

ABOUT THE BOOK

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a harvest and fruitful service to humanity is a historic event that individuals who have distinguished themselves in blossoming their society of the best of their ingenuity. This book of triumphal *Literature: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. G. O. Onyekaonwu*, a publication that does not only celebrate a monumental achiever, but of knowledge in other academic fields, all in honour of an leader in various spheres of society – Godwin Onyeduchukwu professor of Igbo Literature, Language, Literary History and

s twofold. It includes decades of teaching and mentoring in authoring books and articles that testify to his outstanding depth, social responsiveness, transformative vision and sage. His retirement from full-time service as a professor in the African and Asian Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, a leader in and outside his field of learning, to write articles in

from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, other contributors are either from colleges of education. Each of them has a touch of Professor Onyekaonwu's academic life, either as his student or academic colleague. Among the leading scholars whose identification with this laudable *festschrift* that honour is being done to whom it is due.

honour dedicated to celebrating a harvest of great intellectualism a quintessential educator, is divided into nine sections, based on the articles. The editors really worked assiduously and, with put together an amalgam of articles springing from diverse and varying epistemological profoundness.

his publication is that Professor Onyekaonwu was profoundly accordingly meritoriously earned his promotion to the rank of Professor of Literature, Language, Literary History and Stylistics; and at his end with a multidisciplinary *festschrift* that occupies a place of honour among his colleagues and academic mentors.

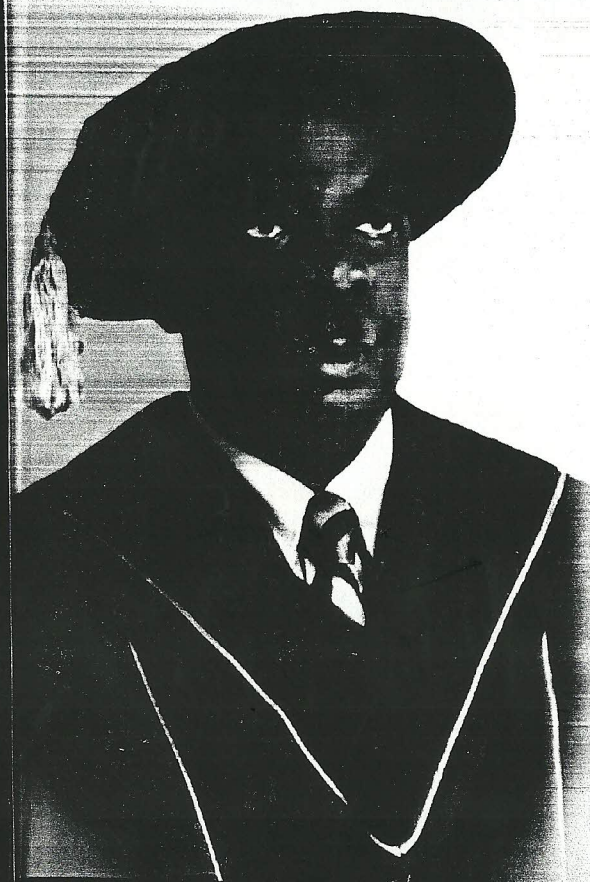
situation whatsoever in recommending this book of inestimable value to academia and the public at large. It is a thought-provoking and enlightening work for its readers.



THE EAGLE OF IGBO LITERATURE: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. G. O. Onyekaonwu (Etigbuchaa Eziokwu)

Edited by
Nkoli Nnyigide
Romanus Ezeuko
Nkechinyere Nwokoye
Joy Eyiisi (Consultant Editor)

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The man **Professor G. O. Onyekaaonwu** is a guru of the Igbo language and literature, a writer of a special breed. His first Igbo play, *Nwata Rie Awo* (Q ju Aau) earned him accelerated promotions in his lectureship career at Nnamdi Azikwe University and beyond. In his thirty-five years of meritorious service in the Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, he made outstanding contributions to the growth of the Igbo language and its literary genres, so much so that the name, Professor G. O. Onyekaaonwu is regarded as the Shakespeare of contemporary African Literature in general and the Eagle of Igbo Literature in particular. This proves that the activities of Professor. G. O. Onyekaaonwu have gone beyond Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Igbo Studies. He has interacted widely across universities and other tertiary institutions in the country and beyond, either as a scholar on mentoring tour or on external examination duties in those institutions. Besides, he has participated in workshops, seminars, conferences on Igbo language, literature and culture. He has published many books and journal articles. Numerous students and scholars have benefited from his creative works and erudite tutelage. It is in recognition of this great scholar that this book is being produced, to give honour to whom honour is due.

The Eagle of Igbo Literature: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. G. O. Onyekaaonwu (Etigbuchaa Eziokwu)

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character.

That the structure of *Nwata Rie Awọ* falls in tune with the accepted structure of tragedy is commendable. But there are some notable Igbo plays which do not adhere to this structure, and this should not detract from their merit as successful works of art.

The title of the text and those of other plays by Onyekwunwu are couched in balanced Igbo proverbs which are equally suggestive of their contents. The language employed clearly makes use of the resources of orality expected in the language of drama.

