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# Quest for Recognition and Freedom: An Archetypal Study of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

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**Abstract**

*Oil on Water* is Helon Habilla's third novel, published in 2010. It has, like his other works, attracted a handful of attention ranging from reviews, commentaries to critical essays. Much of this attention is sociologically and eco-critically oriented, in terms of the truth of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the accompanying restive activities by youths of the region. This essay seeks to take a different approach at studying the text. It proposes, contrary to other approaches, to look at the text at the mythic level, that is, the level where literature stands out from not-literature. Precisely, it attempts to discuss the novel as a quest narrative using archetypal criticism as the theoretical frame. This theoretical approach differs from other approaches that have been used in the study of this novel in that it is essentially a text oriented approach.

## Introduction

Available scholarship on Habila's *Oil on Water* is really meager, at least within Nigerian critical scene. That is however not surprising considering its recentness – it is less than a decade old. In point of fact, criticism of the novel can only boast of a handful of researched articles, reviews and undergraduate projects. These scanty studies are largely oriented towards eco -critical and sociological vectors of literary-critical inquiry. Following the two critical spectra, those studies are interested in the extent to which the environment is polluted by oil exploration and its effect on the terrestrial, aquatic and arboreal habitat and the human denizens, not just in the text but in the region generally known as Niger Delta. In fact, those studies have no doubt that *Oil on Water* is about Nigerian Niger Delta, about the ugly incidents of chronic environmental deterioration that happened and is still happening in the hapless region.

Perhaps *Oil on Water* actually represents the Niger Delta issue – as it is sometimes called – in terms of being the event that provoked it. But there is no gainsaying the fact that the same issue has also provoked other forms of writing such as Newspaper articles, reports, speeches and political criticisms. Most of these other forms of discourses are ontologically non-fictional and therefore distinct from their fictional (literary) counterparts, *Oil on Water* for instance. They also have different goals in view, despite inherent resemblances. So it is pertinent to ask, ought one to react to the different discourse forms in the same way? Is there no way of treating/reacting to these discourses so that they become ostensive one from another?

These questions are prompted by the fact that the prevalent criticisms of *Oil on Water* (and indeed most Niger Delta texts) seem to confuse it with the other forms of discourses. There is nothing in such studies that distinguishes *Oil on Water from* say a newspaper report. The events in text are treated as though they were the exact, non-fictional events in the region.

A typical example of such study is the type done by E.D. Simon, J.E. Akung and B.U. Bassey in their paper entitled 'Environmental Degradation, Militancy/Kidnapping and Oil Theft in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*.' These critics seem not to think that there is any kind of difference whatsoever existing between the event of the text and the 'real' events of Niger Delta. As such, they go as far as citing real life incidents, comments (both political and social) and newspaper reports about Niger Delta issues to support their argument. The essay forcefully begs the question: are the critics trying to verify the incidents in the text? If that is the aim, then one must admit that the endeavour is curious indeed. For, Aristotle has distinguished history and other non-literary discourse forms (newspaper report and political commentary) from literature by asserting that the former 'relates what has happened' and therefore verifiable while the later relates 'what may happen and therefore unverifiable (*Poetics* IX). So, if the text actually represents Niger Delta events, it is '...only in so far as they [the events] are probable' (A.N. Akwanya, *Discourse Analysis and Dramatic Literature* 14). After all, has not Roland Barthe emphasized that 'writing [amounts] the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin'? (*Image-Music-Text* 147) So, should not critics be more concerned with what the text provides rather than what is thought to have provided the text?

The kind of study done by E.D. Simon and his colleagues has certain drawbacks. For one thing, it amounts to the vulgarization and vitiation of the

text as it confuses the text with every other kind of discourse. For another, such analysis is based on external factors that do not in any way tell us anything in the nature of the text: the text is properly speaking never analysed at all. Also, such reflection treats the text as an 'informative 'rather than a 'system' one (see Akwanya A.N. *Language and Habits of Thought* 122 and 128); yet the text of literature is by its nature unarguably a system text.

It is against this backdrop that this study emerges. It aims at recognizing the text as a literary one, optimally analyzing it and discovering what it shares with other texts of both the Niger Delta tradition and others of the entire literary tradition. This is important because in as much as it is necessary for the text to assert its individuality, it is as equally important that it identifies with other texts of the tradition; for,

> if [the text] is a literary work of art, it is because it partakes of the properties wherein art stands apart from everything else that is not art[;] that is to say, it is by virtue of the resemblances it shares with other art works. (Akwanya A.N. '*No Longer at Ease* and the Question of Failed Expectation 82).

The text seems to embody elements of quest. This study therefore seeks to treat it as a quest narrative. The object is to see how the text can be truly analysed through that paradigm and how possibly 'quest' could be *that* resemblance which the text shares both with texts of the entire tradition and those of the Niger Delta. For not only is quest a motif in literature generally, it seems also a recurrent theme in Niger Delta texts.

Quest itself can be construed in two senses: quest as an adventure or a voyage, in search of a price or a treasure and quest as an action or set of actions/activities (physical, mental or otherwise) to achieve a defined goal by a character or characters in a literary work. Quest is a popular term in literature and literary studies as it is not just a motif as many people know it but a myth as well. Myth in this sense is to be understood in terms of Firth's definition as figures which 'unfold in a series of outwardly connected actions what the symbol embodies in a unity' or simply as '...the symbol elongated and complicated' (cited in Akwanya, *Verbal Structures* 131). .Hence, we have such a thing as 'quest-myth' (Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 215). This myth for him (Frye) is the central myth in literature. He writes, 'if we are right

in our suggestion that romance, tragedy, irony and comedy are all episodes in a total quest-myth, we can see how it is that comedy can contain a potential tragedy within itself' (*Anatomy of Criticism* 215). It is central or fundamental because it is to be found in works of different ages, cultures, traditions and of course genres – though more noticeable in texts of narrative and dramatic genres than in lyrics.

The contention that quest or quest-myth is present in literary texts of all ages, traditions sounds generalizing. However, it is actually extrapolative, as even a mere cursory glance at the entire tradition will discover much corroborative evidence. For instance, in the great Greek literary tradition, quest is present in such a text as Homer's *Odyssey*; in Mesopotamia, we can see quest in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; in the English Medieval and Renaissance period, quest is present in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Beowulf* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* respectively; in the English Neoclassical Period, quest is present in Swift's *Gulliver's Travel*; in American literature, quest is present in texts like Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' and 'Ethan Brand' and in Africa, we think of texts like *Sundiata* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* as typical examples of quest narratives.

