

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

1-1-2010

William Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe: A Study of Character and the Supernatural

Kenneth N. Usongo
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), and the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Usongo, Kenneth N., "William Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe: A Study of Character and the Supernatural" (2010). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1387.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1387>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

William Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe: A Study of Character and the Supernatural

Abstract

This study examines how Shakespeare and Achebe use supernatural devices such as prophecies, dreams, beliefs, divinations and others to create complex characters. Even though these features are indicative of the preponderance of the belief in the supernatural by some people of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo societies, Shakespeare and Achebe primarily use the supernatural to represent the states of mind of their protagonists.

Through an essentially New Historicist approach to the study of character and the supernatural in the tragedies and novels of Shakespeare and Achebe respectively, I argue that both writers, besides using supernatural features to explore the human mind, also indicate how these devices could forewarn the protagonists about certain happenings, as well as being instruments of poetic justice. In a sense, the character of Macbeth, Lear, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for example, can substantially be appreciated in the ways that these heroes respond to external forces like witches, storms, gods/goddesses and others. Thus, there is exposure, through the supernatural, to traits like ambition, wrath, impulsiveness, pride and others that considerably account for the downfall of the heroes. In fact, Shakespeare's and Achebe's preoccupation with the supernatural adds subtlety to their characterization and enhances their readability by situating their art beyond time, place or even particularity.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Ph.D.

Department

English

First Advisor

Linda Bensel-Meyers, Ph.D.

Keywords

Achebe, Character, Shakespeare, Supernatural, Tragedy

Subject Categories

African Languages and Societies | Classical Literature and Philology | Comparative Literature

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND CHINUA ACHEBE: A STUDY OF CHARACTER
AND THE SUPERNATURAL

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Kenneth N. Usongo
June 2011
Advisor: Linda Bensel-Meyers

©Copyright by Kenneth N. Usongo 2011

All Rights Reserved

Author: Kenneth N. Usongo
Title: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND CHINUA ACHEBE: A STUDY OF
CHARACTER AND THE SUPERNATURAL
Advisor: Linda Bense-Meyers
Degree Date: June 2011

Abstract

This study examines how Shakespeare and Achebe use supernatural devices such as prophecies, dreams, beliefs, divinations and others to create complex characters. Even though these features are indicative of the preponderance of the belief in the supernatural by some people of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo societies, Shakespeare and Achebe primarily use the supernatural to represent the states of mind of their protagonists.

Through an essentially New Historicist approach to the study of character and the supernatural in the tragedies and novels of Shakespeare and Achebe respectively, I argue that both writers, besides using supernatural features to explore the human mind, also indicate how these devices could forewarn the protagonists about certain happenings, as well as being instruments of poetic justice. In a sense, the character of Macbeth, Lear, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for example, can substantially be appreciated in the ways that these heroes respond to external forces like witches, storms, gods/goddesses and others. Thus, there is exposure, through the supernatural, to traits like ambition, wrath, impulsiveness, pride and others that considerably account for the downfall of the heroes. In fact, Shakespeare's and Achebe's preoccupation with the supernatural adds subtlety to their characterization and enhances their readability by situating their art beyond time, place or even particularity.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Prof. Bensel-Meyers, for her pertinent criticism while I worked on this dissertation. Also, I am appreciative of the useful suggestions that I received from my co-advisors, Prof. Nwosu and Prof. Teuton. I am thankful to Prof. Zaranka for his invaluable remarks about this work. Thank you to Prof. Chevillot for accepting to be the outside chair for the defence of my dissertation.

Finally, I am pleased with the encouragement that I got from my wife, Mira, and the giggles of my boys, Kutando and Gwebi.

Table of Content

Chapter One.....	1
What Shakespeare and Achebe Do Not Have in Common.....	7
Hypothesis.....	14
Critical Historiography.....	18
Methodology.....	28
Chapter Two.....	33
The Term Supernatural.....	33
Early Western Embodiments of the Supernatural.....	43
Igbo Embodiments of the Supernatural.....	59
Literary Manifestations of the Supernatural.....	74
Chapter Three.....	80
Shakespeare and the Supernatural.....	80
<i>King Lear</i>	84
<i>Macbeth</i>	95
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	109
<i>Hamlet</i>	118
<i>Othello</i>	126
Chapter Four.....	133
Achebe and the Supernatural.....	133
The Supernatural and Character.....	133
The Supernatural as Premonitory.....	151
The Supernatural and Morality.....	160
Chapter Five.....	193
Shakespeare's and Achebe's Use of the Supernatural.....	193
Impact of the Supernatural on the Protagonists.....	198
The Supernatural as Prolepsis and Moral Implications.....	212
Works Cited.....	228

CHAPTER ONE

William Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe, in their tragedies and novels respectively, employ the supernatural in creating complex characters. Their protagonists are memorable not only in terms of actions, but also in the ways that the characters respond to external forces like ghosts, prophecies or divinations, which appear to cloud their minds. In their interactions with the supernatural, the tragic heroes expose their fears, anxieties, ambitions or greed; aspects which not only hold our anxiety, but also problematize our explanation of their downfall. In focusing my study on Shakespeare and Achebe, I intend to examine striking similarities and noticeable differences in the ways in which both writers use supernatural features in portraying character, foreshadowing events, and as an instrument of poetic justice. I have decided to focus my study on the actions of the protagonists of Shakespeare and Achebe rather than on their minor characters because the leading characters better represent the supernatural paradigm that I am investigating. Also, an analysis of the works of Shakespeare and Achebe from a supernatural perspective might help to determine cross-cultural symbolic habits in terms of human nature.

In fact, Achebe, like Shakespeare, uses supernatural devices to develop his characters. For example, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is forewarned by Ezeudu not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna; otherwise, he would provoke the anger of the earth goddess. Okonkwo ignores this advice and immediately after killing this child, he, like

Macbeth after murdering Banquo, is plunged into anguish. The child's spirit or Okonkwo's conscience psychologically tortures him almost in the same way that Banquo's ghost haunts Macbeth. In other words, both Okonkwo and Macbeth are tormented by their consciences because of their murderous deeds. Thus, the fear of retribution from supernatural agencies is common to both protagonists, an indication of how the supernatural can impact the human mind irrespective of cultural differences. Interestingly, whereas Okonkwo's demise can partly be explained as the working of the gods/goddesses, although it could be argued that he is simply responding to the call of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves that Ikemefuna should be killed, Macbeth's downfall is partially the result of his trust in the witches' prophecy about his invincibility. In both instances, Shakespeare and Achebe appear to present their protagonists partly as victims of supernatural forces. However, the misfortunes of these characters cannot entirely be attributed to the supernatural because of their vaulting ambition and fear of failure, for example. Moreover, in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu's visit to the shrine of *Ulu* to inquire whether to convene the yam festival or not reminds us of Macbeth's visit to the witches to know about his future. Ezeulu says that *Ulu* is against celebrating the yam festival; an interpretation that is suspect just as the witches' prediction to Macbeth that he shall only be defeated when Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane, or that none of woman born can harm him. In fact, the protagonists of Achebe, like Shakespeare's, are depicted as men with dignity and respect, but who appear to be caught up in a web of fate. Their actions and character seem to be trailed by capricious forces, making it difficult at times to blame only the characters for their downfall.

Nevertheless, Achebe appears different from Shakespeare in the way that he explores the supernatural from a moral standpoint. With Shakespeare, the voice of morality appears mediated by supernatural forces such as ghosts and ancient gods and goddesses, or utterances from some of the characters. In the case of Achebe, morality seems to be more forthcoming in the actions of gods, goddesses, priests or priestesses who appear to bring to order erring people, or inflict harm on them to deter others. His characters are perceived as being greatly influenced by gods and goddesses who seem to have a will of their own, leaving humankind at their mercy. Humankind is implored to be submissive and humble before spiritual forces, or respect societal beliefs. On his part, Shakespeare presents his protagonists as forging their destinies and the intervention of supernatural forces in their activities is more a projection of their own minds. Achebe, for one, hints at several possibilities about the downfall of his tragic heroes, yet not fully explaining, according to Austin Shelton in “The Offended *Chi* in Achebe’s Novels,” the substratum of “divine forces working to influence the characters” (37).

The decision to focus on a study of Shakespeare and Achebe is partly predicated on the fact that, in spite of the timeline between these two writers, they are unique in their exploration of the relationship between humankind and supernatural forces, in their problematizing of the interaction between blacks and whites, or traditional religion and Christianity. Achebe appears to take off from where Shakespeare ends in indicating primarily how the supernatural may affect humankind and in depicting blacks in a more respectable perspective than has generally been the case in earlier works about Africa. In this regard, I think particularly of Leo Africanus’ *A Geographical Historie of Africa* that foregrounds the idea that Africans revere more the devil rather than God and that some of

them, especially those of Congolese descent, worship serpents, goats, tigers and other creatures while Guineans hold that stars possess souls (446). In addition, Iago's image of Othello—black ram, thick lips, lustful—reproduces and exaggerates, according to Eldred Jones in *Othello's Countrymen*, several of the unfavourable characteristics unfairly attributed to Moors or blacks (88). The relationship between Iago and Othello, for example, reflects, in the words of Anne B. Mangum, "contemporary global encounters between the European and the African that resulted in the selfhood and culture of the African being denigrated and destroyed" (64). Particularly so because Othello is perceived as the Other, associated with magic and witchcraft, as well as "bestiality and unnatural sexual activities" (Mangum 64).