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Chapter 2

REVISITING THE QUESTION OF TRAGIC PROTAGONIST IN ONYEKAONWU'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

Tragedy as a dramatic form has been popular from the classical period especially with the prominence Aristotle gave it in his theory or concept of the tragic hero in Poetics which scholars, over the years, have used as paradigm in their analysis of the tragic hero. It has, however, been observed that the innovativeness of playwrights in the subsequent two thousand years and more has led to the development of many and new artistically effective types of serious tragedies - types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing (Abrams, 1999: 322). There is, therefore, the feeling that efforts to extend Aristotle's analysis to apply to these later tragic forms could blur his critical categories, and obscure the essential differences that exist in diverse plays that are equally dramatically effective. Onyekwunwu's four tragic plays were all published in the 1980s, over three millennia after Aristotle, making them to be identified with the later tragic forms. Igbo scholars like Uzochukwu (1988) and Eze (1990) who analyzed the tragic protagonists in Onyekwunwu's plays, using the Aristotelian canon, have shown how the characters either deviate or conform to the norm enunciated by Aristotle. While Uzochukwu's analysis that focuses only on *Nwata Rie Awo* concludes that the death of it tragic character evokes only one of the two types of emotion identified by Aristotle - fear, Eze who carries out a more in-depth study of all Onyekwunwu's tragic plays not only agrees with Uzochukwu but also reveals how the death of other tragic characters in the playwright's other works evokes in the audience either one or the two types of emotion Aristotle discusses. This paper is of the view that the status of the tragic hero in Onyekwunwu's plays has not been adequately delineated by these scholars. The paper, therefore, revisits the conclusions of the previous studies on characterization in Onyekwunwu's four tragic plays. It casts a more critical glance at the attributes of the hero, and submits that strictly speaking, since most of Onyekwunwu's tragic characters, with one or two exceptions, are villains, they are to be seen - even when viewed from the

critical lens of Aristotle's classical theory of the tragic hero - as mere tragic figures and not tragic heroes. It is also observed that there are some obvious traces of influences of classical and later tragedies Onyekaaonwu's plays show, yet he is peculiarly innovative in his depiction of tragic characters. This study gives further insight into Onyekaaonwu's style of characterization; we hope that it can provide inspiration for further analysis of tragic plays by other Igbo playwrights.

INTRODUCTION

Onyekaaonwu has written widely and prolifically. He has tried his hands on the three genres of Igbo literature - poetry, prose and drama. His earliest works were prose, which include *A Sokata Eze Anya* (1976), *Oria Gbuo Ozu* (1977), and *Ubiam Gbafuo Dike* (1977). He also has a poetic work, *Uche bu Afa* (1989), to his credit. Unequivocally, his greatest contribution to the development of Igbo Literature can be said to be in the area of drama where he has about five extant works.

His first major dramatic work, *Nwata Rie Awo* (1980), is tragedy whose inspiration appears to have drawn from Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge*. In spite of the glaring similarity in theme between *Nwata Rie Awo* and Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Onyekaaonwu maintains that he did not draw any inspiration from this classical playwright. From an oral interview with him, he said he was rather impressed by the way the Mayor of Casterbridge sold off his wife and daughter, and the mistaken identity it generated. This 'admiration' of Thomas Hardy's work could, therefore, account for the occurrence of a similar incident in *Nwata Rie Awo*, when Aworo, the principal character, sells off his baby girl, and later marries her without knowing. Another possible source of influence on Onyekaaonwu has equally been suggested. Uzochukwu thinks that the traditional base of *Nwata Rie Awo* is the story of the invincible wrestler that features in Igbo traditional prose narrative, referring to the wrestling bout involving Aworo, a renowned wrestler, and Akataosi. But Onyekaaonwu again attributes the source of his inspiration for the wrestling contest to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where there is a similar wrestling incident between Okonkwo and Amalinze the Cat (see Ikwubuzo, 1998). The theme of *Nwata Rie Awo* is the destruction of a prominent man because he committed incest and could not stand the shame, a shame he brought on himself due to his own fault.

Onyekaaonwu's second dramatic work, *Oku Uzu Daa Ibube* (1982), is a tragi-comedy centered on the struggle for leadership. *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu* (1985), a highly complicated tragic story, has the central theme of vengeance, with parricide and incest as sub-themes while *Uwa Niooo* (1986), also a tragedy, is all about the futility of life and absurdity of human situation. The play portrays that all human social conflicts, all sensual and material cravings, ultimately amount to nothing. *Oku Gharalte* (1988), his last tragic play, centers also on craving for material possession in which the tragedy that befalls the protagonist is caused by his desire to escape from his penury by all means. With four out

of his five extant plays as tragedies, Onyekaaonwu, undoubtedly, has demonstrated his flair for tragic plays.

Due, perhaps, to this notable flair he has for tragic plays, Onyekaaonwu has been described by some of his students as the "Shakespeare of Igbo literature". One of the questions that agitate the minds of some of his readers is: Why does Onyekaaonwu prefer to write tragic plays? Is his life in any way reflected in his works? Or does he re-enact or represent his personal experiences in his creative works? It has often been said that the life of a writer is reflected in his work. Eze (1990) cites Dietrich (1953) as saying that the theme of tragedy "may be a particular story which the playwright wishes to tell, perhaps the story of real happening; or it may be a highly imaginative combination of topics based on the background or experience of the playwright" (p.42). Thomas Carlyle while commenting on Shakespeare says that his Sonnets testify expressly in what waters he had waded and swam for his life. He wonders whether Shakespeare would have been able to create those suffering souls as Hamlet, Coriolanus, Macbeth and other such heroes, if his own heroic heart had never suffered (Eze, 1990). Shakespeare used to write comedies. One of the reasons for his inspiration to venture into tragic plays, some scholars suggest, was his psychological frame of mind after a series of misfortune that befell him at the time, which made him unhappy. He was said to have lost his son, his mistress coupled with the unfaithfulness of a trusted friend and a patron - all of which for him was traumatic, bringing him gloom and pessimism that found expression in the bitter theme and violent language his works have (Dasylva, 1997:18). But for Onyekaaonwu, however, neither the kinds of assumptions about Shakespeare nor the possibility of telling real stories informed by a playwright's experience applies to him, for he insists that his flair for tragedy has nothing to do with his personal experiences, but with his desire to satisfy his readers and reach wider audience. It can, therefore, be said that Onyekaaonwu has not in his works recreated his life experience or even reconstructed a historical incident. Rather, he has channeled his creative dexterity to creating an illusion of reality which is the preoccupation of a literary artist. Literature has been a veritable tool in the representation of realities of human life and experience. Branding Onyekaaonwu the "Shakespeare of Igbo Literature" appears to be an acknowledgement by his students of his prolific output in drama, which are mainly tragedies like most of Shakespearean works.