But quest is more noticeable, defined and elaborated in the tradition known as romance and epic in that romance is characterized by adventure. This adventure is nothing but quest. Frye puts it thus: 'We may call this major adventure, the element that gives literary form to the romance, the *quest*' [our emphasis]' (*Anatomy* 187). So, quest is the definitive element or theme of romance works. And that is the more reason why it (quest) is present in texts of different ages and traditions since Frye is of the view that romance as a mode has traits and attributes that are evinced in different societies, traditions and cultures. He argues:

> Yet there is a genuinely proletarian element in romance too which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever looking for new hopes and desires to feed on (*Anatomy* 186).

Now, quest in our first sense – as an adventure – is something that is as varied in form as the numbers of quest narratives that there are. The reason for such 'variegatedness' may be caused either by the particular age or society into which a text is 'born' (Frye). The differences may be in terms of the Quester, the stages involved in the quest, the aim and then the result of the quest. Hence, quest as represented in a Medieval text may not be exactly the same as that which is represented in a Neoclassical text, to say nothing of a contemporary text – our study text, *Oil on Water*, for example. The distinctions however, there can still be found some recurrent or common patterns and archetypes that different quest-literatures share for which reason they can be said to belong to the same genre. One of such common figures is the principal character of a quest sequence – the quest hero. Merritt Moseley in his essay '*The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Hero's Journey' defines such a character as, 'a person who, through genius or courage or might, can accomplish what a normal person cannot' (63). The quest hero is exemplified in such characters as Odysseus of Homer's *Odyssey*, Sir Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gilgamesh of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Lemuel Gulliver of *Gulliver's Travel*, Ethan Brand of Hawthorne's ,Ethan Brand' .

In terms of the stages involved in a quest or the hero's journey as it is popularly called following Joseph Campbell, there are not many differences in the way different scholars classify them. Northrop Frye who is one of the profound scholars to give attention to quest-literature classified the stages involved in a quest sequence broadly into three, thus:

> The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest and such a complete form has three main stages: the stages of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exultation of the hero. (*Anatomy* 187)

He further called the three stages, 'using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery....' (187)

Nancy Howart's delineation of quest is somewhat similar to Frye's, though there are some minute disparities. In her short monograph, 'The Quest Motif

in Literature: Supplementary Handout for English 215, Fantasy Fiction', she posited that:

> [q]uest, Literature based on a journey, a road of trials in which a hero hears a call and leaves his home alone or in the company of others – to search out a treasure along the way, he undergoes trials, received aid, fights and *may die* [our emphasis] and if he succeeds in stating the treasure sought may change who and what he is (1).

Nancy and Frye are similar in their perception of quest (except that for Nancy, a quest hero may die and not 'must die' unless of course Frye meant the death to be symbolic, (not strictly physical). The journey is usually either mentally or physically demanding, as such only those who are courageous enough embark on it. Beyond courage, heroes are the more persuaded to embark on the journey because they know or anticipate something gainful which would certainly elevate their status. In Nancy's terms, '[i]n stories of the quest, heroes are on the brink of change. Some heroes are desperately unhappy and experience their life as a stultifying world, one that, in its very orderliness and familiarity, comes to seem sterile and confining: a kind of wasteland' (1). So, the hero has a personal, well defined purpose for embarking on the journey which is why he still embarks on the journey despite his/her prior knowledge that the quest is peril-laden. He believes that the journey is capable of changing his present condition of living which may either be stale, stagnant or moribund. Nancy further writes, 'he realizes his dreams and desires and transcends his suffering resulting in a destiny that transforms him to something more than he was' (2). She also classified the stages involved in a quest into The Call, Meeting with the Other, The Journey and The Treasure. Let us consider them in detail.

**The Call:** The call is the first stage. Here the hero receives a call to embark on the journey usually by a herald. Though, it is not always so, for Nancy is of the view that '...there are many instances when the call arises from within the hero in the form of a powerful impulse or sudden craving' (6), as such, the hero himself volunteers to embark on the journey rather than selected. Nancy also maintains that 'for the hero to be able to accept the call, he needs

insights to leave the security and familiarity of the known world to the unknown as the quest demands may seem more dangerous than staying put' (6). And having got the needed insight Nancy writes, 'the hero learns to accept the difficult truth that all is in flux, that all must change, that life is an unending cycle of death and rebirth, a discarding of things that are meaningful yesterday for those that assume new significance as the future unfolds' (6). Having been thus acquainted and encouraged, he then sets out for the journey.

**Meeting with the Other**: The other is the hero's alter ego. In different quest texts, the hero's other performs different functions: either as one who knows the way more than the hero and therefore is to act as his guide through the journey or one who resembles the hero and therefore prevents the hero from being noticed for whom he is, thereby protecting him from life-taking situations, beasts, ogres, etc. if any. For Nancy,

> Meeting the other is a crucial event in the hero's journey towards the ultimate goal. Indeed, it is often the first significant stage of the quest after the departure from home, since the hero cannot proceed along the dangerous path unless she/he has the self awareness that acceptance of the other brings. (4)

**The Journey**: This is the quest proper which has been identified to be replete with difficulties, challenges, trials and temptations of all kinds. It usually consists of a labyrinthine road or path which the hero must pass through before he gets to his target object. If he successfully completes the journey and achieves the targeted objective, he becomes exulted or apotheosized; else he becomes disillusioned or even consumed.

**The Treasure**: This is the quest object, thing or even a person. But Nancy thinks that '...the treasure is not always a material object. Often it is something intangible: the acquisition of knowledge, power, spiritual enlightenment or inner peace. In fact, even when the treasure is tangible, what it represents is some intangible quality' (8). This according to her is the 'true treasure'.Thomas C. Foster affirms the above claim in his *How to Read Literature like a Professor*, when he argued that,

> The real reason for the quest never involves the stated reason. In fact, more often than not, the quester fails the stated task. So why do they go and why do we care? They go because of the stated task, ''mistakenly'' believing that it is the real reason. We know however, that their quest is educational [ouremphasis ] (np)

Mistakenly is put in quotations because it is never a mistake to some heroes. Some quest heroes actually know what they want which is other than the stated reason for the quest. However, they see the journey as an opportune event and time to acquire what they have been craving for; hence they choose to embark on it. So, the journey to such heroes is only a means to their personal end. To some other heroes, embarking on the journey may not be so much for personal gain rather it may be an act of duty. This can be seen in Michael G. Cornelius's reading of *Sir Gawain*, where he argued that 'Gawain however, acts out of none of those [impulse of love, religious faith, mere desire for adventure] but out of ''knightly duty''' (197). Elaborating further on the treasure, Nancy states that it is usually difficult to be gained and that obtaining it demands great input on the side of the quester (8). However, she asserts that '...the value of the treasure [to the hero] is in direct proportion to the difficulty of his or her journey to attain it' (8). More so,

> they [quest heroes] believe that thing they are looking for will change their lives..., for other characters, the treasure represents a change in their position in society. And some characters try to transform not the outer world but their own inner one – to break free of the fears, weakness, and delusions that have trapped them in deeply unhappy lives. (Nancy 8)