Shakespeare's portrayal of Othello as a crossbreed, or at the crossroad of traditional religion and Christianity, could, to a certain extent, be said to mirror the ambiguous situation of Achebe's protagonists like Ezeulu who manifest conflicting attitudes towards Christianity despite their being grounded in traditional Igbo religion. As far back as the Elizabethan period, it is observed that Africans had been associated with stereotypes of savagery and irrationality, although Shakespeare appears to deemphasize some of these assumptions about blacks by presenting Othello as graceful and dignified, given Othello's relationship with Desdemona and his status of military general. Brabantio's denunciation of Othello's race and values is not much different from British arrogance and denigration of Igbo traditional beliefs as depicted in Achebe's novels. In line with some of the stereotypes about blacks, when Othello's emotions override him, he could become irrational or impulsive like Okonkwo. In other words, like some of Achebe's protagonists, Othello appears to be entrenched in supernatural beliefs as

evidenced in the magical handkerchief which he gives Desdemona, believed by him to make her lovable in his eyes. But when it is lost, as is the case in the play, Othello becomes violent and aggressive. In this regard, Elizabeth Williamson argues that the symbolism of the handkerchief lies in the fact that it “illuminates those moments of cross-cultural confrontation characterized by religious difference” (196).

Belief, by Othello, in the magical significance of the handkerchief which he gives to Desdemona reflects belief in *Ulu* by Ezeulu and his compatriots that this god caters for their well-being. Thus, despite the historical and spatial distance between Shakespeare and Achebe, an interconnection is evident between both writers in their exploration of the theme of the supernatural and how it could impact human behaviour. According to Diana Adesola Mafe, when Iago gloats over the gullibility of Othello, and graphically describes a sexual scene involving Desdemona and Cassio: “Work on, my medicine work!” (4.1.41), Shakespeare casts him in the form of a diviner, one who is representative of the practice of *juju* in most parts of West Africa (58). Drawing a parallel between Jacobean England and Achebe’s traditional Igbo society, Stephen Ekema Agbaw argues that Macbeth’s and Banquo’s appearances on stage in battle gear, shots of gun fire and the witches’ conjuration are indisputably African in conception (104).

It would seem that Achebe’s depiction of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for example, appears to interrogate Western perception of blacks as emotive, savage and anti-Christian. However, Achebe confronts, in his novels, European and African values, Christianity and traditional religion, showing how his protagonists are sometimes caught up in the struggle for dominance between these two ways of life. The fact that Achebe juxtaposes blacks and whites in his novels and the relationship between indigenous

religion and Christianity could indicate that these two civilizations share certain commonalities. For example, Elizabethan and Jacobean England, like Achebe's traditional Igbo society, subscribes to particular beliefs about humankind's relationship with the cosmos in the forms of omens, divination, astrology and others. In this regard, both writers draw from the folklore of their societies to create memorable characters. Their exploration of how supernatural forces can influence human action or behaviour clearly indicates how the human mind can be better understood through interaction with the supernatural, irrespective of culture, race or particularity.

Despite the time interval between the period when Shakespeare wrote and the time at which Achebe is writing, there still appears some similarity between the world views of the Elizabethans and the Jacobeans, on the one hand, and the traditional Igbos, on the other, in terms of how external forces like ghosts, dreams or divination may affect human beings. This is so because of the belief in the interconnectedness between the physical and the spiritual worlds by the Elizabethans, Jacobeans and traditional Igbos. Thus, for example, Macbeth's blame on the witches for making him believe in his invincibility before any mortal may not be much different from Ezeulu's charge that *Ulu* incited his downfall. It is observed that in spite of the assumption that traditional beliefs tend to decline with the emergence of industrialization, both Shakespeare and Achebe indicate, in their works, how concerns with the spirit world can shape human thought. As Benedict Chiaka Njoku puts it, Achebe's novels invoke "tremendous geographical, historical, cultural and social" spaces across independence and colonialism and across peoples (189).

In writing *Othello*, for example, Shakespeare, as Emily C. Bartels intimates, “does anticipate the conjunction of racism and imperialism, the coincidence of racially loaded othering and an extremely threatened state, enough to set the two side by side and explore what happens” (64). As a result, the idea of reading Shakespeare alongside Achebe opens up their works, according to Bartels, to cultural dialogism by recovering traces of the Other in the self, the self in the Other, and emphasizing “the flexibility and negotiability of cultural borders” (46). Although Othello ultimately murders Desdemona, an act that is partly orchestrated by Iago, Othello, as Anne B. Mangum aptly remarks, not only “subverts the general assumptions about the bestiality of the African, but also those about European superiority” (103). In other words, through his interaction with Iago, Othello is considerably portrayed as a victim of Iago’s malignity indicating also how the European mind is susceptible to evil.

What Shakespeare and Achebe Do Not Have in Common

Let me begin with this affirmation: Shakespeare and Achebe are both literary giants in the European and African cultures. They seemed to have explored much of human life from two different backgrounds, timelines and texture. Although Shakespeare and Achebe are similar in their use of the supernatural in representing the states of mind of their protagonists, there are remarkable differences between both writers in terms of genres, world views and others. These differences might make some people question my intention to compare these two writers. While, in the course of this study, I shall articulate the similarities in the artistic craft of both authors, it might be necessary to let

the reader know about issues that are uncommon to Shakespeare and Achebe, things which may make you question the *raison d'être* of this study.

Granted that over four hundred years separate these two writers—Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Achebe (1930-)—there are striking differences in their perceptions of the supernatural and how it may affect character. Among several of the dissimilarities between both artists is the awareness that Shakespeare uses theatre as a genre to represent the states of mind of his protagonists whereas Achebe employs fiction to examine the relationship between his protagonists and the supernatural. Put differently, while one writer interrogates the relationship between the supernatural and humans in the form of drama, the other appears to reconstruct Shakespeare's portrayal of the supernatural as a theatrical device by inscribing it within his narrative as symbolic of the culture of his people. Indeed, Achebe acculturates the supernatural as he appropriates the English language in his depiction of the world view of traditional Igbo.

Moreover, while Shakespeare, in his art, explores a predominantly Christian society, in which the Catholic Church vigorously challenged supernatural beliefs such as witchcraft and magic in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, Achebe's society practises essentially traditional religion and this latter society attempts to resist the encroachment of Christianity, a Western religion, into its belief system. In fact, the societies investigated by both artists have different belief systems, which hinge on the supernatural. On the one hand, Shakespeare's society, as typified by Othello, who is arraigned before the Venetian senate by Brabantio on charges of magic and witchcraft, represents Western dread of the supernatural. On the other, Achebe's traditional Igbo society, as represented by the elders of Umuaro and Umuofia, in *Arrow of God* and

Things Fall Apart respectively, accuses Christianity of not only emphasizing the superiority of this alien religion over its indigenous counterpart, but also of engaging in supernatural practices by encouraging traditional Igbo social outcasts to seek protection from a Christian God against traditional gods like *Ulu* or sacred animals such as the royal python.

In exploring the relationship between humans and the supernatural, it would seem that Achebe enjoys more artistic freedom than Shakespeare does as he recreates traditional Igbo pantheon and their apparent impact on human affairs. In doing so, he chooses to foreground or withhold information that may show the dilemma faced by his protagonists, or how they are caught up in a seeming cul- de- sac as they negotiate their concerns or ambitions with the dictates of gods and goddesses. In other words, there are times when the reader feels the intrusive voice of the author as he complicates events or issues in the stories, or when he attempts to influence the reader towards a particular line of thought. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, this is how Achebe describes the fate of Okoli, who claims to have killed and eaten the sacred python: “He had fallen ill on the previous night. Before the day was over he was dead. His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles” (129). Furthermore, in *Arrow of God*, Achebe hints at the possibility that Winterbottom’s illness is caused by supernatural forces: “It looked as though the gods and the powers of event finding Winterbottom handy had used him and left him again in order as they found him” (229). These examples attest to the complications that the protagonists face in Achebe’s art, with the looming presence of supernatural forces. Unlike Achebe’s suggestion about the supernatural intervening in his artistic cosmos, Shakespeare rather engages in problematizing Elizabethan and Jacobean

belief systems that were constantly challenged in the courts and by scholars such as Reginald Scot. In fact, Shakespeare's repeated questioning of the power of the supernatural is done in a systematic manner as his early plays interrogate human belief in it and his later plays indicate how it can be humanized.

Indeed, the considerable time lapse between Shakespeare and Achebe shows an evolution in their perceptions of the supernatural. Shakespeare's task, in examining the inner mind of his tragic heroes through the supernatural, appears simpler than that of Achebe in the sense that the former is using the supernatural essentially as a theatrical device, whose roots can be traced to Medieval morality plays like *Everyman*. Achebe's mission seems daunting because he is also preoccupied with competing forces such as colonialism and Christianity, which interrogate the basis of traditional religion. In his recreation of the belief system of traditional Igbos, Achebe is confronted with the duty of negotiating the balance between his people's sense of religion, which some Westerners, such as the white missionaries in his novels, consider superstitious, while attempting to be an impartial artist as he discusses traditional Igbo religion alongside Christianity. There is the implication that while, from a Western perspective, the actions and behaviours of some of Achebe's protagonists can be seen to be the result of their flaws, from the traditional Igbo perspective and the metaphysics of this society, it may not be enough to explain the fate of these characters scientifically or empirically. Often, the reader is persuaded to take into consideration the idea of supernatural causation. For instance, the downfall of Okonkwo, Ezeulu and Obi, irrespective of their tragic flaws such as rashness, pride and waywardness, appears also to have supernatural underpinnings as their actions apparently clash with cultural practices. Therefore, it

would seem that Achebe's depiction of the supernatural and its apparent impact on the human mind seems more complex and sophisticated than is the situation in Shakespeare. With Achebe, supernatural forces appear to influence the mindset of the protagonists. At the same time, the protagonists manifest failings which trigger their downfall. As a result, according to Mark Mathuray, interpretation in the novels of Achebe "seems to flounder in the face of the preponderance of the representation of myth, ritual and religious beliefs and practices" (22). In other words, as one reads Achebe, there appears to be a grey boundary between the supernatural and the natural whereas this is not the case with Shakespeare, where the dramatist essentially examines the supernatural as a rhetorical device.