The tragic protagonist is obviously the most prominent character in tragic drama, and Onyekaaonwu's tragic dramas mentioned above are no exception. In the works, as we have highlighted, all the incidents revolve around his protagonists. The dramatic works were all written and published in the 1980s, millennia after Aristotle's classic theory of tragedy and tragic hero. Like Onyekaaonwu's works, many other tragic dramas have emerged over the years in different historical periods, some revealing Aristotle's influence, while others show significant innovativeness. Analysts have over the years attempted to apply Aristotle's model in their analyses of the tragic hero. Abrams

(1999:321) has noted that "more precise and detailed discussions of the tragic form" appropriately start with Aristotle's classic analysis in the *Poetics* but they do not have to end with him. Igbo scholars, notably Uzochukwu (1988) and Eze (1990), have equally applied Aristotle's model in their analyses of the tragic characters in Onyekaaonwu's plays. Uzochukwu focuses only on *Nwata Rie Awo*, while Eze on all the tragic plays, and both agree that some characters in these plays conform in part to Aristotle's principles, and therefore, are tragic heroes. This paper intends to re-examines these scholars' conclusion.

The definition and understanding of some key concepts like the hero, tragedy and tragic hero are considered germane to our discussion in this paper. To this end, the paper would look briefly at the classical/Aristotelian, medieval as well as the Igbo concepts of the hero and tragic hero. This would help, among others, to (i) highlight some of the differences in the conception of the tragic hero in different eras in the evolution of dramatic tragedy, (ii) re-examine Onyekaaonwu's representation of the tragic character in his plays, and (iii) see whether or not his works introduced any innovativeness characteristic of some later tragedies.

Hero, Tragedy, and Tragic Hero in Drama

In the classical context, spirit-human conception leads to the birth of the hero, which explains why he partakes of both spirit and man. Early in life, the hero experiences serious threats to his life. Most heroes also acquire superhuman nobility and exhibit remarkable intelligence, strength and courage at a very early stage. The strength of the hero is directed at saving his people. This is why he is the people's hero. Moses, for instance, saved his people from servitude in Egypt and led them out while Jesus is seen as the Saviour of the world. One other remarkable feature of the hero is that he does usually not attain a ripe age, and that constitutes his tragedy. This happened to Oedipus, Achilles and Jesus among others. However, there are heroes that are different as it does not necessarily mean that all heroes must follow the same life-cycle patterns.

Like in the classical context, the life of the Igbo hero is threatened. The hero's antagonist, usually a despotic king, threatens his life because of the hero's opposition to his tyranny, and sends him on a dangerous expedition so that he can have tragic end. There would be a contract that if he is able to accomplish the mission and return, the antagonist, would vacate the throne for him. Where he fails and does not return, that would be his fate. The hero accepts the challenge for he has no choice. He wins the sympathy of the people who pity him and fear that he would not return for such a mission would be perilous. The mission indeed would turn out to be hazardous but because the hero is not a villain, he uses his good conduct to elicit the assistance of supernatural forces and individuals. And finally he escapes death by a close shave. He returns with the mission accomplished. The people who would have given him up for dead jubilate and

the antagonist, a tyrant to his people, is disgracefully dethroned and often banished into exile. The hero assumes the throne to liberate and lead his people.

The Igbo hero could also be shrewd, ruthless and reckless; he is capable of attracting the wrath of other communities and cause war between his own community and their neighbours. In the process, many people may lose their lives. This is why Ugonna describes him also as "firewood that emits smoke which when removed from the fire, the house becomes cold, and when left in the fire, smoke kills the people." This means that sometimes, he performs act of magnanimity, and sometimes too, he causes the people untold suffering. By this way, he can contribute to his own tragic fall.

There is a view that the tragic hero, though often imbued with superhuman nobility, is pitched against superior powers or higher forces in a struggle he may not win. The struggle may be so serious as to involve the hero in violent death, and the audience in pity and fear. It may be an unequal struggle with destiny which may be represented by forces within or outside the hero. He manifests his heroic spirit but ultimately he is crushed. He perishes bringing the conflict to its tragic end; and the supernatural forces are once more allowed to assert their sway. They have a hand in it for they use the tragic hero like a pawn. They may make or mar him. Dasylyva (1997:12) identifies the following three elements as being contributive to the making or marring of a tragic hero: supernatural forces, the society and the protagonist's personal weakness or tragic flaws. The Greek society, including African societies, believes in the existence and invincible powers of supernatural forces or the gods, and that man is to the gods a mere pawn whose misfortunes are their delight. Great playwrights like Sophocles, Aeschylus, William Shakespeare, and some African writers like Ola Rotimi, J.P Clark and Anaelechi Chukuezi, among others, represented this belief in their plays.

'Tragedy', as a dramatic form, is defined by Abrams (1999: 321) as "Representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist (the chief character). It is, therefore, not intended to make people laugh like comedy. Tragedy is intended to give pleasure through pain; it shows us pain, sorrow and disaster. It shows the audience the bringing down, through the dark and choking abyss of pain of a noble man. The predominant idea in tragedy, according to Crow (1983:124), is that "It shows the fall of a great man because of some flaw in his otherwise impressive character." Shakespeare agrees with the idea that the hero contributes to his destruction, but not by acts in which we see no flaw (Bradley, 2010).

Tragedy must portray disaster, for the tragic playwright writes from a sense of crises. For scholars like Reese (1963) and Shaw (1972), the character of the hero in tragedy must involve him in failure, suffering and death; the hero must die. But Aristotle does not insist that the hero must die, or as Dasylyva (1997:12) puts it, "Greek tragedy does not end in the death of the tragic hero." Due to the religious origin of drama in Greece where performance took place in Dionysian temple, violence was banished on stage. Aristotle says the hero must suffer a calamity, and

'calamity' in this sense could mean an action of destructive or painful nature: death openly represented, excessive suffering, wounding, and the like. To him, the crisis does not consist in the hero's death but his destruction. The destruction may be a fall from glory or death. The tragedy of the famous Ojaadili of the Igbo tales, for instance, is not his death but his fall from glory. The reputation and invincibility he has acquired are eroded when he is defeated by his *chi* (personal god). The tragedy of Oedipus does not consist in his death but in his fall from grace to grass.