These stages of the quest as variously rendered by Nancy and Frye respectively are further summed up into five categories by Thomas C. Foster, thus: '...let's think structurally. The quest consists of five things (a) a quester, (b) a place to go, (c) a stated reason to go there, (d) challenges and trials in route and (e) a real reason to go there' (np)

So far, we have been considering quest in sense of an adventure or journey. Let us now focus on its second sense. Quest in this sense is particularly present in almost every text. This is because characters are in one way or the other involved in activities either to assert themselves or to achieve a particular thing. It is this kind of quest that brings about conflict in a text usually between the protagonist and the antagonist. Quest in this sense is implicated in such popular phrases as 'quest for identity', 'quest for freedom', 'quest for power' etc. which are topical issues in criticism especially postcolonial criticism. Quest in this sense is predicated on *Desire* – desire to achieve something or to effect a change. Desire itself has an undoubtedly prominent place in literature. It is one of the things identified by Roland Bathes as 'the major articulations of praxis'; the others being 'communication and struggle' (*Image-Music-Text* 207).

Nancy H. as well hints on the importance of desire in quest-literature or even any literature for that matter when she says that 'the *desire* and the ability to make [] changes distinguish the hero from the rest of humankind' (8) – our emphasis. There are of course many things that could be desired by characters, heroes per se. It could be 'renown and bold reputation' (Michael G.C. 199), freedom/independence, happiness, wealth, power, etc. However, it is pertinent to mention that desire itself is usually preceded by a certain kind of awareness that things are not as they ought to be or that the present condition of things is unsatisfactory or boring and therefore needs to change or be improved upon. This awareness is akin to what we have earlier called insight. It is this kind of awareness that propels characters to search for a better form or condition of living.

Moreover, it is desire that drives most of the Faustian heroic archetypes in literature. These Faust heroes are in other words quest heroes themselves. Their own kind of quest does not usually involve physical journey but mental and intellectual one; therefore, it is in line with quest in our second sense. These characters feel bored with the mundane and quotidian state of things around them and consequently desire to be different, to achieve something new and to obtain knowledge beyond human realm. This can be seen in Dr. John Faustus' quest for an inhuman kind of knowledge and Ethan Brand's search for 'The Unpardonable Sin' in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and Hawthorne's 'Ethan Brand' respectively. In lyrics, such a character is to be seen in the lyrical persona of A. L. Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. The persona of the poem is a quest hero who has totally given himself to adventure, as such, he cannot do

any other thing but to continue to explore places. His endless adventure is founded on his desire to know and to discover new places and things.

These characters are labeled Faustian because they usually sell their souls to their object of desire and refuse to be daunted or discouraged by anything. They may end tragically or otherwise depending on whether their desire is against the moral frames of the textual society or not.

Right from the title of this paper, it is clear that it is premised on Archetypal Criticism. What then is archetypal criticism? This practice of textual study proceeds from the term *Archetype*. The origin of the term can be traced to the psychologist Carl Gustavas Jung. He used the term to refer to what he called "primordial images" and "psychic residue", located in the human "collective unconscious" (Abrams M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 12-13). Jung himself defines archetypes as ''forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous individual products of unconscious origin'' (*Etymology Dictionary*). The thought, principles and discursive approach of archetypal criticism can be seen in Frye's works. They include 'Archetypes of Literature', *Anatomy of Criticism*. Mohammad Taheri and Ronak Jalaly have a definition of archetype which is apt. They defined an archetype as ‘a recurring pattern of character, symbol, or situation found in the mythology, religion and stories of all cultures' (247). Archetypal criticism is therefore the type of criticism based on archetypes.

Let us then look at the underpinnings of the discourse of archetypes as formulated by Frye . He discovered that the prevalent modes of criticism before his theory were largely according to him 'meaningless' ('Archetypes of Literature' 503), and that is 'talking about literature in a way that cannot build up a systematic structure of knowledge' (503). He further added that '[a]ll judgment in which the values are not based on literary experience but are sentimental or derived from religious or political prejudice may be regarded as casual' (503).

In place of such approach which for him is nothing but 'pseudo-criticism' (503), he proposes another approach to the study of literature which is at the same time 'centripetal' and 'systematic'. He writes, 'let us, then, keep the study of literature, centripetal, and base the learning process on a *structural analysis of the literary work itself*'[our emphasis]'(503). That centripetal, systematic and structural analysis is *Archetypal Criticism*. The first

assumption of the approach is that of 'total coherence' (504). He maintains further that the method of criticism which he is proposing is twofold: inductive and deductive. We read, '[w]e may proceed inductively from structural analysis, associating the data we collect and trying to see larger patterns in them. Or we may proceed deductively, with the consequences that follow from postulating the unity of criticism' (505).

Moreover, he argues that for criticism to be systematic there must be something that will make it so. This thing, he identified to be **archetypes**. He argues, '[a]n archetype should be not only a unifying category of criticism, but itself a part of a total form, and it leads us at once to the question of what sort of total form criticism can see in literature' (506). For him then, the study based on archetypes (or search for archetypes as he terms it) 'is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folktale[]' (507). In his *Anatomy of criticism*, he posits that 'the study of archetypes is the study of literary symbols as parts of a 'whole' and that 'if there are such things as archetypes at all, then, we have to take yet another step, and conceive the possibility of a self-contained literary universe' (188). In 'Archetypes of Literature', Frye reiterates his argument that the archetypal or central myth in literature is the quest-myth.

From the little we have seen as the background, basic underpinning and approach of archetypal theory of literary criticism, the theory is a viable tool for literary studies for some cogent reasons. One being that it sees the text as a distinct and *self-contained* discourse and therefore proposes to intrinsically interpret it, paying 'deaf ears' to external forces seeking to distract its attention from the object of engagement. This is what Frye meant by structural analysis of texts. Another is that archetypal criticism espouses the study of a text in relation to other texts. Studying a text in this way is the idea of inter-textuality which archetypal criticism supports.

**Contextualization of Quest archetypes in *Oil on Water***

Having explored the meaning, various stages, archetypal patterns and personalities involved in a quest sequence in line with the rendition of different scholars, the next and essential task is to explore the text in search of typical archetypal patterns and personalities in it. The idea is that since the text is being read as a quest narrative, it is the possession of the known archetypes in such texts that will authenticate and validate the claim.