On the one hand, Shakespeare's heroes appear to be wrestling more with their individual wills in the light of supernatural devices, questioning whether there is some correlation between their yearnings or feelings and supernatural signs. For example, Lear sees in the storm a reflection of his distraught mind; Brabantio attempts to ascertain whether his dream about his daughter's elopement with Othello is true or not; and Macbeth is worried that the witches' prophecy of Banquo's descendants being crowned kings may be a stumbling block to his reign as he attempts to kill Fleance. On the other, the heroes of Achebe seem to be concerned with negotiating their desires against established traditional Igbo institutions in the forms of gods or goddesses, norms or belief systems. For instance, Okonkwo constantly finds himself at odds with the dictates of the earth goddess; Ezeulu apparently faces opposition from *Ulu* and the elders of Umuaro because of his apparent intransigence to convene the yam festival; and Obi's engagement to Clara conflicts with the rejection of the caste system by his society.

Now, let us explain Shakespeare's and Achebe's perceptions of the supernatural in another way. The English dramatist examines the supernatural in a philosophical manner as opposed to the Nigerian novelist who recreates Igbo gods and goddesses, cultural and social practices in his novels as having moral implications on the actions of his protagonists. Igbo traditional society is re-imagined in a hierarchical postulation with *Chukwu*, *Ani*, *Ulu* and other gods/goddesses; ancestors; priests and priestesses as keeping watch on human activities. In this regard, Achebe's protagonists, unlike Shakespeare's, rarely express misgivings about the influence of the supernatural in their endeavours.

It is probably the concern with the supernatural as generally evil in Shakespeare that makes Achebe revisit, among other things, the portrayal of women in Shakespeare's drama. Within the context of the plays that I am studying, female characters, with the exception of Cordelia and Desdemona, are usually depicted either as evil, or as encouraging men to embrace destruction. In Achebe's art, there is the absence of witches and ghosts as female characters tend to be regarded within traditional Igbo society as custodians of decency and morality, and associated with goodness and procreation. Interestingly, unlike the case of Shakespeare's England with a preponderance of belief in witchery, traditional Igbo society instead portrays wizards as dangerous. A good example is Otakekpele, in *Arrow of God*, who is thought to render impotent the charms used by wrestlers. There is also the case of Okeke Onenyi, in this novel, who is suspected of having supernaturally tied the womb of one of Ezeulu's wives. Shakespeare's world of Lady Macbeth, Gertrude, Portia, Goneril and Regan is contrasted with Achebe's world of *Ani*, Chielo and Beatrice as both writers depict women negatively and favourably respectively. At the macrocosmic level, then, Shakespeare's depiction of the supernatural

tends to incite evil in his protagonists or reflect chaos whereas Achebe's is directed towards denouncing evil or chastising characters for their transgressions.

In terms of language, there are significant differences between Shakespeare and Achebe. While Shakespeare wrote essentially in verse, Achebe primarily employs lucid prose in his writings, the type that simulates Igbo idioms. In this regard, Achebe bequeaths to the English language a sense of liveliness. After all, he has consistently argued in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that the African writer should "aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different to say" (61). A glaring example of Achebe's refreshing use of language can be seen in this warning from Matefi to her son, Nwafo, in *Arrow of God*, on the need for cleanliness and obedience: "But let me see you come back from the stream with yesterday's body and we shall see whose madness is greater, yours or mine" (123). Unlike Achebe, Shakespeare concentrates on creating mental pictures in the audience through evocative language. For example, when Macbeth describes an imaginary dagger as he proceeds to murder Duncan, Shakespeare's intent is to let us emotionally connect with his hero in terms of anxiety:

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still!
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? (2.2.33-37)

The above example is not to deny the point that Achebe's prose can also be pictorial as seen when he graphically describes the wrestling match between Okonkwo and Amalinze, the Cat, in *Things Fall Apart*:

The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. (3)

In fact, while Shakespeare's dramatic art is intended to be appreciated by a live audience, Achebe engages his reader through descriptive prose that enables him or her to imagine the action. This linguistic experimentation eventually leads to Achebe's re-imagining of the history and culture of the Igbos in his novels.

It follows, then, that in spite of the differences pointed out in terms of ideology and craft between Shakespeare and Achebe, the common denominator between both artists is how the human mind can best be explored using belief systems and cultural practices in their respective societies. Their different artistic perspectives do not mask their concern with examining the human mind in relation to supernatural forces, a mind that seems to overlook constraints of time, place and culture. Now, we can justifiably proceed with comparing Shakespeare and Achebe.

Hypothesis

This study intends to compare how Shakespeare and Achebe used their audience's belief in the supernatural to develop complex characters, to reveal the inner workings of their states of mind and to heighten the tragic effect of their plays and novels respectively. Both writers also use the supernatural as a premonitory device and their characters see it as an instrument of poetic justice. The belief in the supernatural could be derived from magic and supernatural events or communal beliefs. The actions of the central characters in the respective plays and novels of Shakespeare and Achebe are

either motivated by drives such as vaulting ambition, or belief in supernatural forces, sensuality or lust, or both. My supposition is that the actions of the tragic heroes in these works are partly propelled by belief in supernatural agencies like prophecies, divinations, dreams and omens. Therefore, Shakespeare and Achebe use the supernatural to expose the internal dilemma of characters such as Macbeth, Hamlet, Caesar, Lear, Othello, Ezeulu, Okonkwo and Obi Okonkwo. In this light, I attempt to trace reasons for belief in the supernatural by some of these characters, examine how the supernatural is manifested, and evaluate its consequences. My intention is to demonstrate the extent to which the concept of the supernatural is the hallmark of the writings of Shakespeare and Achebe and what it reveals about cross-disciplinary symbolic habits of mind.

Moreover, granted that the supernatural in literature could be used “to work out results impossible to natural agencies, or it may be employed simply as a human belief, becoming a motive power and leading to results reached by purely natural means” (Doak 321), Shakespeare’s and Achebe’s use of this device invests their drama and novels respectively with something more than a sense of awe. Beyond the mesmerizing spell that the supernatural appears to cast on their works, Shakespeare and Achebe are primarily concerned with exploring the human mind. In other words, the numerous evocations of the supernatural serve to express fundamental traits of humankind like ambition, evil, or sensuality. For his part, Shakespeare also uses the supernatural to humanize and excuse the behaviour of his protagonists. He introduces prophecy, for example, in his plays not as an enthusiast of it, but as an observer of his own culture. In presenting supernatural features in his works, Shakespeare represents traditions, without necessarily crediting

them. He uses them “to delineate character by revealing a particular attitude of mind” (Wittreich 8).

This study limits the analysis of the supernatural to essentially the tragedies of Shakespeare and the novels of Achebe. Admitted that Shakespeare handles this theme in some of his comedies, history plays and poems, it is in his tragedies that the supernatural is poignant rather than mere comic device; therein, its various forms and influences can be appreciated. In Achebe, the supernatural is amply illustrated in the beliefs and actions of his characters and this affords me an opportunity to discuss it from a traditional Igbo background. Analyzing these two writers from two different cultures will enable me to discern similarities and differences in their handling of the supernatural.

As earlier stated, the supernatural is envisioned as an instrument of poetic justice in the tragedies and novels of Shakespeare and Achebe respectively. It is a medium of rewarding or punishing characters. For example, Macbeth is perennially haunted by his crimes, the ghost of Caesar haunts Brutus and Cassius, and Okonkwo is psychologically worried after killing Ikemefuna while Ezeulu loses his son and becomes demented, apparently due to the wrath of *Ulu*. Shakespeare and Achebe portray the supernatural as premonitory. The witches’ prophecy of Macbeth becoming king, the Soothsayer’s warning to Caesar, or Ezeulu’s vision while in detention are good examples of how the supernatural is used to foreshadow events.

My objective, in this study, is also to carry out a comparative analysis of the characters that are influenced by supernatural forces with the view to finding whether their actions follow a defined pattern or not. Here, an attempt will be made to answer such questions as what constitutes the difference between one superstitious character and

another, why the one succeeds in his ambition while the other fails and what finally becomes of them. In judging the tragic heroes in the light of the dominant precepts of their time, it is possible to assess the reasons behind their actions, and, of course, how Shakespeare and Achebe use the supernatural for dramatic effect.

Explaining the actions of the tragic heroes in terms of external forces alone means placing them at the mercy of fate. However, the characters are primarily responsible for their actions. After all, during Shakespeare's time, there were conflicting views on the relationship between the planetary forces and humans among the Elizabethans and Jacobean. Some Elizabethans posited that the planets were created only to do good, and their adverse effect was the result of human failings which shook the harmony of the universe. The dominant influence of the planets on humankind was seen as natural, an obedience to God's orders. It was, therefore, up to humankind to rise above these planetary forces since only beasts were thought to be powerless in the face of such external powers. As for Achebe, some people of Umuofia or Umuaro, particularly the new converts into Christianity, rejected outright the belief in the supernatural. According to them, humankind is responsible for his or her destiny; he or she could choose to make or mar it since it squarely lies on his or her shoulders. In other words, the true nature of Shakespearean and Achebean tragic heroes can be understood in the way that they grapple with external forces. Thus, Hamlet's phlegmatic nature can be discerned in his reactions to the ghost's message; Macbeth's ambition in his contemplation on the prophecy of the witches; Othello's superstition when he asks repeatedly for the missing handkerchief; Okonkwo's fearlessness when he kills the colonizers' messenger; and Ezeulu's pride through his apparent refusal to convene the yam festival.

Critical Historiography

Despite the time interval between Shakespeare and Achebe, both writers have continuously attracted much critical attention. Shakespeare, for one, enjoys a rich and diverse history of criticism. Several schools of criticism have developed around his tragedies, and range from practical or textual, historical, psychological, sociological to stylistic. Perhaps one of the foremost critical appraisals of Shakespeare's plays was done by A.C. Bradley who attempted to situate his works along the classical tradition of Aristotle. In *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bradley argues that Shakespeare's plays subscribe to the principle of causality, the plots move from exposition, complication, climax and catastrophe resulting in the fall of the heroes. The substance of a Shakespearean tragedy is often an exceptional story in which the male hero dies mainly because of a flaw in his character that is exploited by his antagonist(s). At the end of the play, there is an establishment of moral order.