The tragic hero is obviously the most prominent character in tragic drama as we noted earlier. He stands out and all actions revolve around him. So important is the tragic hero that it is his suffering and destruction that qualify a play as tragic. In Shakespearean sense, "no play at the end of which the hero remains alive is a tragedy" (Bradley, 2010:46).

To Aristotle, the ideal tragic hero is a man who has something to recommend him; a man of grandeur who is not pre-eminently virtuous but one like us with degree of human finitude whom misfortune befalls not because he is a villain but because of a flaw in his character or an error in judgment. It is the misfortune of a man like this that evokes in us the emotion of pity and fear; and this tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is "better than we are." Pity is occasioned by unmerited or undeserved suffering, and fear by the misfortune of a noble man who behaves like us. We fear because if a misfortune of that magnitude could befall a noble man, it could befall us, ordinary people. When, for instance, noble men like Macbeth, Oedipus, Prince Hamlet and Ojaadili are brought into disgrace and death for minor flaws in their character, they arouse in us these emotions. Tragedy calls forth pity for the distress of the hero, and Aristotle says it makes us fear for ourselves. We fear not for the hero alone but for ourselves because the hero is like us.

Aristotle's view is that tragic hero must not be a good man passing from prosperity to ruin or from happiness to misery. This will only shock us if happens. He must not also be a bad man passing from misery to happiness. This would not be tragic and would appear as if bad engenders good. The tragic hero must not be an extremely bad man, a villain whom misfortune befalls. If he is, his misfortune would be justified and we would not have the emotion of pity.

The Medieval era wove the tragic concept around the death or disaster of the hero (Dasyuva, 1997). In this period, tragedy is simply the "story of a person of high status who, whether deservedly or not, is brought from prosperity to wretchedness by unpredictable turn of the wheel of fortune" (Abrams, 1999: 322-3). To the Mediaeval mind, as Bradley (2010:50) explains too, "a total reverse of fortune, coming unawares upon a man who 'stood in high degree', happy and apparently secure" is a tragic fact, which strongly appeals to common human sympathy and pity, as well as fear. Such experience evokes a feeling that "man is blind and helpless, the plaything of an inscrutable power, called by the name of fortune or some other name – a power that

appears to smile on him for a while, and then on a sudden strikes him down in his pride" (p.50).

In line with Aristotelian description of the tragic hero, the Igbo hero may be a good man but he is not portrayed as a saint. He is, therefore, neither a saint nor a villain. It can be argued that since for the Igbo, it is possible for tragedy to befall a hero, expression of both emotions of pity and fear is equally possible. In a typical oral Igbo heroic tales, the excruciating ordeals the hero goes through and the perilous obstacles that confront him on his way are capable of evoking pity and fear in the audience.

We shall now look at some comments, which the Aristotelian concept of tragic hero has attracted from writers over the years. Raphael (1960) criticizes Aristotle for tying too closely together the emotion of pity and fear. He agrees with Aristotle that for us to be able to pity, we must be capable of imagining and therefore experiencing ourselves, the pains or evil like the person pitied, but Raphael argues that he does not have to fear for himself or for the person unless there is an imminent danger of that evil befalling him. We do not think that we have to perceive danger before we fear. Like the existentialist philosophers would say, the absurdity of human life throws man into anguish, an anguish occasioned by fear. When we realize that the tragic hero is in fact a person elevated above us, a man of grandeur, his misfortune reiterates for us our own vulnerability. As Bradley (2010: 68) puts it, with respect Shakespearean tragic hero, his greatness should be so prominent that his error and fall may make us vividly conscious of the possibilities of human nature. Like Aristotle, he believes that if such evil could befall such a personality and he failed to successfully resist it, then being ordinary mortals, we stand no chance at the face of such calamity. This is what brings about the fear.

The reason why Aristotle says that a pre-eminently virtuous man's misfortune cannot be seen as tragic but shocking is because there would be no justice in such suffering. Because there is no flaw in his character, there would be no justice if misfortune befalls him. The point to make here is that if we use justice as the yardstick for determining tragic situations, and we exclude all cases where there is no justice from being tragic, we may never have tragic situations. Since Aristotle says the hero must experience undeserved suffering to evoke emotion of pity in us and goes on to say that pity is essential in tragedy, one could ask whether there is justice in undeserved suffering. Is there justice in the destruction of a good man simply because of an insignificant flaw in his character which is not his fault? Is there justice in the gods arranging the destiny of a man before he was born, and making him suffer for it? Is there even justice in the world? Aristotle should not have on grounds of justice excluded a saint from being a hero for a saint earns our fear.

The issue of "tragic flaw" described by Aristotle as *hamartia* is a concept which has been variously interpreted and possibly wrongly too. While some scholars see *hamartia* as flaw in the character, others see it as an error in the character. Our contention is that if *hamartia* is interpreted as an error, it means it is not inherent in the character. It could be

an error in judgement, a thing done or left undone. The implication of this interpretation is that as a result of an error in judgement, the tragic hero is destroyed. This is not always the case in tragedy. The hero is destroyed because of a flaw in his character; not a particular error in judgement. Dasylyva (1997) is of the opinion that a protagonist's tragic flaw ("hubris") - that is, a protagonist's personal innate weakness which he/she can neither contain nor change - is fundamental to tragic process. The character, Ojaadili, for instance, is destroyed because of his pride, obstinacy, over-confidence, and vaulting ambition to assert his prowess as a hero in the land of the spirits. He rejects the idea by the elders of his community of honouring him with a chieftaincy after his heroic exploit in the land of the animals. And, in his blind pride, he ignores all dissuasions and proceeds to the land of the spirits where he, after defeating a number of multi-headed spiritual figures, does not also heed the warnings of Ogwumagana against engaging his personal god (*chi*) who emerges last to challenge him in a wrestling. This eventuates in his death. Macbeth is equally destroyed because of his vaulting ambition, Oedipus because of his pride and overconfidence, and Othello because of jealousy. All these are flaws that could lead to errors. It is, therefore, not the error that is *hamartia* but the flaw that is inherent in the character, which makes him commit error.