As already established, one thing that is common to any quest-literature is the Quest Hero **or** Heroine. This is the individual who embarks on the search for something. *Oil on Water* is by no means short of this principal character. Precisely, the quest hero of the text is the narrator, Rufus– a reporter. This character has all it takes to be a quest hero. For one thing, he is courageous. This is seen in the fact that he does not actually receive a call to embark on the journey in search of the kidnapped white woman. In fact, he is even the least person the editor expects to be interested in the job. However, when every other reporter in the newspaper firm (*The Reporter*) trembles and recoils on the very idea of embarking on the journey owing to the unquestionable dangers and troubles therein, Rufus steps forward, amidst the consternation of all and sundry, including the editor, and takes up the challenge. We read: 'I was standing with the other reporters in the little passage between the editor's office and the newsroom, listening, avoiding the editor's eyes, but when I heard Zaq's name I stepped forward. – I'll go'' (*Oil on Water* 50). Because of this singular act of courage and the doggedness and unwavering energy, enthusiasm and tenacity with which he pursues the quest, Rufus over-qualifies as a quest hero. In fact, that action identifies him with Sir Gawain, who takes up the challenge of the Green Knight at the meat hall where and when even older, more skilled and experienced knights shiver at the presence of the Green Knight.

After the quest hero comes The Hero's other/Mentor**:** This is the character whose presence brings hope and encouragement to the quest hero. As earlier argued, meeting his other is critical to the career of a quest hero because of its significance. The hero's other in our text is Zaq. He is the cognoscenti' news hunter and reporter whom the protagonist (Rufus) has always taken as his mentor since they first met in Lagos at the latter's graduation party. Though unknown to Zaq, he is Rufus's mentor as far as journalism is concerned. And he is indeed the hero's other because it is the mere mentioning of his name that inspires, reinforces and invigorates the hero's courage and confidence to embark on the journey.

At the inception of the journey, Zaq is as much a quester himself as Rufus and the four other journalists. However, as the sequence continues to unfold, there is no more question as to who the hero is and who the other is. It is the duty of the other to guide, inspire and educate the Hero on the tenets, principles and precautions which the journey demands. Based on that benchmark, Zaq is unquestionably Rufus's Other as he continues to guide,

motivate and assure Rufus of his status as a good reporter thereby motivating the latter's spirit not to give up on the quest.

Next is The Journey**.** The journey, as we have seen, is characterised by difficulties, trials and temptations. This is exactly what is at issue in *Oil on Water*. The journey is truly a labyrinth, a maze. The hero and his other is seen traversing the water ways. The atmosphere and weather condition of the water and in fact the entire environment are by no means clement. Both air and water are polluted with oil fumes so that passing through them means exposing oneself to disease and death. Of course, it is through the exposure of Zaq to the unfavourable weather condition characterising the journey that he contacts the disease which weakens and eventually kills him. More so, through the narrator, various scenes of horror are exposed, such as seen in Agbuki Island. The hero and his mentor are also held hostage in different places, such as the Major's camp. They also seek help and shelter in different places: Irikefe and chief Ibiram's house. That the journey is a dangerous one is further proved by the fact that two other journalists, Max Tekena and Peter Olisah, who had embarked on a similar journey, lost their lives. So, the journey is indeed peril-ridden and therefore a typical 'hero's journey'.

Another important archetype is the Treasure Archetype**.** The treasure refers to the object of the quest. In *Oil on Water*, the object of quest for the journalists is Isabel Floode, the wife of James Floode, the expatriate petroleum engineer working in one of the oil companies. The said woman is abducted first by quasi-kidnappers (Bassey, Jamabo and Salomon, her driver) and later by the militants (the real kidnappers). The militants are already sending ransom to her husband, but to confirm that his wife is still alive; he (James Floode) enlists the services of the journalists including Zaq, Rufus and four others from Lagos. Though the assignment is not to bring the woman back, rather to enquire about her health condition and whether she is dead or alive, it is nevertheless herculean, for as has been seen, embarking on the journey means exposing oneself to dangers of different kinds: one from the soldiers, another from the militants and another from the weather condition of the entire place which is deadened by oil pollution.

Fulfilling the onerous task of meeting with the militants and by extension the white woman, however proves more difficult than the journalists ever imagined. The quest object becomes almost entirely elusive. First, the planned meeting between the militants led by Professor and the journalists at Agbuki Island is foiled and frustrated by the soldiers. The incident recorded a number of casualties on the side of the militants. This particular incident is

of enormous significance in that it helps to determine who the questers are and differentiate them from mere tyros who have no courage to undertake a quest: the journalists from Lagos having seen the dead bodies lying about at Agbuki know right away that the journey is too unsafe and dangerous for their likes and therefore balk while Rufus and Zaq pursue it headlong.

Secondly, another attempt by Rufus and Zaq to catch up with the woman is once again frustrated by the soldiers who mistaking them to be rebels arrest and detain them in their camp for days. From the camp, the journalists move together with the soldiers to Irikefe where they are once again trapped and their movement restricted. Suddenly, luck seems to be on Rufus's side. He manages to escape from the guard and the intensive surveillance of the soldiers at Irikefe. In the process, he is almost drowned but is rescued by some villagers. In the company and shelter of the villagers, he learns about the white woman and her driver Salomon. Immediately, he begs to be led to wherever the white woman is. On the demand, he is led by Charles and Peter. He eventually catches up with the white woman in the company of Chief Ibiram and his people. At this point, the woman is almost free having escaped from the militants with the help of her driver. Rufus interviews her and her driver and through that learns a lot. However, at nightfall, when chief Ibiram and his people together with Rufus are set to head for Port Harcourt which is their proposed destination, Rufus's hope is once again shattered as the militants strike taking both the woman, Salomon and even Rufus away. However, upon release, Rufus is somewhat relieved knowing that he has been handed enough scoop with which to write a good story with regard to the abduction of the woman and the circumstances and truth surrounding it. The anticipated success of the story when written is what he takes at this point as a recompense for his trouble so far.

The Guides, Helpers and Enemies Archetypes are also duly represented in the text. The first guide seen in the text is one of the security men of the oil company. He is actually the one who takes them across the threshold between the ordinary world and the world of the quest. He however ends his career with the Lagos journalists. Eventually, the boatman, Tamuno and his son Michael take up the 'guideship' of the hero and his mentor. He, the boatman, proves a successful and reliable guide to them. His career is similarly unexpectedly cut short by the soldiers. At the last movement, the hero is 'guideless' and as he inevitably needs one, Peter and Charles assume the function. They successfully lead him to the white woman.

Another archetype, the Helper archetype is manifested in the character of Chief Ibiram and Irikefe Island at large. Lastly, we have the enemy or what Emmanuel Obiechinna has called taskmaster. He wrote,'[t]he pattern is very clear: first, there is the hero, then the well-defined objective of the quest, and, finally, the taskmasters who are consciously or unconsciously operating to hinder the hero from attaining his objective' (*Language and Theme on African Literature* 41). This archetype is so called because it inhibits, occludes and frustrates the quest hero from the utmost realisation of his aim. In our text, this figure is represented by the soldiers as we have seen. For three consecutive times, the soldiers proved themselves an obstruction to Rufus's assignment: first at Agbuki Island, second at the camp and finally at Irikefe where they not only succeed in shattering that peaceful place but also restricted movement to the detriment of Rufus and Zaq. However, by what one may call an act of fate, Rufus is able to sidestep and overcome all the inhibitions of the soldiers.