Unlike Bradley's analysis of Shakespeare from an Aristotelian perspective, Muriel C. Bradbrook's *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* seeks to historicize the plays of Shakespeare within the rhetorical tradition. Besides stressing that the plays reflect certain Elizabethan theatrical conventions like natural locale or emotive gestures, the power of such theatre, according to Bradbrook, is more in evocative language rather than action. In the same vein of discussing Shakespeare's drama as representative of Elizabethan culture, Lily B. Campbell in *Shakespeare's Heroes: Slaves of Passion* stresses that Shakespearean tragedy is grounded in Elizabethan psychological concepts like the idea of a healthy body and mind as dependent on the good mixture of

such humours as melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler. As a result, Campbell attributes the downfall of Lear to wrath, Hamlet to procrastination, and Othello to sexual jealousy.

From a structural standpoint, Larry S. Champion's *Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective* identifies dramatic devices like tragic pointers, foils, asides or soliloquies which Shakespeare uses to sustain the audience's attention. Although these devices explain the misfortunes of the heroes, Champion adds, Shakespeare also intimates that the downfall of the protagonists is due to a combination of personal and external forces.

However, Ernest Jones insists on attributing the misfortunes of Shakespeare's heroes to their failings through Freudian analysis. Basing his study on the behaviour of Hamlet, Jones, in *Hamlet and Oedipus*, explains Hamlet's predicament as resulting from his sexual attraction to Gertrude. Hamlet's hatred of Claudius is accentuated because of the latter's marriage to Gertrude. Also, his delay to kill Claudius is, according to Jones, the result of the fact that "his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality" (100). Within the realm of psychology, Piotr Sadowski's *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* ascribes Hamlet's procrastination to his exostatic nature, which is initial enthusiasm that soon drains away. Those who manifest this trait indulge in acting in order to release their emotions. Macbeth, in the eyes of Sadowski, can be perceived as an endodynamic character, one who is preoccupied with honour, conscience and loyalty, as well as love for power.

In "Hamlet in Purgatory," Stephen Greenblatt revisits the Freudian interpretation of Hamlet's behaviour, arguing instead that Hamlet's actions do not spring from repressed sexual drives, but that Shakespeare uses Hamlet to question the cult of the dead. Through Hamlet's relationship with the ghost of his father, Shakespeare

interrogates the concept of purgatory by foregrounding issues of responsibility, guilt or conviction. Hamlet, like some Elizabethans, does not want to accept uncritically institutionalized opinions like the idea that the dead have knowledge about the living. In making Hamlet express his doubts about the ghost and purgatory, Greenblatt insists, Shakespeare seems aware that this would make his play intellectually sophisticated.

From a sociological perspective, Cumberland Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural* argues that Shakespeare's plays attest to the fact that Elizabethans and Jacobean "commonly attributed to the agency of the spirit-world effects for which a reasonable and intelligible explanation has now been found" (12). Clark adds that the supernaturalism in Shakespeare's day was manifested in the forms of witches, ghosts, fairies, demons, prophecy, divination, dreams and astrology (13). His study of the plays is insightful in pointing out that supernatural agencies are revealing about Shakespeare's dramaturgy; the playwright embeds some of the folklore and mythology of his day into his works for dramatic effect. Similarly, Herbert Courson's *Christian Ritual and the World of Shakespeare's Tragedies* avers that the average Elizabethan watched Shakespeare's plays from a religious viewpoint. Thus, the plays are perceived as symbolic representations of Christian theology. For instance, while Macbeth's downfall is seen as a re-enactment of the Fall of Man, Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius, when the latter is praying, articulates the importance of repentance before salvation.

However, Jonathan Dollimore, employing Marxist and materialist criticism in *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, challenges Christian and humanist readings of Shakespeare's plays. According to him, the plays, particularly *King Lear*, critique dominant ideologies of

power, inheritance and retribution. As a result, Edmund is seen as an advocate for change. Dollimore argues that Edmund's standoff with Gloucester and Lear is justified.

The supernatural in Shakespeare has also been analyzed from a moral perspective. In *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy*, Irving Ribner states that Shakespeare seeks to explore humankind's relationship with forces of evil in the world. His plays, like religion, attempt to answer cosmic problems of evil and injustice. In the same critical perspective, Bernard McElroy in *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* opines that *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *King Lear* represent the struggles of extraordinary individuals to reconcile a complex and an uncertain reality with basic assumptions about life. The emphasis is not the problems, but the solutions; not the result of the struggle, but the struggle itself.

Robert Ornstein in *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* emphasizes Shakespeare's central concern with morality. According to Ornstein, the tragedies, like their Jacobean counterparts, end with some restoration of order or decency. In fact, the plays give us a sense of relief at the purgation of evil. Although evil appears dominant in Shakespeare's plays, what he seems to suggest is that "whatever ultimate destiny awaits the race of man [sic], the life greatly lived has a timeless meaning" (276). Taken as a whole, the tragedies are couched in Christian or religious images in order to heighten their moral, spiritual and emotional impact. This view of Shakespearean tragedy is also underscored in Robert Brustein's *The Tainted Muse*, which states that Shakespeare's ghosts are entrusted with the mission of creating fear or instilling purpose in the minds of the living, whether Christian or pagan (211).

Compared with Shakespeare, critical readings on Achebe are relatively few, but given the fifty-two years of his literary career, scholarship on Achebe seems

overwhelming. In fact, he is one of the most anthologized African writers and one of the few African authors who have had much critical attention. Criticism on his writings has focused essentially on issues of history, his art and aesthetics, feminism and Igbo world view.

Early scholarship on Achebe attempted to historicize his works, reading them as Achebe's defence of black culture against the cultural arrogance of Europe. His novels are generally perceived as interrogating issues of (post)colonialism, oppression, moral decadence and political corruption. It is within this framework that Emmanuel Obiechina in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* views Achebe's novels as a reaction to the Western perception of Africa as "a place with primitive institutions, inhabited by primitive, irrational people on whom the civilizing will of Europe needed to be imposed" (15). In seeking to address aspects of African culture in his writing, Achebe is aware that the West has abused and insulted the African claim to humanity. As stated in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe sees his task as a writer in helping his society to "regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (44). In addition, Achebe stresses that Africans should be proud of themselves and their past which "was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (45).

Moreover, the idea of reading Achebe's novels as a way of dispelling some myths propagated about Africans by Eurocentric writers like Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad is foregrounded in G.D. Killam's *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*. According to Killam, Achebe's stories are expressions of the tensions, stresses and conflicts to which Africans were subjected by Europeans, and Achebe seeks to present Africans as respectable and

well organized, contrary to the European view of the continent as uncultured and disorderly. His art attempts to discount the colonial system and extol African values, and in doing so, colonial administrators and missionaries are ridiculed and portrayed as purveyors of anarchy and a sense of inferiority among blacks. As a result, Eustace Palmer argues in *An Introduction to the African Novel* that Achebe's Umuofia society in *Things Fall Apart* is governed by a system of customs and traditions; its legal, educational, religious and hierarchical systems are elaborate and impressive (49). Historicizing the novels of Achebe, Gerald Moore, in "Chinua Achebe: A Retrospective," affirms that Achebe demonstrates not only to his foreign readers, but also to Africans that "traditional cultures had a depth and complexity totally ignored hitherto in all the official literature" (29). In *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*, Oladele Taiwo asserts that Achebe's novels realistically present many aspects of Igbo culture such as the feast of the New Yam, wrestling contests, the display of the *egwugwu* on festive occasions and the religious beliefs of his people.

Achebe's dignified presentation of his culture in novels has also attracted appraisals of his aesthetics. Achebe's use of proverbs, Pidgin and even his appropriation of the English language in describing his world view have won critical acclaim. Bernth Lindfors, in "The Palm-Oil with Which Words are Eaten," postulates that Achebe's use of English is refreshing in the way that he simulates Igbo idioms. In fact, according to Lindfors, Achebe's proverbs can serve "as keys to an understanding of his novels because he uses them not merely to add touches of local color but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization" (50).

The African writer is often seen as a gadfly of society, writing not simply to please, but fundamentally to educate and criticise malpractices in society. In this respect, Kolawole Ogungbesan's "Politics and the African Writer" reads Achebe's novels as revolutionary and socially transforming. Consequently, *A Man of the People* is perceived as a representation of the corruption that has engulfed Nigeria. Chief Nanga is, therefore, symbolic of the Nigerian politician who is corrupt and driven by graft and greed.

Female characters in the novels of Achebe have also been analyzed with the view of asserting that, although most African societies are patriarchal, the women in Achebe's fiction enjoy considerable respect and fulfil important roles in society. In this regard, Grace Malgwi, in "The Changing Faces of the African Woman: A Look at Achebe's Novels," submits that the African woman ensures peace, love and hope. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Ezinma breaks her visit to her in-laws' family in order to take care of Okonkwo, and a week of peace is observed in honour of the earth goddess. When Okonkwo is exiled from Umuofia, he seeks refuge in his mother's village. Beatrice, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, is determined to work towards her career rather than being dependent on a man.

Another important trend in the scholarship on Achebe is sociological criticism. In other words, how his novels can be seen as cultural representations of Igbos and that knowledge of Achebe's society is crucial in understanding the behaviour of his characters. Kalu Ogbaa in *Gods, Oracles and Divinations* posits that, in Achebe's fiction, human fate is a combination of personal contribution with that of supernatural forces. Put differently, the supernatural and character are complementary; which of them overshadows the other depends on how the latter conditions the former. On his part,

Umelo Ojinmah in *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives* argues that although the Igbo society plays a role in the downfall of Okonkwo, through its reverence of status and power, his failure is largely his responsibility. Umelo states that even though Achebe portrays a society that is greatly influenced by supernatural forces, he does not persuade the reader to accept or refute it. Instead, he offers him various possibilities of arriving at his own conclusion himself. Put simply, Achebe, like Shakespeare, is a careful observer of issues, without necessarily taking sides.

