no one steps into the forest for hunting or farming, or visits the river for fishing or swimming. It will be argued scientifically, therefore, that these days are enough for the fish in the sea to procreate and to reproduce, and the forest also to recuperate, even though the African thought, and still think, of these days as resting days for the gods or spirits. To the Ebo man in Nigeria, the gods must not only protect the vegetation, they equally must indicate (or give permission) when and what time to start farming. Establishing this function of the gods through their custodian or representative, Ezeulu, Achebe writes

Whenever Ezeulu considers the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people, he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watch man. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive, it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered, he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the chief priest of Ulu was more that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there will be no festival-no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare (*Arrow of god*, p. 3).

On another occasion, Achebe extols this same idea of the power of the gods rooted through Ezeulu. He writes

If Ezeulu does not declare a day for the festival, there will not be planting nor harvesting. He has power over the year and crops, but this power is not his, but the gods. The gods therefore have the oversight responsibility to ensure the safety of the forest. And when the green light is finally given for farmers to start planting, the same gods would be called upon again for bumper harvest and accident free farming season. Ezeulu offers a powerful pray to the gods in this regard

Ulu, I thank you for making me see another moon. May I see it again and again. This household may it be healthy and prosperous. As this is the moon for planting may the six villages plant with profit. May we escape dander in the

farm-the bite of a snake or the sting of a scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland. May we not cut our shinbone with machete or the hoe. . . may good meet the face of every man and every woman. Let it come to the land of river rain folk and to the land of the forest peoples” (*Arrow of god*, p. 6).

The gods do not only preserve the forest and ensure bumper harvest, they equally preserve the water bodies. Ezeulu at a point is worried the women are returning from the stream very late in the night, but he quickly remembers that there is a ban on the nearest river by the gods.

. . . Ezeulu had forgotten temporarily that the nearer stream ,Ota, had been abandoned since the oracle announced yesterday that the enormous boulder resting on two other rocks at its source was about to fall and would take a softer pillow for its head. Until the *alusi* who own the stream and whose name it bore had been placated no one would go near it (*Arrow of god*, p. 7)

4.4 Peace and Unity

One key function of the gods in *Arrow of God* is to ensure peace and unity. Peace must be the foundation of the progress of the society. And from the African traditional perspective, conflict can be seen as inevitable but resolvable on the stronger foundation which is peace. The concept of peace has been conceived differently by different scholars. Some people understand peace to mean simply an absence of violence. This means, an absence of overt physical harm to persons and property which emanates from wars, riots, crime and vandalism, is seen as a state of peace (UNESCO, 1999).

This is exactly what we find in Achebe’s *Arrow of God* when six villages who once lived independently from each other, during which they were attacked and defeated constantly by invaders, decided to come together under one common name and deity. Their unity of coming together brought peace to them and they were no longer attacked. Achebe captures this beautifully as follows;

In the very distant past, when lizards were still few and far between, the six villages-Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umu-ezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo – lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became Nkwo market and the other half

thrown into the stream which became MiliUlu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy (Arrow of god, p. 14).

The unity of the six villages did not end there. They will constantly meet at the market square every season to show happiness and to pacify their gods for making them happy. Chinua Achebe narrates this incidence beautifully as follows

A stranger to this year's festival go away thinking that Umuaro had never been more united in all its history. In the atmosphere of the present gathering the great hostility between Umuneora and Umuachala seem, momentarily, to lack significance. Yesterday, if two men from the two villages had met they would have watched each other's movement with caution and suspicion; tomorrow they will do so again. But today they drunk palm wine freely together because no man in his right mind would carry poison to a ceremony of purification, he might as well go out into the rain carrying potent destructive medicines on his person (Arrow of god, p. 66).