We have also The Wise Old Man Archetype**.** Ikenna Dieke calls this archetype the 'Clairsentient self' (*The Primordial Image* 227). This figure is a sage who knows so much including the hidden. It is present in many quest-texts. For instance, Tiresias of Homer's *The Odyssey*, Utnapishtim of *TheEpic of Gilgamesh* and Pa Ahime of Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (as identified by Ikenna Dieke in his *The Primordial Image* 232). Of this self/archetype Dieke writes, '… the clairsentient self serves as a symbol of the ethical and spiritual forces, those inner moral resources, that lie beyond what Jung characterises as man's "native enlightened rationalism"' (*The Primordial Image* 228). In our text, this figure manifests in the character of Naman, the assistant chief priest of Irikefe shrine and in the real sense the leader and guardian of the community. His words and actions are loaded with wisdom and knowledge as evident in his sagacious religio-philosophy which he bequeaths to Rufus and Zaq thus: 'It is the nature of existence. A thing is created, it blooms for a while if it is capable of blooming, it then ceases to be'*(Oil on Water* 159). In this very assertion is implicated the very primeval and ubiquitous myth which underlies many tragic works: the Year-god myth, we shall return to this.

Lastly, there is the Utopian Archetype**.** Utopia refers to a perfect and sublime place where there is peace, progress, understanding, order and total absence of disharmony and unease in the relationship amongst humans and their environment. Ikenna Dieke thinks that the word 'utopia' was first used by Sir Thomas More who according to him 'sets out a vision of an ideal society where things are good, where there is progress.(240).' Generally, a utopian

society is at most an imaginary enclave that is characterised by impeccability and flawleness in all ramifications. This imaginary ideal society is as recurrent as it is archetypal in literature, particularly those that deal with quest. To cite popular examples, the Phaecian of Homer's *Odyssey* is a utopian society, so is the Houyhnhnms in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Ayiero in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, as also identified by Ikenna Dieke in his *The Primordial Image*. He described *Season of Anomy's* Ayiero as '… the land of order and sympathetic harmony and relatedness' (141). In *Oil on Water*, the utopian archetype is Irikefe Island.

Those mentioned places in the various works are indeed ideal societies, for instance, in *Gulliver's Travels*, the land of the Houyhnhnms is so perfect that they have no word for falsehood or lying in their lexicon, rather the only way to make such expressions is to say that 'one must needs be mistaken, or that [one is saying] the thing that was not' (*Gulliver's Travels* 21).

The role of a utopian society in a quest narrative is usually that of provision of shelter, food, repose, general help and solace to the quest hero. Hence, in *Odyssey*, Odysseus receives help from the Phaecians, Gulliver from the Houyhnhnms and Ofeyi, the quest hero of *Season of Anomy* receives both solace, motivation and inspiration from Ayiero. In like manner, Rufus and Zaq receive help, shelter and motivation from Irikefe. There is in fact no doubt about the utopian status of Irikefe: it is beautiful in its physical appearance, (which is further glorified by the presence of the statues), in its philosophical and ideological stand, (as we saw earlier in Naman's speech) and in its religious standpoint – the worship of both the sun and water usually dressed in white robe (by the worshippers) which undoubtedly depicts holiness and sanctity not just for the worshippers as they are called but for the island and its flora and fauna.

Irikefe's perfect nature can be further seen in many dimensions. One is that they try as much as possible to stay out of trouble, to meddle with neither the soldiers nor interfere with the activities of the militants. Naman the assistant priest and later the chief priest himself tells Zaq and Rufus that:

> The kidnappers brought here four days ago, and yes, one of them was the Professor. We try as much as possible to keep out of their way, and they leave us alone. We don't talk to them, or to the army. But they brought the white woman,

> here. I objected. But he said they only came because she is seriously I'll, and they knew we had a nurse here' (*OW* 130).

On the other dimension, they are hospitable and specialist in provision of aid as we also learn from Naman. When asked by Zaq whether they have a hand in the kidnapping he gives a rather self-descriptive and touché riposte of whom and what they are and stand for, 'No. We are a holy community, a peaceful people. Our only purpose is to bring a healing, to restore and conserve...' (OW130). Therefore, Irikefe's provision of help to the militants should not be seen as conniving with them – they are rather simply doing what they best know how to do, what they live for: providing help to the needy irrespective of the person's disposition or identity. Moreover, just like the Houyhnhnms, Irikefe people do not tell lies. Even when Zaq accuses Naman of lying to them as regards the false grave dug and covered by the militants claiming to be that of the white woman, he simply corrects Zaq thus: 'I didn't lie to you. I told you all I knew' (*OW* 165).

Ultimately therefore, Irikefe is a place of reparation. It is a place of refuge to the demented, the degenerate, the forlorn and the dying. This claim is demonstrable with Boma's arrival at Irikefe and Zaq's sojourn and subsequent death therein. Boma is Rufus's sister who is abandoned by her husband, John. She is once a pretty girl until one side of her face gets burnt. Prior her coming to Irikefe, she is not only forlorn but also unhappy and helpless. But on arriving there, she feels restored to her former self and decides to stay. The case is similar with Zaq who having reached the peak of his popularity and fame and having also fallen to the lower if not lowest rung of the same ladder finds solace and hope once more at Irikefe, decides to stay there and eventually dies there. Those are two symbolic incidents that help to define the essence of Irikefe as a place. The physical, emotional and religious pulchritude of Irikefe makes it a likeable place, so that Zaq and Boma begin to have the feeling of '*topophilia* – love of place' (Ikenna Dieke, 'Walker's *The Temple My Familiar:* Womanist as Monistic Idealists'136) towards the place. Zaq asserts, 'I like the air here. It's pure. Who knows, I might get some religion' (*OW* 86). Boma also confesses, 'I've made up my mind to stay. [] I like it here, I like the people and I can feel myself relaxing in a way I haven't in a long time. My spirit feels settled' (227).