Appreciating Achebe's preoccupation with the supernatural, Odirin Omiege argues that Achebe envisions this feature as part of the cosmos of his society. The beliefs and practices of traditional Igbos are free from prejudice against Christianity and these people are also open-minded. In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, the offended masked spirits that converse with Mr. Smith do not destroy his church, but appeal to him to show respect to cultural practices while he worships his God. Thus, Omiege insists that Achebe explores beliefs and practices of traditional Igbos in order that Europeans can better understand and refrain from prejudice and ignorance about a way of life which may be different from theirs (205). Discussing the theme of the supernatural, Christophe Tshikala Kambaji's *Chinua Achebe: A Novelist and a Portraitist of his Society* underscores the inextricable link between traditional Igbo individuals and their gods/goddesses. After all, the Umuofia society is fraught with a galaxy of gods/goddesses such as *Chukwu*, the great god; *Ani*, the earth goddess; *Ifejioku*, god of yams; *Amadiora*, god of the sky and thunderbolt; and a motley of other gods/goddesses. Objects are used to represent gods such as the case of a piece of wood that stands for *Chukwu*. Most of these gods and goddesses are constantly propitiated.

Explaining Okonkwo's behaviour against the backdrop of his society, Damian U. Opata in his essay, "Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom," justifies Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna on grounds that the protagonist did not have a choice. He questions the view held by many critics that Okonkwo's subsequent misfortunes emanate from his offence against the earth goddess because of his killing of this lad. According to Opata, in blaming Okonkwo over this incident, we are using conventional wisdom on supernatural issues.

Granted that critics have portrayed Shakespeare's tragedies and Achebe's novels as reflections of Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo world views; admitted that the downfall of some of the tragic heroes has been ascribed to personal and external forces; considering the growing readership of Shakespeare and Achebe partly because of the fascinating characters depicted in their works, some of whom have become household words; I am interested in exploring how these authors use supernatural devices to create memorable characters. Moreover, it seems that the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's and Achebe's use of supernatural devices in articulating character, as a foreshadowing literary device, and as a moral instrument, have not been sufficiently appreciated. Hence, the need for this present investigation which will be informed by some of the critical approaches and scholarship on Shakespeare and Achebe with the objective of indicating how the supernatural feeds the imaginative universe of these writers.

To a certain extent, my study of the supernatural in Shakespeare and Achebe shall be syncretic in approach, embracing sociological, historical and psychological perspectives. In doing so, I shall articulate how supernatural devices enable me to probe

the minds of the protagonists of Shakespeare and Achebe, given that these characters are complex and intriguing to critics. It would seem that while it may be plausible to attribute the downfall of Shakespeare's tragic heroes to individual failings, relying only on this criterion as a way of explaining the misfortune of Achebe's tragic heroes cannot be critically sustained. It appears that the fate of Achebe's characters is irrevocably tied to societal or external factors, which seem to impinge on the minds of the characters willy-nilly. Put differently, while Macbeth's failure can be attributed to his vaulting ambition, with the witches as metaphorical representation of his desire for power, it is debatable whether the explosion of Okonkwo's gun at Ezeudu's funeral, for example, is the result of his carelessness, or revenge from the earth goddess for his killing of Ikemefuna. Or can it be postulated that this goddess is bent on punishing Ezeudu for attempting to stand in the way of justice when he persuades Okonkwo to refrain from killing Ikemefuna? Even then, why does Okonkwo's gun explode and result in his banishment given that, in killing Ikemefuna, he is simply responding to the request of the Oracle?

Moreover, whereas Caesar's assassination can be traced to his pride and refusal to heed the respective warnings of his wife and the soothsayer, among other signs, it is difficult to ascribe Ezeulu's downfall only to his premeditated revenge on Umuaro because there is evidence that, in refusing to eat the remaining yams, Ezeulu is apparently abiding by the will of *Ulu*. In which case, Ezeulu's downfall and the break down of his authority may indicate the anger of *Ulu* against Umuaro for abandoning their priest and hankering after Christianity and the ways of the white male colonizers. Furthermore, some of Achebe's characters like Ezeulu, Okonkwo (as *egwugwu*) and Chielo are mortals and spirits at the same time. This gives them a larger than life personality and makes it

challenging at times to separate their real selves from their spiritual counterparts, or to determine whether some of their actions are their responsibilities or are thrust on them by superhuman forces.

Methodology

The topic “William Shakespeare and Chinua Achebe: A Study of Character and the Supernatural” will be tackled essentially by textual analysis with a focus on identifying evidence of the supernatural such as dreams, prophecies, signs, divinations, or omens. Concomitantly, I intend to analyze these supernatural features as to how they impact character, how they could be premonitory, and how they ensure morality, or poetic justice. Here, I shall attempt to answer such questions as: how do the characters respond to supernatural forces, and what role do external powers play in revealing the inner minds of the characters?

I shall embrace a pluralist approach in my study of the supernatural in Shakespeare and Achebe because of the complexity of the human mind as it reacts to it. Nonetheless, I may have to anchor my analysis first on New Historicism before fleshing it out to other critical perspectives such as the psychological or semiotic. Begun by the American critic, Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism generally refers to a renewed interest, initially among American critics in the early 1980s, in explaining literary works as historical and political documents. Leaning towards Feminism and Marxism, this approach takes a critical view of the past, and assesses the consumption and status of literary productions. Fundamental to New Historicism is the admission that the enquiry being done may not be objective, but the issue of the past is dictated by the concern with

the present. In other words, New Historicism, unlike deconstruction which engages in philosophical abstraction and uncertainty, perceives literature as a cultural artefact. This is precisely because art is not created in a vacuum; it is not simply the creation of an individual, but that individual is fixed in time and space, responding to a community of which he constitutes an important element.

Taken as a whole, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism take a holistic view of criticism by historicizing literature, or considering literary texts as part of a historical culture. Such a rethinking of history brings fluidity to literature by breaking down the artificial boundaries separating both. This interplay between history and literature makes both complement each other as each sheds light on the other. However, I find controversial the argument by New Historicists that literary texts have shaped historical events. Persuasive as this statement may appear, the submission that texts may make us rethink about history and culture seems more compelling.

I am concerned with analyzing Shakespeare and Achebe from both synchronic and diachronic historicism. In this case, not only do their works recreate social, political, religious and cultural aspects of their societies, but also both authors reinterpret some of these issues in the light of their artistic visions. Put differently, I intend to study how Shakespeare and Achebe tap into the supernatural representations of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo cultures to articulate aspects of human behaviour. In this endeavour, I shall pay attention to the politics, culture and history of the societies evoked by Shakespeare and Achebe. Rather than imposing Western value judgement on Achebe's protagonists, I intend to examine them within traditional Igbo world view. At the same time, Shakespeare's tragic heroes shall be analyzed taking into consideration the

belief system of the Elizabethans and Jacobean. Through this representative critical approach, I arrive at some kind of hybridism, of how cultures intersect in better representing the human mind as it is assailed by external forces in the forms of prophecy, divination, dreams and others.

As earlier mentioned, I resort to psychological and sociological criticism to explain certain uncanny issues. This is important because these critical perspectives shed light on certain supernatural or mysterious happenings in the works. For instance, the ghost-scenes in the tragedies can best be understood by taking recourse to the Elizabethan and Jacobean philosophical and theological speculations concerning spirits and the import of their appearance. In fact, the appearance of the ghost to the Elizabethans was often thought to result from some disturbance to the natural order; its appearance, therefore, meant that something was wrong and had to be set right. In the same vein, the actions of Okonkwo, Ezeulu and Obi Okonkwo can best be appreciated through knowledge of Igbo pantheon and ethos. After all, the literary or aesthetic evaluation of Achebe cannot be divorced from “the climate of reflection and discourse arising out of the comprehensive context of an African experience” (Irele xviii).

The study of the supernatural in the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of Achebe will be analyzed under five chapters. Chapter One sees the supernatural as recurrent in most societies. Some useful background information relating to the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo world views are equally outlined. The differences between Shakespeare and Achebe in terms of genre, world view and artistic perspective are also articulated in this chapter. A review of existing scholarship on the

supernatural, the objectives of this study and the methodology to pursue in this endeavour constitute the bulk of Chapter One.

Chapter Two attempts a definition of the supernatural and views it as the cornerstone of not only the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo societies or of Christianity and traditional religion, but also of contemporary human society. There are ample illustrations of how it is manifested in different cultures. In Chapter Three, I explore the impact of the supernatural on Shakespeare's tragic heroes, as well as how it functions as a premonitory device and an instrument of poetic justice. I also attempt to answer the following questions: Is Macbeth's vaulting ambition innate or the making of the witches? Why does Hamlet procrastinate before killing Claudius? In fact, at times, events in the plays and the actions of some characters can be predicted by some of the characters from certain unnatural occurrences. For example, Macbeth's accession to the Scottish throne and Caesar's assassination are good examples of prolepsis through the supernatural.

The relationship between character and the supernatural in Achebe's novels is the subject of Chapter Four. Do the actions of the tragic heroes spring from within themselves, or are they provoked by forces beyond their control? Put differently, how do the characters and we, as readers, explain, for example, Okonkwo's series of misfortunes and Ezeulu's loss of authority? Is Okonkwo's tragedy due to his impulsive attitude or punishment from supernatural forces? Or can Ezeulu's downfall be attributed to his vengeful attitude, or is he simply the victim of an angry god?