Hamartia in tragedy raises the issue of undeserved suffering. The tragic hero is destroyed not because he is a bad man but because of flaw in his character which makes him err. His destruction is surely not merited for he is not a villain and cannot be responsible for a flaw in his character. Apart from this, the consequences of the error are often too harsh. This again raises the question of fate or destiny which is believed to be inalienable. Is *hamartia* same as fate or just a defect or fault in one's character? The experience of Oedipus in *King Oedipus* is a case in point. Myth has it that Oedipus was a cursed child from birth. He had been destined to kill his father and marry his mother. He was not responsible for whatever offence that led to the imposition of such terrible curse, and therefore, does not deserve to suffer something he knew nothing about. Such undeserved suffering contradicts the idea of poetic justice for what justice can there be in a good man suffering and dying for a little flaw in his person - a flaw he is not responsible for?

Crow (1983) criticizes Aristotle for insisting that a hero must fall from height. He says Aristotle's view is a product of his time. He could not imagine tragedy being possible for any but the higher rank. Crow argues - and we agree with him - that "In modern time, the audience can accept an ordinary 'man in the street' as a tragic hero as long as his life engages the issues of survival of a race" (p.125). Crow's view, in our opinion, sounds plausible since Aristotle himself said there could be tragedy without fear. If there could be tragedy without fear, then an ordinary man could be a tragic hero.

Crow's argument draws our attention to one of the differences between Aristotle's classic idea of tragedy and later conceptions. Abrams (1999: 322) has also pointed out, with respect Aristotle's classic analysis of tragic form in *Poetics*, that he "based his

theory on induction from the only examples available to him - the tragedies of Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides." Similarly, Dasylyva (1997:12) observes that "Tragic drama in classical Greece particularly since the early decades of 5B.C. had quite distinct changes and phases in the course of its development over the years" - a point which Abrams reiterates when he argues that playwrights in the subsequent two thousand years and more have been innovative as "many and new artistically effective types of serious plots in a catastrophe have been developed - types that Aristotle had no way of foreseeing." Abrams sees the efforts to extend Aristotle's analysis to apply to later tragic forms as reducing to obscurity his critical categories and the essential differences that exist in diverse dramatically effective plays. He says that many of major tragedies by Marlowe, Shakespeare, George Chapman, Webster, Sir Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, and Philip Massinger are observed to have deviated radically from Aristotelian tradition. To illustrate this further, Abrams gives us insight into some kinds and materials of these post-Aristotelian tragedies that developed over time. There is, according to him, the Senecan concept of tragedy in the Elizabethan Age, an example of which is "revenge tragedy" or "tragedy of blood." The drama is said to be derived from Seneca's favorite subjects of ghosts, insanity, suicide, murder, vengeance, mutilation, carnage, sensational incidents, among others, all represented on stage by the Elizabethan writers to satisfy the craving of the contemporary audience for violence and horror (Abrams, 323). "Bourgeois" or "domestic tragedy" was another type of play popular in 18th century. Its protagonist who is portrayed as suffering a commonplace or domestic disaster is drawn from the middle or lower social class.

The introduction of comic relief through humorous characters, incidents, or scenes also marks Elizabethan tragedies out from Aristotle's norm which construes tragedy as serious and of magnitude. It is equally noted that like in classical Greek tragedy, Shakespeare's works incorporate and involve elements such as: the supernatural forces or their agents (e.g. witches, omen), the societal (as it is evident, for instance, in Othello's trust of Iago, in *Julius Caesar*), and the tragic hero's flaws, despite his nobility.

Although Shakespeare's tragedy involves the supernatural forces, the idea of an external force holding sway in hero's life and being solely responsible for his downfall is not shared by the Shakespearean school. In the words of Bradley, while giving exposition of Shakespearean idea of tragedy, "The calamities of tragedy do not simply happen nor are they sent; they proceed mainly from actions, and those the actions of men." Certain circumstances produce certain actions, and such actions arise from the cooperation of characters. There is a succession of such actions, and their interconnectedness inevitably leads to a catastrophe. Something does not just happen to persons; the person concerned equally caused something to happen. The hero, therefore, contributes in some measures to the disaster in which he perishes. Bradley further puts this idea more succinctly: What we do feel strongly, as a tragedy advances to its close, is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of men, and that the main source of these deeds is

character (p.55). The hero "errs, by action or omission; and his error, joining with other causes, brings on him ruin... the idea of the tragic hero as being destroyed simply and solely by external forces is quite alien to Shakespeare. A Shakespearean tragedy, therefore, is a "story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man "in high estate". This means that the story is one of human actions producing exceptional calamity and ending in the death of such a man. The implication of this is that the tragic hero could be the architect of his misfortune.

Another aspect of similarity between the Greek and Shakespearean traditions is the preponderance of cathartic elements in Shakespearean tragedy. Dasylyva emphasizes that *catharsis* in Shakespearean tragedy "essentially amplifies the sense of greatness as the audience is privileged to watch the grandeur of human soul passing through purgatory or through redemptive suffering" (p. 20). Prior to the Shakespearean times also, tragedy centered on the kings whereas a typical Shakespearean tragedy does not feature a king or someone of noble birth as its tragic hero but a highly-placed individual with excellent qualities and grandeur personality. As Bradley points out that the Shakespearean tragic hero needs not be "good", although he is generally "good" as he wins sympathy in his error. From Shakespeare's perspective, the pity and fear stirred by the tragic story "seem to unite with and even to emerge in, a profound sense of sadness and mystery which is due to.... impression of waste" (p. 68).

There are also some recent tragedies which, according to Abrams, are not heroic but antiheroic because they feature a character who does not manifest the dignity and courage characteristic of the protagonists in traditional dramas. Some Igbo tragedies like Gbujie's *Oguamalam*, Akoma's *Obidiya*, Onyekiaonwu's *Erii Mara Ngwugwu* and *Oku Gharalte*, as well as Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Meiere*, are in this mode. By their actions, the tragic characters in these plays are antiheroes.