The disposition of a utopia community to render help to whoever is in need sometimes constitutes a form of threat or disruption to its order. It can be recalled that the Phaeceans are severely punished by Poseidon, their patron

god, for rendering help to Odysseus. So is the order of the Houyhnhnms disrupted/threatened by Gulliver's sojourn therein. Irifeke is likewise threatened and in fact driven to the threshold of outright extermination for rendering help and shelter to the militants. Sometime after the militants are attacked by the soldiers at Agbuki, they return to Irikefe with the false information that there is a saboteur among the Irikefites who informs the soldiers about their way about. So to make sure that that does not happen again they will have to abduct one of them, preferably the nurse (Gloria). After which, they proceeded to shoot some soldiers on patrol unaware of the militants' presence at Irikefe. As a reprisal, the soldiers come back and start shooting and bombing human beings and structures, hoping to trap down the militants. The attack leaves Irikefe, battered, shattered, and a ghost of its former self. Human casualties are also recorded while the militants simply slip away unhurt, leaving the worshippers to face the soldiers. Nevertheless, before a week passes, Irikefe has been restored to its former liveliness, beauty and glory under the supervision of Naman. This means that no matter what happens, Irikefe is and will always remain a peaceful and ordered place. Its order can never be tainted or jeopardised rather boosted as can be seen in the fact that after the incident, Dr Dagogo-Mark is brought to the island, where he establishes a dispensary and further plans to build a full-fledged hospital all for the good of the island and its inhabitants.

The mention of utopia automatically implicates its other – dystopia. Ikenna Dieke defines dystopia as 'a society characterised by negatives such as mass poverty, lack of trust, squalor, suffering and unimaginable violence' (300). He further added that 'dystopian fiction is the creation of an utterly horrible or degraded society that is generally headed for the irreversible precipice of oblivion.'(310) A dystopian community is all that a utopian one is not. To a large extent, the description and in fact the actual condition of the places/landscapes surrounding Irikefe qualifies them as typical dystopian enclave, a typical ‘wasteland’, a land that is characterised by death and life-taking objects. This is utterly and truly evident in Dr Mark's confabulation with Rufus. He says 'I have been in these waters five years now and I can tell you this place is a dead place, a place for dying. [] Those dammed flares. There weren't that many of them when I first arrived where. Sometimes, I feel like I have been here all my life.' (143). He further maintains that 'Sometimes I wonder what I'm doing here; I tell you there's more need for a gravedigger than a doctor' (146). The description of the narrator about one of the villages they enter is further telling of the deadness of the place:

> 'The next village was almost a replica of the last: the same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same identifiable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return. In the village centre we found the communal well. Eager for a drink, I bent under the wet, mossy pivotal beam and peered into the well's blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face...' (*OW* 8).

So far, we have tried to identify important archetypes in the texts, the list is not exhaustive. However, for want of space, those will suffice.

**Quest for Recognition and Freedom**

Nancy Howart and Thomas C. Foster as seen earlier noted that beyond the so-called treasure which the quest hero is assumed to be searching for, there may be another hidden motive behind the hero's decision to embark on the journey. This usually latent motive is what the two scholars argued to be the 'true or real reason' for the quest. This real reason is the respect or recognition that will be accorded to the hero having embarked on so formidable a journey. So the same way Nancy Howart argued that ...'some characters try to transform not the outer world but their own inner one–to break free of the fears, weakness, and delusions that have trapped them in deeply unhappy lives []', do we here argue that beyond the white woman, Rufus – and to some extent Zaq – is simply searching for **recognition** and **freedom** as well. At the first thought, it may be taken that the two journalists decide to embark on the journey for the mere love of journalism and therefore see it as their duty. But that is only at first thought, one only needs to think deeply and follow the sequence critically to discover that there is indeed something ulterior to the decision. For one thing, it does not seem that Rufus, considering the situations surrounding him, will embark on such a difficult and perilous adventure for such a luxury as 'love for journalism'. This is someone who after finishing secondary school has been advised by his father to go and learn a skill/trade so as not to face or fall a victim of retrenchment like him (his father).

Consequently, he undertakes a three year apprenticeship programme with Udoh photos in Port Harcourt city. When he completed the programme, he applied for the post of a photographer with *Whispers* – a monthly magazine also in Port Harcourt. The editor of the magazine agrees to give him a job. However, the editor advises him thus: 'I'll give you a job, but on temporary bases. Have you ever thought of becoming a journalist? Not just a photographer, but a *real reporter* [our emphasis]. You could go to school in Lagos. I have a form here: fill it out and post it. They give scholarships. Give it a try' (65). Rufus does and luckily gains admission into Lagos school of journalism. Three years later he finished from the school and starts searching for job. Fortunately, he gets one with a paper named *The Reporter*. However, ironically, instead of becoming a 'real reporter' which is his reason for going to the school, he is rather given the post of a photographer. The owner of *The Reporter*, the chairman, casually tells him: 'Your CV, if it is all true, says you have done some photography. Well, work with him, you might learn a few things' (49). 'Him' refers to Max Tekena, the person with whom Rufus is employed the same day. So, it is here argued that Rufus's decision to take up the task is so as to reclaim his rightful position as a reporter instead of 'just a photographer' and even to become the 'king of the jungle' as Beke Johnson, the editor of *Daily Star* calls it (111), thereby bringing some level of recognition to himself. This is further evident in the editor of *The Reporter's* derisive response to him when he offers to embark on the journey, we read:

> I was standing with the other reporters in the little passage between the editor's office and the newsroom, listening, avoiding the editor's eye, but when I heard Zaq's name I stepped forward, I'll go. [ ] The editor opened his mouth to laugh, but when he saw I was serious, the laugh turned into a sneer. [ ] Well, well, the little photographer wants to be a real reporter, eh? Well come to my office and tell me what you have in mind' (51).

He takes the decision not minding the physical challenges bedevilling the task which the prior death of Max Tekena and Peter Olisah bespeaks.

The presence of ulterior motives behind the supposed overt reason for the quest is something that is recurrent in some texts in which the issue of

environmental pollution as a result of oil exploration is raised. That is part of what is at issue in Chinelo Okparanta's 'America', a short story. In the story, the narrator Nnenna Etoniru has a lesbian partner: Gloria Oke, who through her educational crusade is invited to live and work in America. Before her departure, they have been experiencing inhibition in their love and sexual affairs because the society in which they are found forbids their kind of relationship. So, as soon as Gloria settles in America, she invites Nnenna to join her. The idea is that in America, they will have the freedom to practice their love affair without such inhibition as obtainable in their country. Unfortunately however, Nnenna is unable to secure her Visa because of repeatedly failing the interview.

Suddenly comes the issue of oil spillage in America. This is something that is already existent in Nnenna's country home: Nigeria. So, the American case becomes an opportune coincidence with that of Nigeria. The duo then plan to use the unfortunate oil pollution incidents as a means to achieve their end; in the exact words of Gloria during a phone conversation with Nnenna, 'Something good must be made out of such an unfortunate event' (*Granta* 118). The plan is that Nnenna should tell her interviewer that she is going to America to study how America manages her own cases of oil spillage so that she would come back and apply the same method in solving Nigeria's own oil pollution problem. The scheme,of course, works and she is granted Visa to America where she will go and enjoy her sexual freedom. His quest is therefore successful.