The tragedies of Shakespeare and the novels of Achebe are examined from a comparative viewpoint in Chapter Five. An attempt is made to show how both writers

metaphorically use the cultural beliefs and practices of Elizabethans, Jacobean and traditional Igbos to explore the human mind through representative tragic heroes. This chapter synthesizes and ties up the various arguments in the discussion. It also highlights the contribution of this study to the existing body of scholarship in relation to Shakespearean tragedy and Achebean novels with regard to their preoccupation with the supernatural as a way of studying human nature.

CHAPTER TWO

The Term Supernatural

In this chapter, I intend to theorize the supernatural, indicating its manifestations and how, at various historical times, it has been perceived either as universal, evolutionary, diffusionary or symbolic. I shall analyze how the concept of the supernatural has been appreciated across cultures (mainly Western and African) and across history. It would seem that the supernatural has continuously intrigued humankind, generating diverse interpretations of it—mythical, spiritual, religious and the irrational.

From time immemorial, humankind has always been preoccupied with the supernatural. Events in human life, positive and negative, have often been traced by some people to mysterious forces in order to make sense of the events. As a result, daily occurrences have hardly been seen as isolated happenings void of a supernatural coloration. Beliefs in supernatural action and the human ability, through sacrifice, prayer, rite and spell to influence it, are rooted in human psychology. However, the forms “they take, the contexts in which they are invoked, are related to the rest of the cultural pattern and to the social system” (Forde xiii). In other words, the belief in the supernatural appears impulsive in some humans and could manifest itself in several ways though it could remain latent. For those who believe in the supernatural, it only needs but an incitement from external forces for them to expose their inner minds. Although belief in the supernatural is persistently attacked by Western rationalism, it seems still quite

popular and also appears to be embedded in both Christian and traditional religions. In fact, in oral traditions, as portrayed in some of Achebe's fiction or even Shakespeare's tragedies, the belief in the supernatural is constantly interrogated and some forms of it, like divination, seem to affect the actions of their protagonists.

It has been argued by scholars such as David Hume in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and Herbert Spencer in *Elements of Sociology* that, because of their lack of sophistication, primitive beings could hardly conceive of a monotheistic religion or an almighty God. Their sense of awe or surprise at the happenings around their environment was generally expressed in the form of mythology. To this end, Hume uses as examples divine creatures like Bacchus or Hercules to indicate what he calls the overwhelming sense of irrationality that ruled the primitive mind. The Greek myths, for example, did not represent one Almighty God, but rather made the different gods and goddesses more human, where even Zeus/Jupiter was challenged by the other gods and goddesses. In *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, Hume posits that superstition is a product of human creation, as something subject to "certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholy disposition, or from the concurrence of all these circumstances" (144). He ridicules the superstitious mind, but interestingly, he argues that superstition is embedded in all religions and that the greater the influence of superstition in theology, the more the priest is respected (147-48), a relationship which is used by religious organizations like the Roman Catholic Church to undergird its theology.

In fact, every religious system appears to incorporate aspects of the supernatural in its doctrine, including Christianity, which insists on the immaculate conception of Mary and the resultant birth of Christ, or the symbolic ritual of baptism which is associated by Christians with the cleansing of sin. As Angulu Onwuejeogwu aptly qualifies it, be it in a Christian or non-Christian setting, anything that is conceived beyond natural existence can be referred to as “super nature” or supernatural (222). This is apparently true because these happenings challenge our rational understanding of things, bordering at times on the mysterious and the incomprehensible. Emile Durkheim appears to synchronize Christian and traditional perceptions of life in terms of their religious practices (prayers, purifications, sacrifices, dances and songs), which he explains as a combination of ideas that express the world (430).

In *The Golden Bough*, James George Frazer articulates a naturalist argument that, because of the fact that ancient gods and goddesses were once perceived as diviners, humankind tended to pay homage to ancient divinities. This is particularly the case of Greek, Roman and Egyptian mythologies that used deities to represent several aspects and traits of physical and human nature. In fact, Frazer’s study of several cultures and mythologies in the world was partly to prove his thesis that humankind appears to be governed by elementary ideas which seek to underscore the argument that, given a particular circumstance or situation, humankind would most likely react in a predictable manner. Throughout his study, Frazer foregrounds the point that the birth of religion could be attributed to “primitive” man [sic], to his [sic] use of magical rites or rituals to explain things.

Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss concludes in *Tristes Tropiques* that human beings manifest similar sentiments and attitudes, or what can be called drives, without regard to differentiation in terms of the so-called savage or civilized person. This is particularly so because socio-cultural factors tend to impinge on human behaviour. According to Lévi-Strauss, it seems that humankind lives in two worlds, one which he or she may understand in action, and the other only in thought (396). Both these worlds can be related to the physical and the spiritual.

On his part, Richard Hooker (1554-1600) sees the supernatural as somehow subsumed in the divine. To this end, he, like other English Protestants, saw in the defeat of the Spanish armada, in 1558, by the British navy the handwork of divine providence in the presence of fortuitous winds in favour of the English. From a different perspective, Hooker posits that all created things in the universe, both animate and inanimate, are governed in their behaviour by rational laws of the universe, laws created by God. Although there may be defects in some of these laws, Hooker comments, these laws generally shape thoughts and actions. Accordingly, Hooker believes that those people who deviate from the laws of society risk divine punishment, in various ways, for their disobedience. His overarching argument is that human beings, in general, strive for good behaviour as represented in the perfection of God. However, in the quest for an ideal state, humans are occasionally tempted by sin that enables them to stray from the righteous path.

The above group of scholars—Hume, Spencer, Frazer and Lévi-Strauss—can be loosely described as evolutionists. In other words, these philosophers identify similarities

in human cultures as opposed to those scholars who explain, according to Isidore Okpewho in *Myth in Africa*, that “cultural similarities could only be the result of historical contact and geographical contiguity between peoples” (15). After all, Okpewho intimates, there is burgeoning interest on the part of scholars to study societies in the moment of socio-cultural change, triggered by the twin factors of colonialism and independence, and nurtured by the influence of religion (25), which increasingly embraces supernatural practices.

The supernatural can be defined as something that exists beyond nature, or not subject to explanation according to scientific and natural laws; something that is neither physical nor material. It can be mysterious, imaginary or capable of generating unreasoning. The protagonists of Shakespeare’s and Achebe’s works appear to be greatly influenced by cultural or societal beliefs, which are assumptions or convictions taken as truth by an individual or a group. Beliefs play on psychology. While the protagonists of Achebe appear to be greatly affected by socio-cultural factors, there was great questioning of the different superstitions held in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Shakespeare was not working with a monolithic superstitious culture. He used the variety of beliefs on witchery, astrology and demonology that different people held at the time to question them, as well as to examine how such beliefs affect human behaviour. Achebe’s traditional Igbo society, which is recreated in his novels, emphasizes the importance of spirit beings and the belief in interactions between the living and the living dead.

Like Achebe’s novels, Shakespeare’s tragedies sometimes give the impression of divine providence, an omnipotent power that controls the universe although humankind is

still free to choose good or evil. It is an omnipotent power whose operations appear to be clouded in mystery as evidenced in the various forms of the supernatural in the works of both writers.

As a manifestation of the supernatural, religion, in both the traditional African and Christian sense, was thought by some communities to ensure good health, security and prosperity as communities connect with it spiritually. Scholars such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *On Religion* qualified religion as the opium of the people in the sense that it kept the proletariat from rebelling against their oppressors (206). This is an atheistic position that argues that belief in the supernatural actually works against prosperity, security and good health. Religion could be in the forms of a temple, church, rite or ritual depending on the social and cultural upbringing of an individual. Be it in a rural or an urban setting, African or European milieu, some communities believe that spiritual beings inhabit the universe and enjoy considerable power over human beings. These supernatural beings are thought to be capable of causing personal and emotional problems, but humans must negotiate or propitiate them in order to have beneficial results. Based on this assumption, African traditional religions seek to maintain their purity from any Western influence although Western Christianity engages in winning new converts from traditional African societies.

In the words of Toyin Falola in *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*, conversion to any religion is facilitated by the belief that it provides “solutions to problems in interpersonal and community relations; and that if expectations are unfulfilled after many sessions of prayer to a particular god [sic], one can change religion, sect, or allegiance to

a religious leader” (31). In a sense, there appears a commingling of religious beliefs when Christian converts integrate Christian and traditional beliefs, resulting in new supernatural ideas or duality of thought as demonstrated in some of the characters in Achebe’s fiction. Thus, within Igboland, for example, people selectively incorporate into their belief system aspects of traditional or Christian religions that can meaningfully transform their lives. Whatever type of religion that a person pursues, it would appear that many people are unanimous on the fact that religions remain the source of morality and that members should be devout and immensely spiritual (Falola 32).

However, new religious movements within Christianity in Igboland, for example, like Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church and several variants of Pentecostal churches, oppose any combination of Christian and indigenous beliefs. Paradoxically, witchcraft appears to be inherited in Christian theology in that, in attempting to cast out demonic forces, it sometimes manifests extensive borrowing from native culture (Falola 47). These new churches offer a celebrative religion, integrating symbols, dance and music in religious worship. Therefore, the belief in supernatural events such as prophecy, spirit possession and faith healing by members of these churches, blurs the line between Christianity and traditional African religions, and indicates that both forms of worship appear to be anchored in the supernatural. In this regard, the words of Paul Verdzev (1931-2010), the late Arch-Bishop of Bamenda, are telling:

Divination, the use of charms, and other superstitious practices are now rampant among many Christians. Many Christians are now leading what we must call a double life. They go to church, receive the sacraments, and afterwards go to diviners to seek solutions concerning illness, deaths, marriage problems, thefts, business problems, employment, promotion in their work, and so forth. One catholic woman openly said that whenever

she has a serious problem, she does three things in order to be sure of success: she offers a Mass, goes to consult a Marabout, and then goes to consult a traditional diviner or “medicine-man.” For her, the Mass is something in the same category as divination, dreams, omens and “medicine.” (2)

The Bible itself acknowledges the point that Christians indulge in supernatural practices. In Ezekiel 13:18-21, the story is told of how women used handkerchiefs to trap the souls of men and then kill them. Deuteronomy 15:10 and 2 Kings 17:17 denounce the practice of augury and divination by the Israelites. Thus, it is noticed that Christianity and traditional African religions can be said to nourish each other as members of these religions increasingly realize the presence of occultist practices in their forms of worship. Put differently, the growth of independent churches in Africa has reshaped mainstream Christianity, injecting in it “the dynamic aspects of the traditional religion, the social mannerisms and world-view as well as the practical aspects of the gospels into their religious movements” (Ndeba 50). It seems, then, plausible to draw a correlation between witchcraft and religion. In this regard, Bronislaw Malinowski intimates that belief in either magic or religion is “closely associated with the deepest desires of man [sic], with his [sic] fears and hopes, with his [sic] passions and sentiments” (82).