Equally important and worthy of mention for the purpose of this study is Dasylyva's (1997:14) distinction between a tragic hero and a tragic figure and their attributes. The tragic figure, according to him, is equally influenced by elemental forces - the supernatural (gods), the societal, and tragic flaw - but unlike the tragic hero, he does not undergo a transformation or rebirth in spite of his suffering. The tragic hero, on the other hand, "undergoes a distillation of spirit", and his "soul is ennobled through suffering." He is, therefore, worthy of emulation. Oedipus, for instance, is left alive and free after his fall. Although he embarks on self-exile, which he imposes on himself, he achieves redemption, ennoblement and perfection through suffering. It is in this suffering that he experiences "distillation of spirit" and purgation of his excesses and flaws. The hero's travail could lead him to self-appraisal, self-discovery and regeneration. The tragic figure, in contrast, remains intransigent, unbending and irredeemable. Such character is not worthy of emulation. Dasylyva explains that it is because of the tragic and nobility entraining the heroic in Greek tragedy that its subject matter is construed as serious and of magnitude. This distinction will be adopted in our re-assessment of the tragic

protagonists in Onyekiaonwu's plays under review. Dasylyva also points out that in classical Greece, the idea of "greatness" does not imply that the hero is by all standards a very good person in his disposition or that he is not perfect either. The hero's greatness, instead, lies in "his personal and humble acknowledgement towards the end of the play, of his shortcomings and apparent transformation from the initial state of imperfection to a state of "perfection".

From the above discussion, some attributes of a tragic hero from classical to the medieval periods, and even in later tragedies, are clear. While for Aristotle, the ideal tragic hero is a man who has something to recommend him; a man of grandeur who is not pre-eminently virtuous but one like us with degree of human finitude whom misfortune befalls not because he is a villain but because of a flaw in his character, what constitutes a tragic fact to the Mediaeval mind, is "a total reverse of fortune, coming unawares upon a man who 'stood in high degree', happy and apparently secure." A typical Shakespearean tragedy does not feature someone of noble birth as its tragic hero but a highly-placed individual with excellent qualities and grandeur personality. He needs not be 'good' but generally he is good enough to attract the sympathy of people when calamity befalls him. However, Shakespearean view of tragedy is that the hero contributes in some measures to the disaster in which he perishes; no external force is solely responsible for his downfall. Some later tragedies presented a protagonist drawn from the middle or lower social class. Also, there are also some recent tragedies which, as Abrams informs us, are not heroic but antiheroic because they feature a character who does not manifest the dignity and courage characteristic of the protagonists in traditional dramas. Dasylyva equally draws our attention to the fact that the tragic hero, like in the case of Oedipus, undergoes a transformation or rebirth, a distillation of spirit", and he achieves redemption, ennoblement and perfection through suffering. It is such suffering that makes him experience "distillation of spirit" and purgation of his excesses and flaws. The hero's travail could lead him to self-appraisal, self-discovery and regeneration. With these characteristics of the tragic character on our mind, we shall now proceed to reappraise Onyekiaonwu's depiction of the tragic character in his four plays under review in the light of the conclusion of previous studies.

Characterization in Onyekiaonwu's Four Tragic Plays

In modern Igbo drama modeled after the western dramatic canon, the Aristotelian and Shakespearean views on tragic hero can be appropriately evaluated. Apparently, Onyekiaonwu's depiction of tragic characters does not strictly conform to the Aristotelian description highlighted above. He does not also strictly follow the Igbo concept of the hero, even though he incorporates the idea that the Igbo hero can sometimes be ruthless and reckless as reflected in the actions of some of his protagonists. By nature, Onyekiaonwu's tragic personages are usually villains who bring misfortune unto themselves and do not deserve the sympathy of the audience. To illustrate this

observation, we shall now see how he has portrayed each of his tragic personages as we examine his four tragic plays against the backdrop of the earlier analyses by Uzochukwu (1987) and Eze (1990).

In *Nwata Rie Awo*, Aworo is the protagonist around whom most of the actions are centered. In terms of physical strength, he is the people's hero; a wrestler of repute who saved his people from the shame accruing from the challenge of Akatoosi, a renowned wrestler, from Amaudele. Aworo had killed a leopard with bare hands as his mother mentions:

Aworo aburula nwa m taa
Ma ubochi o jiri aka dogbuagu
I na-etuya aha. (Onyekiaonwu, 1980:)

(Aworo has become my son today
But the day he strangled a leopard with hands
You were praising him.)

This statement is directed at Aworo's father who is blaming her for the misbehavior of Aworo.

In spite of his heroic exploit in the two instances mentioned above, Aworo, from moral standpoint, is profoundly a villain. He is described by his father, Obidike, as a son who jumps from one place to another. He is also portrayed as unruly son who even threatened to beat up his father one day, a behavior which his mother frowns at and advises him to apologize. His wickedness and callousness are evident in the manner in which, without any qualms, he fabricates lies against his wife, Obioma- the trumped-up charge of her planning to poison him - and sells her off alongside her newborn baby girl. This shocks the reader. Only a wicked man can tell such lies against his wife, even though she is a frivolous woman who jilted her original fiancé and ran to Aworo whom she believes is strong and famous. So, when Aworo eventually commits suicide after inadvertently marrying her daughter, the audience does not pity him for he deserves what he gets. His suffering is merited because he causes his own misery. In Uzochukwu's words -which Eze (1990) agrees with -"the tragedy of Aworo who indulges in various acts of malevolence does not inspire in us the emotion of pity for we feel that he deserves the fate that has befallen him" (1987: 10). He, however, argues that because Aworo is a renowned wrestler, his fall inspires in us the emotion of fear. As for Obioma whom tragedy equally befalls, even though she does not die, her misfortune and misery evoke in the audience not the emotional effect of tragic pity but of compassionate understanding because she is innocent of the charges against her. The misery she goes through which is clearly undeserved would make the audience forgive her earlier action of jilting Anene and sympathize with her.