At that very point, the texts connects with *Oil on Water*: the way Nnenna seeks to make something good out of the unfortunate event is the same way Rufus intends to make something good for himself out of the unfortunate event of oil pollution and the consequent abduction of oil workers by the militants – this is the kind of introspection and ambition usually latent in the mind of every quest hero. What is more, Zaq has taught Rufus that a journalist may be captivated by a great story, but that story is not or should not be of utmost importance to any journalist; rather the *meaning* of the story. He tells him, 'Forget the woman and her kidnappers for a moment. What we seek is not them but a greater meaning. Remember, the story is not the final goal' (4). The 'greater meaning' of the story here can be taken to mean what its reporter stands to gain upon reporting it, which is that such a reporter will be recognised as a great reporter not just by the paper the person works for but by the reading public at large, just like Zaq in his younger days was recognised.

Rufus may be said to have achieved this ambition to an extent. The first time he leaves Irikefe back to Port Harcourt, his work place, he writes his story. Fortunately enough, his story makes it to the front page of the paper thereby winning the admiration of both his colleagues and the chairman, an incident that is altogether unprecedented. We read, 'My story, which my paper brought out in a special edition, had captured more attention than the other reports....' (93) As an incentive to his incredible feat, Rufus enjoys a meal with the chairman – this special kind of lunch is generally known in the office as the 'last supper'. At this very moment and incident, Rufus could be said to have achieved his ambition: he has moved from a mere 'cub reporter' (47) or even a photographer to a real reporter. As such, the editor who erstwhile treats him with disdain can now comfortably call him a reporter, thus: 'Ah, here comes our *star reporter*, when are you going to see the husband?' (93) The last supper is of course the highest favour anyone can enjoy from the owner of *The Reporter*.

Zaq is also on a quest for recognition. Having lost his previously held popularity and respect, he feels that the story of the kidnapped white woman if successfully pursued to a reasonable conclusion and reported is capable of bringing him to limelight once again; is capable of salvaging him from the state of confinement and 'unfreedom' which he finds himself at the *Daily Star*. He says;

> All the time I was in that windowless, airless office with my good friend Beke out there behind his editor's desk, gloating over the fact that he was now actually my employer, the great Zaq cut down to sizes... all that time my greatest fear was that I'd die there, unable to get out and follow a true story one more time (126).

His intention to regain his former status is further evident in his proposal to Rufus, that they will go to Lagos and establish 'a real paper' at the end of the search.

In the context of the texts (*Oil on Water* and 'America), oil exploration can be seen as that which throws the entire community in disarray; that which brings trouble to the community which is hitherto at peace and harmony;

that which brings disorder to the once ordered world; that which constitutes a disruption, disorder or even a threat to the '*Sophrusune*' (A.N Akwanya, *Discourse Analysis and Dramatic Literature* 118), which according to him is loosely translated as 'humility' by some and 'moderation' by others and which according to Etymology Dictionary means 'prudence in desire, discretion, temperance'. Such a disruption elicits different kinds of reactions and motivations from the denizens of the concerned community. As the Doctor tells Rufus, 'It's the oil and fighting. It affects everyone in a strange way. I'm going to write a book on that someday' (142). Consequent upon the reaction, a character may end comically or tragically depending on what the character's fate is. As has been seen, Rufus's and Zaq's motivation is to make something positive out of the seemingly negative. While Rufus may be said to be on comic plane all through, the story is not the same with Zaq – he obviously ends tragically in the jungle.

Also, implicit in Dagogo-Mark's tale about a village where he once worked is desire towards oil, its exploration and the resultant factors. The Doctor tells the story of a small village where he took over service from an old and retired doctor. The village used to be a peaceful, healthy and happy community. Suddenly, the villagers became mesmerised by the kind of 'luxury' their neighbouring villages enjoy simply because oil is discovered in their land. The villagers therefore started wishing and praying for one. Fortunately or unfortunately, oil is discovered in the village and its exploration started. The villages according to the doctor feasted for weeks because of the discovery of oil in their land which to them is a sign of development and 'the fulfilment of some covenant of God' (144). They virtually moved all their activities including buying and selling, children's night play and even the village meeting to the site of the exploration where the 'orange fire' glows intermittently. However, not long, their water and air become polluted and they started dying and virtually entirely died out. Chief Ibiram also tells Zaq and Rufus a similar story. Simply implicit in those tales is quest in terms of desire.

Even the militants themselves can be said to be acting out their own motivation towards oil exploration. They feel that the peace and existence of both the land and its denizens face the threat of starvation, death and in fact total extinction from the act of oil exploration. They take it therefore as their responsibility to protect, conserve and in a word *free* the land, its waters and human occupants from the calamitous output of the activities of the oil companies. As one of the militants tells Zaq at the Major's camp, '...we used to have a name, but no more, that is for children and idiots. We are the

people, we are the Delta, we represent the very earth on which we stand' 154). More so, Bassey, Jamabo and Salomon have different quest and desires which are ultimately connected to oil. Their desires inform their decision to kidnap the white woman in the first place, but one vividly sees where their desires take them, obviously to the tragic realm.

Finally, Rufus may not be said to have fully realised his ambition but he did realise a lot, at least he is the only one out of the six journalists who set out in search of the woman, who actually sees the woman and also lasts to the end of the narrative. There are times when Rufus himself doubts the wisdom in continuing the search for the white woman. That is when he feels that by the time he gets back to Port Harcourt, his job may not be waiting for him any longer. He laments: 'My job wasn't the best in the world. [ ] I thought I should receive more *recognition* [our emphasis] and encouragement for the effort and enthusiasm I put into it – but it was the only one I had and I certainly do not want to lose it' (166). However, at the end his courage and excitement return, when he eventually meets the woman and is told what no other reporter in the world knows or has access to:

> I keep nodding, keeping my expression pleasant and interested, and comparing what she is telling me with what her husband had told me. I tried to calm my excitement: I was being handed a major scoop, and though I had no pen or recorder, I was storing every word, every inflection of her voice' (190).

At the end, Rufus becomes an embodiment of knowledge and information: he learns from James, from Isabel herself, some from Professor, and about journalism, he has learnt enough from Zaq. Armed with these, he is likely to become a great reporter, a real reporter, who will definitely command more respect and recognition both by his editor and the entire populace and free from the editor's derision, command and the shame of becoming a mere photographer in a news firm instead of a reporter.

**The Scapegoat Archetype**

A scapegoat is a carrier, one who carries or suffers for the sins of others. Scapegoat and its dialectics are embedded in what is known as the *myth of pharmakos*. According to Northrop Frye, 'The pharmakos [or scapegoat] is

neither innocent nor guilty; or, to put it in another way, he is both innocent and guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes...' (*Anatomy of Criticism* 41). However, it does appear that a scapegoat differs in comedy as in tragedy. In comedy, especially those of the ironic type, a pharmakos is a scoundrel who must be driven out for peace to reign in society (see *Anatomy* 45). In tragedy on the other hand, a scapegoat is usually the tragic hero who is sometimes always already fated, but who may expedite his suffering through some reckless actions or decisions (this shall soon be seen in detail as regards Zaq). The scapegoat figure is present in the cultural practices of different peoples and also literatures of different ages and traditions, quest-literatures particularly.