While to some people, individuals who take part in communal activities like festivals or rituals can be considered pagan and the activities perceived as false belief in magic, other people, particularly those who embrace these practices, would think of them as genuine. According to those initiated in the cult of some of these traditional festivities, their practices are in the same tradition with a Christian sermon or service. As a result, traditional African religious practitioners and Christians can be said to be involved in

supernatural activities at different times, or in one way or the other. Whether this assertion is true or not is simply a question of perspective. For instance, Calvin Rieber argues that there are significant similarities between the Old Testament and African social life on issues such as polygamy. In his words, the African attitude towards “the world in its reality, unity, and goodness is much more Hebraic than Greek” (271). For the purpose of this study, all interactions between humankind and forces supposedly beyond the human realm are considered manifestations of the supernatural. This can be in the forms of dreams, divination or occultism, aspects which both Shakespeare and Achebe use as metaphors in depicting their protagonists.

It seems that most religions encompass beliefs that show the relationship between God and the universe, the physical and spiritual worlds, and seen and unseen forces. In this regard, the Western Supreme God can be said to fulfil the same function as *Chukwu*, his namesake in Igbo traditional religion. The conversation between Mr. Brown and Akunna, in *Things Fall Apart*, is illustrative of the resemblance between Christianity and traditional Igbo religion. Akunna affirms that the supreme God or *Chukwu* created the world and that “He appoints the smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person” (143). Akunna’s argument is inscribed within the understanding that God cannot directly be approached by human beings and that contact between Him and the living could be facilitated by intermediaries like traditional priests or priestesses, seers, prophets, diviners or marabouts. This postulation appears to reflect Placide Tempels’ argument that the ontology of traditional Africans remains attached to the ancient and vital faith that life emanates from God and that invocations used in magical practices are

primarily addressed to God in order that they can be more efficacious (175-77). Even though Tempels admits that the African philosophy of life should be respected by Westerners and it could meaningfully contribute to the development of the human race, he manifests his bias for Christianity against traditional African spiritual values in his submission that the Bantu or African can only fully realize his or her yearnings and deepest aspirations when he or she embraces Christianity.

On their part, some Igbos have attempted to indigenize Christianity, accepting some values of the Christian religion alongside their traditional beliefs. Moses Unachukwu, in *Arrow of God*, is a good example of the fusion of practices from both religions when he advocates for people to defy *Ulu* by bringing their yams to church while also requesting Christian converts to refrain from hurting the royal python, seen within Igbo traditional religion as a symbol of fertility. Moreover, just as traditional priests/priestesses and diviners are used to exorcise evil in a traditional African society, Christian missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* rescue babies abandoned in the evil forest and integrate societal outcasts within their fold. In social and cultural life, both Christianity and traditional African religions can be said to be united in their fight against evil and in the healing of diseased minds through intense spirituality.

Achebe's portrayal of Christianity in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* indicates its supernatural dimension. As earlier stated, the ability of Christian missionaries to rescue societal outcasts thrown into the dreaded evil forest makes for suspicion that this religion is imbued with supernatural might that protects it against the baneful forces, believed by some traditional Igbos to inhabit this locale. Moreover, the

church's admission of *osus* into its fold makes some people in Igboland seek protection in this religion against the dreadful consequences believed to be connected with associating with these outcasts. In *Arrow of God*, the encouragement given by missionaries to Umuaro natives to defy *Ulu*, a revered god, by harvesting yams and bringing them to church intimates that Christianity presents itself as a supernatural counterpoise to traditional Igbo religion. Contrary to the general expectation in Umuaro that those who disobey *Ulu* would be punished by this god, apparently nothing harmful happens to those who join the Christian church, an indication of the rivalry for dominance between Christianity and traditional Igbo religion.

Early Western Embodiments of the Supernatural

As early as the ancient Greeks and Romans, and early modern Europe, representations of the supernatural were depicted in religions, augury, rituals, the conception of the universe, astrology, witchcraft and the composition of the human body. Throughout history, these aspects appear to represent different embodiments of the supernatural in the West.

The French philosopher, Auguste Comte, remarked that

in the first stage [of thought] man [sic] attributes all universal phenomena to supernatural forces—a god [sic] or a multiplicity of anthropomorphic gods [sic]—which represent to him [sic] the summation of power, wisdom, and authority. (Horton and Hopper 412)

In this connection, humankind has always been influenced by belief in supernatural agencies; disbelief in the supernatural occurs only when, according to Rod W. Horton

and Vincent F. Hopper, humans discard the idea of gods [sic] in human form and consider the universe as being moderated by natural laws, or by undefined natural forces. Although Western science and rationalism have taught humankind that mysteries, superstitions and even certain assumptions should no longer be taken seriously because human knowledge of the universe seems to be more precise, demonstrable, and predictable (412), the inability of science, for instance, to definitively explain certain happenings like the afterworld and the creation of the universe has ignited belief in the supernatural.

Among the ancient Greeks, for example, the supernatural occupied a privileged position. Their gods and goddesses represented several aspects of life. Dionysus, for example, was connected to the idea of fertility. As a result, the Cretan-Mycenean deities were seen as the most important because they symbolized propagation, which was also seen as a female attribute. In fact, the Greek conception of creation is fraught not only with superstition to some people nowadays, but also with awe. The Greeks believed that the universe originated from darkness and chaos. Again, the pre-world was conceived as a place of negatives from which came *Nox* (Night) and *Erebus*, the place of death. These two later gave birth to *Eros* (Love), which then had as children *Aether* (Light) and *Hemera* (Day), followed by *Gaea* (Mother Earth) and *Duranos* (Father Heaven). All of these gods and goddesses were believed to reside on Mount Olympus, a place that neither experienced snow nor rain. In this Edenic place, they feasted on nectar, made merry, joked, loved, and even quarrelled like human beings (Horton and Hopper 50-54).

Like Greeks, Romans were also quite superstitious and had Roman names to fit the Greek gods and goddesses. Among other beliefs, Romans maintained that animals were spirits of their dead ancestors. As a result, the actions and physical attributes of certain animals were considered signs of protection and forewarnings. Flights of eagles and vultures, the sounds produced by ravens, owls and crows were seen as highly suggestive. Animals were slaughtered as sacrifices to the deities. Any form of abnormality, imperfection or deformity in the position, shape or colour of the entrails of the sacrificed animals were scrutinized by a *haruspex*, a diviner who would then make predictions on the future in the light of his analysis (Scheid 266).

Moreover, Romans performed prayers at several ritual performances like birth, death, festival, inauguration and battle in the hope of invoking deities to ensure success in any endeavour. In times of serious adversities, the Roman senate decreed public days of prayer, a time when men, women and children, led by priests or priestesses, moved from one temple to another in the city of Rome supplicating for divine intervention. The city itself had several roadside shrines and statues before which people offered prayers or thanksgiving for any positive thing that happened within Rome (Hahn 238).

In fact, in times of war, Roman commanders offered special prayers to Roman gods and goddesses with regard to the successful outcome of a military venture. In another perspective, some Roman military leaders monitored the behaviour of what was considered special chickens, guarded jealously by a diviner, who was entrusted with the task of examining them and reading meaning thereof. If the chickens ate vigorously and dropped food from their beaks on the morning of a battle, all would go well in combat.

Similarly, if the chickens did not eat, this was seen as signalling disaster. At times, Roman military generals prayed to the patron deities of cities under military attack, requesting these to facilitate victory on their behalf. The significance of Roman prayers lay in the fact that they encapsulated the fears of most Romans about the future, as well as the belief or hope “in the power of supernatural beings to affect that condition” (Hahn 247).

Like the Romans, the Renaissance being was generally superstitious. The concept of the Chain of Being, which was conceptualized by the quattrocento Neoplatonists of Italy, was still upheld in the 16th century, although scientists like Galileo, through the telescope, disproved the concept of a Ptolemaic universe. According to the Chain of Being, the world was conceived of, by philosophers and scientists, in the form of a chain that connected humans with God. It was also held that all created things were closely linked and arranged in a uniform pattern to reflect a particular hierarchy that was thought of in the semblance of a chain, hence the appellation the Great Chain of Being. According to E.M.W. Tillyard in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, there were six main links or classes in the chain of creation. At the top of this ladder was found God, the source of everything. Beneath him was the class of angels who were divided into other groups, namely, Seraphs, Cherubs, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels. In this wise, the highest form of an angel was a Seraph and the lowest was a real angel. The third class comprised humans, where the Emperor or King lorded over his subjects. The fourth class was made up of animals while the fifth class grouped flowers and plants, all of which constituted the Vegetative class.

At the bottom of the chain was found the inanimate class that embodied things which had mere existence, without life and sensitivity. Here, could be found rocks, minerals, liquids and metals.