Achebe adds another dimension to the theory of men deified as gods-Euhemerism. He does not only present the Euhemerist concept so well in the form of 'the dead is alive' or the ancestral way, he makes the spirits or the gods dwell in the living. In the following quotation, Achebe presents to us how the deity is made to dwell in a human being, so the people will be worshiping a live deity, or for want of a better word a walking deity. He observes

Yes, it was right that the Chief Priest should go ahead and confront danger before it reached his people. That was the responsibility of his priesthood. It had been like that from the first day when the six harassed villages got together and said to the Ezeulu ancestor: *You will carry this deity for us*. At first he was afraid. What power had he in his body to carry such potent danger? But his people sung their support behind him. . . So he went down on both knees and they put the deity on his head. He rose up and was transformed into a spirit. . . And he stepped forward on his first decisive journey, compelling even the four days in the sky to give way to him (Arrow of god, p. 189)

In another instance, the walking deity is presented or exemplified in a mask, "the mystery of the ancestral mask" (Arrow of god, p. 194). These masks are feared and revered by the people not because of the personalities who dwell in them-they know them too well-but the ancestral sprites they carry or represent. During festivals, the approaches of the ancestral masks cause fear and panic among the

people. Achebe captures one of the scenes of their arrival at the market square in the following lines.

The approach of the mask caused massive stampede. The women and children scattered and fled in the opposite direction, screaming with the enjoyment of danger. Soon, they all backed again because the masks had not even come into sight (Arrow of god, p. 197).

In another instance, Achebe describes with clarity the mask presented by Obika and his friends in a different occasion. The language is carefully chosen to make the reader see in their minds eye “a walking god” in action.

The Mask arrived appropriately in the crest of excitement. The crowd scattered in real or half-real terror. It approached a few steps at a time, each one accompanied by the sound of bells and rattles on its waist and ankles. Its body was covered in bright new cloths mostly red and yellow. The face held power and terror, each exposed tooth was the size of a big man’s thumb, the eyes were large sockets as big as a fist, two gnarled horns pointed upwards and inwards above its head nearly touching at the top. It carried a shield of skin in the left hand and a huge machet in the right. “KO-ko-ko-ko-ko-oh !it sang like cracked metal and its attendant replied with a deep monotone like groan: “Hum-hum-hum”KO-ko-ko-ko-ko-oh’0h:oyoyo-oyoyo-oyoyo-oh ! oh-oyoyo-oh “Hum-hum” (Arrow of god, p. 198).

Achebe’s use of masks to represent the gods is in response to, and in conformity with, a well-established theory of mask in the African societies. In his ground breaking work, *The Masks of god: Primitive Mythology* (1960), Joseph Campbell discusses the psychology of masks in our African societies, what he refers to as the ‘primitive world’ He notes that in parts of the world, especially in Africa, where traditional gods are revered a lot. “A god can be simultaneously in two or more places like the form of a traditional mask”. Campbell elevates masks to the status of gods, and that the masks are used to represent the gods. In a stronger voice, he opines that;

The mask is revered as an apparition of the mythical being that it represents, yet everyone knows that a man made the masks and that a man is wearing it. The one wearing it, furthermore, is identified with the god during the time of the ritual of which the

mask is apart. He does not merely represent the god, he is the god. The literal fact that the apparition is composed of (a) a mask (b) its reference to a mythical being (c) a man is dismissed from the mind, and the presentation is allowed to work without correction upon the sentiments of both the beholder and the actor. In other words there has been on shift of emphasis from the normal secular sphere, where things are understood to be distinct from each other to a theatrical or play sphere where they are accepted for what they are experienced as being and the logic is that of “make-believe”. (1960, pp. 21-22).

Even though the African has always seen, and still sees, a mask walking before his very eyes, he does not take it for a mask. He views the mask as a manifestation of his god, that is why he will bow to worship it. Joseph Campbell describes this as “the attitude of mind represented by the game itself”. During the “game”, the festival, the African sees a mask, and even knows who wears it, yet take as god in his mind.

4.5 *The Gods Have Healing Powers*

Achebe presents the priest or the gods as medical doctors of the community who cure different kind of sickness. The Chief priest, Ezeulu, himself was cured of convulsion. Achebe, in narrating this incidence, writes;

Ezeulu rose from his goat skin and moved to the household shrine. . . His Ikenga. . . jostled with faceless *okposi* of he ancestors black with the blood of sacrifice, and his short personal staff of *ofo*. . . It had been carved for him because of the convulsion he used to have at night. They told him to call it *Namesake*, and he did. Gradually the convulsion had left him (Arrow of god, p. 6).