In *Oil on Water*, Zaq, the experienced and once great journalist is to be considered as the pharmakos figure. Zaq's career as a scapegoat is in two phases: one as depicted in Beke Johnson's tale of his early journalism days in Lagos and secondly the one implicit in the journey he makes in search of the kidnapped white woman. Zaq in his younger days as a journalist had one day stood up before his editor contemptuously, for just a minor misunderstanding, and declared 'Tunde I quit' (111), an act that is according to Beke totally unheard of then. Having left the newspaper firm, he moved to the Beach in search of great stories. There at the Beach, he started mingling with prostitutes. His association with the Beach prostitutes gave birth to a great story entitled 'Five Women', published in five different series every weekend. The story is about the prostitutes.

The story not only brought Zaq to the limelight but also caused government and non-governmental organisations to mount a campaign, clearing the Beach of the prostitutes and returning them back to school. So, while Zaq becomes a famous and sought for journalist, the prostitutes who were hitherto regarded as worthless derelicts of society and societal excrements become useful once again and even famous, particularly Anita.

However, unknown to Zaq, that singular action is tantamount to trading his life, fame and career with that of the hopeless prostitutes. The act automatically confers him the status of a scapegoat: the *carrier* of the sins of the prostitutes. Hence, it is not an accident that it is one of the prostitutes, Anita, who later brings about his (Zaq's) fall from grace to grass: from an adviser to the information minister to a prisoner. It is this fall that plunges Zaq from the famous Lagos reporter, political activist and a democrat to a

table-side reporter at the *Daily Star* in Portharcout, owned by his then friend in Lagos (Beke Johnson) who is by no means as good as Zaq is in terms of journalism.

On the other hand, Zaq continues his career as a scapegoat in the quest for the white woman. As already seen, Zaq is the other/mentor of Rufus. It is therefore not uncommon for the quest hero's other to die or suffer for the hero. Hence, it can be recalled that Enkidu the Other of Gilgamesh dies for the latter. Zaq's death at Irikefe qualifies him once again as a scapegoat. Before his demise, he has taught Rufus all he needs to know about journalism. His death means that he has died for and on behalf of Rufus so that the latter will now reign in his (Zaq's) stead. In the two scapegoat sequences which Zaq has been identified with, what he does is self-sacrifice, albeit unselfconsciously. There is even no doubt about Zaq's scapegoat status vis-à-vis Rufus when it is recalled that part of the fame of Rufus first story is because he quoted Zaq copiously.

From what has been discussed, Zaq is as much a tragic hero as he is a scapegoat: That is if one considers Roland Barthe argument that 'every character [ ] is a hero of his/her on sequence' (*Image-Music-Text* 106). In his first pharmakos experience, what he has committed is the 'sin of excess' (A.N. Akwanya *Discourse Analysis* 33). He has desired more than normal and therefore falls. For, Beke Johnson does explain to Rufus that feature story, the type that deified Zaq was not a popular thing then, it is to be some decades later. So, the story of Zaq is that of someone who has gone ahead before others, plucks his future and career, exhausts it and dies when those he left behind just started to bloom. Beke tells Rufus, 'Zaq saw the story in that when the rest of us saw only prostitutes, selling sex' (112); 'That shows you how ahead of time he was' (114). So, Zaq is a tragic hero who has got to the zenith of his reign, who has actually wished or desired more than is allowed at the time and therefore plunged down by fate. That of course implicates the Year god myth/sequence and has been hinted before and which is no longer hidden but now overt in Naman's oration: 'It is the nature of existence. A thing is created, it blooms for a while if it is capable of booming, then it ceases to be'*(Oil on Water* 159). Also according to Gilbert Murray, 'All begin in beauty and frailness, grow in strength, grow strong or too proud, and then inevitably dwindles and dies' (qtd in *Discourse and Analysis and Dramatic Literature* 34)

**Conclusion**

In Nigerian contemporary literary scene, there is a category of texts known as Niger Delta texts/literature. These texts are so called because they are written by Niger Delta authors and also because what is usually known as Niger Delta issue/problem, the issue of environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration, is raised in them. The said issue is actually sometimes egregiously represented in these texts, our study text for instance. Critical attention to this text is almost always towards the issue. That is of course not surprising considering the said conspicuity of the issue – there is probably no way to read those texts without touching on the matter. What is rather surprising, in fact strange, is the manner with which this attention is exercised. Some critics really take things to the extreme. For instance, E.D. Simon, et al. wrote in the abstract of their essay that 'The paper seeks to proffer solutions to this age-long problem if socio-economic and political growth is to be met in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.' To think that a literary-critical discussion of a text that supposedly deals with oil exploration and its resultant troubles in the Niger Delta will 'proffer solution' to the issue appears to us as nothing but conscious self-deception. That kind of criticism is what Frye has aptly called 'casual' and 'pseudo-criticism'.

It is of course not altogether unviable to study a text in line with what is considered its immediate social, political and economic engagement, but such study cannot go without its drawbacks. Some of these drawbacks have been mentioned but there remains another that is equally adverse, which is that the text is likely to be abandoned or forgotten when the social, political, environmental or economic problems it allegedly deals with ceases to exist, as it will one day do. So, if the text must enjoy continued relevance, if it must be preserved (Heidegger) then it must be seen beyond its points of immediate engagement; it must be analyzed to see what it shares with other texts both old and new; it must be assigned a place within the vast literary tradition.

It is with these self-assigned mandates that this paper has read *Oil on Water* as a quest narrative following the discourse of archetypes. From the analysis we have seen that different archetypes usually encountered in quest narratives are duly represented in our text. We have also dissected the lives of some characters, notably Rufus and Zaq. The dissection has offered us the opportunity to see the motive behind every single action they take or have taken and its significance. Lastly, the text has been seen to share recognizable elements and resemblances with both older texts (*The Odyssey, Gulliver's Travel, Sir Gawain and the Green Knigh*t) and new one ('America').

This resemblance is what contributes to endorse the literary merit and status of the text since the text qua literature cannot exist alone. Hence Jacques Derrida has maintained that'to write is to resume or to enter into the movements of thought which have always already begun' (qtd in Discourse *Analysis* 19). Finally, it is hoped that scholarly interest will henceforth be ignited towards archetypal studies of other Niger Delta texts or further archetypal study of *Oil on Water* as what is done here may not have exhausted the possible archetypal study of it.

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