Erii Mara Ngwugwu has tragic characters most of whom are not important. Prominent among them, is Ochonganooko who could be seen as the protagonist in the play. Like Aworo in *Nwata Rie Awo*, he is the character around whom most of the actions are centered. He is both frivolous and wicked. His name Ochonganooko itself denotes troublemaker and in his actions he truly lives up to his name. He absconds with Ndubisi's wife, Uduaku. He is a married man and yet commits incest with his daughter, though inadvertently. He threatens to marry a new wife if Uduaku fails to give birth to a male child, thus showing a total lack of understanding. After he discovers that Taagbo is not his son, he conceives the idea of avenging himself on Uduaku which makes him sell her off, an attitude similar to what Aworo does in *Nwata Rie Awo*. He is thus a villain whose misfortune is caused by him. His misery does not evoke the emotion of pity (Eze, 1990). Uduaku on her part deserves what she gets because she is selfish and wicked. Uduaku, which literally means 'fame of wealth', runs after Ochonganooko because he is famous and wealthy. Abandoning her husband to abscond with another man, and contriving with a nurse to exchange her female child with someone else's son in order to safeguard her marriage reflect her lack of moral rectitude. It is her selfish desires that ruin her.

Okwuike Ogbunanjo is another tragic character in the play who some readers see as the protagonist. But this is difficult to justify because he has not much to do in the play. He only appears twice in the play; first to kill his wife and second, to be killed by his son. True to his name, Ogbunanjo is a killer who actually kills in a bad way. He has an evil habit of murdering, maiming and trafficking in parts of human body. After repeated warnings and unable to stand it any longer, his wife informs the police. He is arrested, convicted and jailed for fifteen years. He is a villain whose death evokes no emotion. The other two tragic characters are Oriji Ogbunanjo who is also called Oriaku Okwundu, and Okeihemere. The former is killed out of malice and vengeance while the latter by mistake. Oriji Ogbunanjo is depicted as good character who exposes the evil deeds of her husband for the interest of the general public. Her death at the hands of the same evil husband is undeserved, having stood against evil in the interest of all. The tragedy that befalls her evokes pity and fear even though she is depicted as an ordinary person (Eze, 1990).

In *Uwa Ntogo*, characterization is very interesting and peculiar. It is the first instance of two heroes in Onyekiaonwu's plays. The first hero is Ebubedike, the village war leader. He is a prominent man; a warrior who experiences a sudden death he does not deserve. Even though Ebubedike's death occurs at the beginning of the play, he keeps recurring in the form of apparition and directing action. He first appears to his son in the bush and tells him the circumstances surrounding his death. He thus affects the first major discovery in the play. Second, he appears to kill his wife whom he has earlier warned not to remarry, thus effecting the first major tragic incident in the play. He appears again to warn his son when he is walking towards his doom, and finally at the end of the play when all the major characters have died. He gives the last word, thus "outliving" all the

other major characters. He, therefore, deserves to be a tragic hero, a warrior who commits himself to the defense of his people – a man that has something to recommend him (Eze, 1990).

On the other hand, Oguamalam could be seen as the hero. He is the character that effects most of the actions. He survives many dangerous periods to bring the play to its tragic conclusion and at his death, the conflict is resolved. His death unlike that of his father, Ebubedike, however, does not engender the emotion of fear. He is not a prominent person but his death evokes the emotion of pity because he is not a bad person. His death is caused by a flaw in his character – hamartia. He has a weakness for Olamma which makes him defy his father's warnings. He obviously deserves the sympathy of the audience. In this play, a lot of emotions of pity are generated following several deaths, but it is only that of Ebubedike that evokes emotion of fear in addition. However, the audience is purged of these emotions for a character like Oguamalam at the end of the play because he has a flaw. It is this flaw that makes his death by poisoning bearable (Eze, 1990).

Characterization in *Oku Ghara Ite* is as complex as it is in *Uwa Ntoq*. Ukpaabi the protagonist is not good man. He is burnt by the fire he lit and does not deserve any pity from the audience. He is not a noble man and so his death does not evoke the emotion of fear (Eze, 1990). Akuebuo who is a bad man like Ukpaabi lures him into the secret cult of Odima, where he plans to kill his wife and son for ritual purposes. He is killed by members of the cult for attempting to denounce his membership some years later, a thing completely unacceptable to the members of the cult.

Most of Onyekaonwu's tragic characters, as we have seen, are bad men who cause their own downfall, more like the tragic heroes in Shakespeare's plays whose deaths rob the audience off the emotion of pity. His portrayal of the tragic character conforms to the Shakespearean view that the hero contributes in some measure to the disaster in which he perishes. Macbeth and Brutus, for instance, contribute to their tragic experiences. Similarly, Onyekaonwu's tragic characters are not passive; through their actions, they contribute to their calamities thereby being the architect of their misfortune. In all his plays under review, the playwright achieves this element of self-induced downfall by always incorporating a breach of moral codes – contravention of moral law. A protagonist or another prominent character in the play contravenes a moral law which causes his/her misfortune. In *Nwata Rie Awo*, for instance, as earlier mentioned, Aworo first accuses his wife falsely, sends her packing and goes ahead to sell her off alongside their new-born baby, all against the laws of morality. He also commits incest and suicide, two things regarded as extremely odious to the Igbo. The moral laws breached by Aworo causes his misfortune. In *Erii Mara Ngwugwu*, the situation appears worse. Ogbunanjo commits parricide by killing his wife and Okoto by killing his father. Ochonganooko has incestuous affairs with his daughter and finally commits suicide. Uduaku, like Obioma in *Nwata Rie Awo*, jilts Ndubisi and arranges with a nurse in the hospital to exchange babies

– thereby setting the stage for the incest which Ochonganooko commits when he inadvertently marries his daughter who is a victim of that exchange.