And when Ogoye suspected an unexplained sickness in her home, she runs to the gods with a prayer:

Great Ulu who kills and saves, I employ you to cleanse my household with all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has come through my children or my friends or kinfolk let it follow these leaves (Arrow of god, p. 72)

There are many more medicine men as “medical doctors” in Achebe’s fictional community, and people had to make their choices as who among them is more powerful. On one such occasion when

Ogbuefi Amalu fell sick, a medicine man from Umuofia was brought in to take charge and to cure him of the sickness, and for several days he could not. Ezeulu decides to visit the sick man, and Achebe gives a vivid account of what Ezeulu saw.

Ezeulu did not need two looks at the sick man to see that he could not pass the twelve days which the sprits gave a man stricken with this disease. . . . The herbalist sat a little apart from the group, and took no part in the conversation. Ezeulu looked around the room and saw how the man had fortified it against the entry of the spirits. From the roof hanged down three long gourds corked with wads of dry banana leaves. . . . (Arrow of god, pp. 113-114).

Ezeulu, himself a powerful “medical doctor”, had to return home because he only came to visit, but he knew the man will not survive.

4.6 The Gods Provide Prosperity and Protection

Wealth and prosperity of the people are always attributed to the gods. Business men who do well at the markets, farmers who have bumper harvest, all turn to thank the gods for making them prosperous. Achebe informs us of how men of Okperi placed a deity in their market and how that market is now booming with people from all walks of life patronizing it.

As the men of Umuaro passed company after company of these market they talked about the great Eke market in Okperi to which folk from every part of Igbo and Olu went. It is the result so far of an ancient medicine, Akukalia explained. . . . At first, Eke was a very small market. Other markets in the neighborhood were drawing it dry. Then one day, the men of Okperi made a powerful deity and placed their markets in its care. From that day, Eke grew and grew until it became the biggest market in these parts. This deity which is called Nwanyieke is an old woman. Every Eke day before cock-crow she appears in the market place with a broom in her right hand and dances around the vast open space beckoning with her broom in all directions of the earth and drawing folk from every land (Arrow of god, p. 19).

Apart from the function of this deity in securing wealth and protecting same for an entire community, there are other smaller gods to whom individuals go to seek wealth and other social needs. Such gods are brought out annually during festivals for farmers, business men, ordinary men and women who “had received a favour from it to make a small present in return” (Arrow of god, p. 202). Obika, one of the sons of Ezeulu, who had seen one of such gods through its lightening begun to tremble with fear thinking something might happen to him, but his father, Ezeulu, assures...

There is no cause to be afraid, my son. You have seen Eru, the Magnificent, the One that gives wealth to those who find favour with him. People sometimes see him at that place in this kind of weather. Perhaps he was returning home from visit to Idemili or other deities (Arrow of god, p. 9).

5. Conclusion

The article was set out to establish the functions of the gods in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* using the theory of Euhemerist-Euhemerism. Having established that Euhemerism is the believe that the gods are men deified for their good deeds , and that the Africans believe they can speak and seek assistance from their dead ancestors, the article has postulated four different functions the gods, either by themselves or through their representatives, can perform.

The article has argued that the gods are capable of protecting our forest and water bodies as well as be able to ensure peace and unity between and among people in a community. It has further held that not only do the gods have healing powers and that the Priests serve as “medical doctors” in the African traditional communities, they equally ensure prosperity for the people who believe in them.

It is the position of this paper that myths are not the same as folktales, even though there is a meeting point between the two. They are both stories in effect, but stories about gods, ancestors heroes and others about the human existence which has the per formative and the narrative ethos, qualify as myths. Also, myth and folktales seem the same structurally, but while folktales will remain at the structural level to include fairy tales, fables, storytelling, myths go beyond just the structure to function, and encompasses rituals whose explanation become the myths. To this end, functions of the gods through the lenses of Euhemerism in Achebe’s *Arrow of God* have therefore been established.

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