In all these instances, the breach leads to disastrous consequences. Ogbunanjo is killed because he killed his wife. Ochonganooko commits suicide. Murder and suicide are the order of the day in *Uwa Ntoq*. Agamevu murders Ebubedike and Uwadiogbu, and commits suicide. Obidiya murders Oguamalam and Olamma and also commits suicide. These are breaches of moral precepts. Several acts of disobedience in the play are also against moral code. Onukwube defies her dead husband's instructions and marries the man who killed her husband. Oguamalam ignores his dead father's instruction and warnings and starts an affair with Olamma which eventually leads to his death. Inweregbu, in spite of having sworn to secrecy, divulges vital information to Agamevu. All these infringements of moral precept lead to disasters. The most outrageous contravention of moral law in *Oku Ghara Ite* is Ukpaabi's scheme to sacrifice his wife to the cult. Also odious is his plan to kill his son, Akachukwu. Akuebuo, his friend, and members of Oduma also contravene moral law by embarking on such heinous and hideous crimes as human sacrifices and the killing of Ukpaabi.

The concept of tragedy also entails a contravention of moral precept or the divine law. In the classical context, Oedipus, for instance, had broken the divine law by committing patricide, a thing abhorred in all human communities. Worse still, he had "begotten where he was begotten" – incest. In Shakespearean tragedy, Macbeth is guilty of murder, the murder of a friend under his own roof – betrayal of trust. Ojaadili wrestled against his chi (personal god) a thing unheard of among the Igbo. Thus, the contravention of the moral precept is common in tragic plays, including those by Onyekaonwu, for that is what ultimately brings down the tragic hero. Without the contravention, there may be no tragedy.

Uzochukwu (1987, 2012) and Eze (1990) agree that Aworo's death (in *Nwata Rie Awo*) arouses only one of the two kinds of emotion proposed by Aristotle and yet accord Aworo the status of a tragic hero on the grounds of being a renowned wrestler. Eze argues that the death of Aworo could be said to have evoked the emotion of fear because according to Aristotle, what occasions fear is the death of a man of grandeur. Therefore, Aworo being a notable wrestler qualifies to be called a man of grandeur, a man sought after when his community is in need of a deliverer. The king solicits his help in representing the town in a wrestling contest. But the critical questions about this conclusion are: Can a man of grandeur personality and excellent qualities ever contemplate such heinous crime committed by Aworo? Does the audience experience tremor or trauma when watching *Nwata Rie Awo* given the magnitude of Aworo's crime? Does the audience upon watching Aworo really experience cathartic feeling?

According to Aristotle, as Dasylyva explains, "classical Greek tragedy was intended to serve a definite purpose of affecting a *catharsis*", by which he meant "an effective purgatorial process through which the soul of man is purged through fear and

pity" (p.12). If as Dasylyva suggests, catharsis "essentially amplifies the sense of greatness as the audience is privileged to watch the grandeur of a human soul passing through purgatory or through redemptive suffering" (p. 20) in Aristotelian sense, the death of Aworo is devoid of any cathartic element.

Dasylyva also informs us that the process of regeneration is achieved through anagnorisis and that the Shakespearean tragic hero, for instance, cannot be the same at the end of the play as he was in the beginning. He thoroughly undergoes purgatory, cleansing and rebirth. In *Nwata Rie Awo*, Aworo is in the dark concerning what he had done until Obioma returns; then he discovers his crime. Such discovery is particularly effective because it brings about a reversal in the fortune of the personage but in the case of Aworo, as a tragic personage, it does not lead to regeneration through what Dasylyva calls "distillation of spirit", as we have it in classical tragedy. Aworo commits suicide.

The two types of emotion Aristotle describes are absent in Aworo's death, his being a notable wrestler, notwithstanding. For even as a renowned wrestler, he is consistently portrayed in his actions as a bad man from the beginning to the end of the play. At no time is he either portrayed as a man of excellent qualities before he derailed as a result of some flaws, or shown to be under the manipulation of supernatural forces whose curse or prophesy he cannot escape as in the case of Oedipus. His being identified as a tragic hero, therefore, raises a question. Is Aworo truly a tragic hero or mere tragic figure? If Dasylyva's distinction between tragic hero and tragic figure and their respective characteristics are to be used as parameters for assessing the tragic protagonists in Onyekaaonwu's plays, Aworo and indeed most other tragic characters, except, perhaps, Ebubedike and Orijei Okwundu, are not qualified to be described as a tragic heroes because they are antiheroes - mere villains. Aristotelian's tragic hero is portrayed as one whose fall is as a result of his flaw, not villainous tendencies. In the same vein, Onyekaaonwu's tragic characters are not shown to undergo any form of transformation towards the end of the plays as they all die.

CONCLUSION

Onyekaaonwu not only exhibits his creative skills in the creation of plots but also in the characterization of the personages that feature in the plays. Our examination of the four plays shows the playwright's artistic manipulation of tragic incidents where tragic characters fit in appropriately. Good characterization, no doubt, is indispensable in tragedy because the audience is watching the imitation of an action, and unless those characters imitate well, the audience will not be convinced, and they would fail to identify with such character. Onyekaaonwu's tragic characters are well developed.

The study has revealed that in his portraiture of the tragic characters in his plays, Onyekaaonwu has demonstrated so much flexibility that he cannot be said to be strictly tied to any particular concept of the hero. Although some previous studies concluded that some features of Aristotelian concept of the tragic hero can be seen in his plays, the paper

has argued that if subjected to critical scrutiny, on the basis of the kind of personality or attributes a tragic hero should have, most of Onyekaaonwu's tragic characters do not fit into the mode and, therefore, could only be seen as tragic figures.

Onyekaaonwu's works can be identified more with the innovativeness characteristic of the later tragedies that deviate from Aristotle's norm. This can be seen in his introduction and use of tragedy-prone incidents and themes such as vengeance, murder, suicide, maiming, trafficking in human parts, cult, incarceration, separation, false allegation, selling off of persons, jilting of a lover and elopement, apparition/ghost, etc. in all his plays. At the center of most of these actions are tragic characters that are devoid of the qualities of the ideal tragic hero which Aristotle describes: a man who has something to recommend him; a man of grandeur, although not pre-eminently virtuous, whose fall stems not from his villainy but from a flaw in his character. The study also reveals that many of the tragic characters are ordinary people unlike the classical and Shakespearean tragedies.

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