Indeed, the concept of the Chain of Being was accepted by many educated people, although the rise of Bacon's new science in the 16th and 17th centuries was in reaction against this philosophy. Bacon's scientific method was designed to investigate fundamental premises through inductive inference. It implied a return to source material in order to draw conclusions. In this regard, Bacon insisted on observation as fundamental to constructing scientific theory. He argued that what the sciences required was "a form of induction which takes experience apart and analyses it, and forms necessary conclusions on the basis of appropriate exclusions and rejections" (17). According to Arthur O. Lovejoy, the Chain of Being, as regards its continuity and completeness, was "a perfect example of an absolutely rigid and static scheme of things" (242) in that it represented more the Middle Ages than the Renaissance, the "dark ages" when the Catholic Church controlled all cultural beliefs. Commenting on this metaphor of the Chain of Being, Tillyard says that it

served to express the unimaginable plenitude of God's creation, its unflinching order, and its ultimate unity. The chain stretched from the foot of God's throne to the meanest of inanimate objects. Every speck of creation was a link in the chain, and every link except those at the two extremities was simultaneously bigger and smaller than another: there could be no gap. (25-26)

The Elizabethans, Tillyard continues, looked at the world at this time as being in a special order, kept rigorously by God. In the human world, the King or ruler was superior to all other subjects. This hierarchy was understood and accepted by the common people. It

was generally believed that if one of the links in the Great Chain were destroyed, then the system was destined to fail. This made the King central on earth and he was seen as the direct representative of God on earth and answerable only to God alone, although the Catholic Church placed the Pope above the King. Earlier on, precisely before the reign of Elizabeth, Henry VIII had attempted to remove the Pope from the Chain. Through the common laws of 1529 and the first Act of Supremacy (1534), Henry curbed pluralism and absenteeism on the part of clerics, as well as established his control over the English church. He also made himself head of the English church in place of the pope and introduced parliamentary legislation on ecclesiastical matters. Henry exerted considerable influence on the church by bestowing the title of vicar-general on Thomas Cromwell to run church affairs on the King's behalf (Rex 56). The behaviour of the King reflects the appropriation of the spiritual metaphor for a political propaganda.

Indeed, some critics like James Daly argue that the ideology of divine right did not confer absolutism on kings, but rather placed them within the spectrum of the Great Chain of Being, advising leaders to be humanists in their rule. In this regard, Hooker envisions divine authority as natural, rational and necessary for the fulfilment of basic human needs. However, the King is also subject to the law, which was defined as natural and divine. According to Harold Nicolson, emperors and kings felt obliged to strengthen their claims to supremacy or independence by invoking the idea of the supernatural as enshrined in kingship (189).

In a display of Elizabethan concern with order, there have been speculations about the involvement of Shakespeare with threats of rebellion in Elizabeth's reign, fuelled by

controversy over the revision of *Richard II*. In this regard, David M. Bergeron discounts the idea that Shakespeare had to revise his play in order to avoid staging the deposition scene before Elizabeth. According to Bergeron, the charge of political censorship of the play is unfounded, without credible evidence (90). On his part, Kristian Smidt in *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays* avers that *Richard II* underwent various phases of conception and it is possible that Shakespeare may have only added the deposition scene at a date after Elizabeth watched a performance of the play, although this suggestion is questionable on grounds that the play followed the Tudor myth behind the histories commissioned by Elizabeth at the time. These speculations seem to underscore the political appropriation of divine laws by monarchs to maintain power.

Manifestations of disorder during Elizabethan England were associated with charges of heresy and witchcraft that were brought about against the Catholic Church during the English reformation. For example, the Church of England spoke against exorcism primarily because it was linked to Catholicism and radical Puritanism. Furthermore, following the Oath of Supremacy of 1559, the queen was recognized as the head of spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs in England. Thus, English subjects were enjoined to be grateful to her for delivering them from what was considered papal tyranny.

Elizabeth's successor, James I, also took up the ideas of respect for the monarchy and its sovereignty over everybody, including the church. As a result, in *The Political Works of James I*, he addressed the British parliament in 1609 thus:

Kings are iustly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power vpon earth: For if you wil consider the

Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King. God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or vnmake at his pleasure, to giue life, or send death, to iudge all and to be iudged nor accomptable to none: To raise low things, and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soule and body due. And the like power haue Kings. (307-8)

The above speech shows James' concern with asserting his authority within his kingdom, reminding his subjects of the sanctity of the monarch. Moreover, John Neville Figgis holds that, being of Scottish origin, James sought a legitimist principle for how to secure himself on the English throne and to stop the dominance of theology in politics and issues of spirituality (11).

From a different perspective, the Elizabethan conception of the universe was generally philosophical. It was believed that the universe was made up of a number of concentric spheres, the outermost inhabited by God while the innermost harboured the moon and the earth. It was also held that everything in the created world, human beings inclusive, was made up of four elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire that stood for melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler respectively (Campbell 52). This view of the universe was also, as earlier mentioned, a reflection of the Ptolemaic system. Ptolemy (c. AD 90-c. 168), a Greek astronomer who spent most of his life in Alexandria, Egypt, argued that the earth was the centre of the universe because "it has the ratio of a point to the sphere of the fixed stars; and it has no motion from place to place" (32). His geocentric theory was challenged by later scientists partly on grounds that if the earth were the centre of the universe, then the stars ought to be different in brightness because they would not be equidistant from the earth.

Among those who criticized the Ptolemaic system were scholars such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). The former, a Polish astronomer, proposed a heliocentric theory that rejected the idea of the earth being central in the universe. Instead, according to him, the earth was spherical and rotated round the sun. Unfortunately, Copernicus' theory did not gain much publicity because it was at odds with Catholic theology that placed the earth at the centre of the solar system. On his part, Galileo, the Italian astronomer and physicist, used a telescope to observe the universe. From his findings, Galileo supported the heliocentric theory of Copernicus that stressed the idea that the planets, including the earth, revolved around the sun, which was fixed.

Other embodiments of the supernatural in Elizabethan England include the arts of Astrology, Alchemy or Medicine, which were thought to affect human behaviour or character. According to Tillyard, human beings born under different planets were assumed to have specific conditions of the body and the mind. Those born under Jupiter tended to be fair, handsome, honest and generous; those given birth under Mars were likely to be tall and thin, and given to revenge, rebellion and anger; the planet Saturn accounted for prudence and the pursuit of knowledge, but humans conceived under its evil aspect were generally ugly, slow and melancholic; Mercury made some people wise, eloquent and subtle; Venus was thought to make its offspring fair, graceful, voluptuous, and interested in music and singing; those born under the sign of the Sun were cheerful, truthful, handsome and religious. The Moon was believed to govern the humours of the

body and influence the brain. These astrological descriptions had to do with theories about an imbalance in the “humours” of the blood.

Influenced by ideas from Classical times, some Elizabethans and Jacobean held that the other planets were directly affected by the position of the moon, which was seen as the major agent of change in the ‘sublunary’ world. At whatever stage of life, the stars were thought to be continuously influencing human behaviour. Therefore, change or mutability ruled the world beneath the moon; such change was conceived in the form of the Wheel of Fortune, derived from Greek mythology and the goddess Fortuna, and was used by some dramatists of this period to represent the changing fortunes of their tragic heroes. As a result, the human mind is perceived as a victim of external circumstances which impinge on behaviour. According to Cumberland Clark in *Shakespeare and Science*, Shakespeare tends to associate certain aspects of the mind with nature. For instance, anger, worry or fears of the supernatural are represented by a storm, hurricane, thunder, or lightning. Evil and criminal acts often take place in the night (6). This leads Lily Campbell to conclude in *Shakespeare’s Tragic Heroes* that Shakespeare is primarily concerned with passion rather than action (vi); she also indicates that Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Macbeth, for example, are made by Shakespeare to express their grief, jealousy, wrath, and fear, respectively, through their interactions with supernatural agencies.

Stressing the interaction between the gods/goddesses and human beings, one that could be traced to Greek tragedy notably Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Martin Stephen and Philip Franks remark in relation to Shakespearean tragedy that: “It is tempting to see the tragedies as the story of man [sic] against the gods [sic], doomed to failure in a fight

against superior odds but showing the nobility of his [sic] nature in the course of the unequal struggle” (44). In other words, despite the influence of the supernatural in the action, the tragic heroes are primarily responsible for their fate.

In fact, supernatural devices such as ghosts, apparitions and dreams are prominent in Shakespearean tragedy; Shakespeare uses these elements to delight his audience as he engages them in exploring human nature. He also uses supernatural devices to give form to what is going on inside the characters. Among some of the dramatically significant elements of the supernatural used by Shakespeare is the idea of ghosts which had diverse appreciations at the time that he was writing. While Protestant theology saw ghosts as either hallucinations or angels or devils in disguise, Catholic theology viewed them as souls briefly released from purgatory. According to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, Elizabethans associated ghosts with evil; they sprang from hell and were charged with acting in a supernatural way. A second Elizabethan opinion on ghosts was that they were true spirits of departed persons and were entrusted the task of revealing crucial information (68), which sometimes led to the protagonists being called upon to revenge past misdeeds. The idea of revenge gave rise to the popularity of the Revenge Tragedy genre at the time. This spirit, it was thought, cannot rest peacefully in the other world because certain wrongs committed during its time on earth have not been expiated. In the day, the ghost was thought to be resigned to suffering in the lower world and, in the night, it was condemned to walk for some hours in search of comfort and atonement for previous sins.

In fact, Thomas Alfred Spalding argues that there were two opposing schools of thought on the issue of ghosts. On the one hand, the conservative school emphasized that ghosts existed and, on the other, the reforming school denied the possibility of ghosts. Between these extreme positions, Spalding contends, were those who neither accepted nor disbelieved in the phenomenon of ghosts, and this probably was the majority opinion, which is also reflected in Shakespeare's plays (54-55). In representing the supernatural in his plays, Shakespeare was not investigating an unfamiliar concept; he was simply exploring the supernatural, but using beliefs and practices that were dominant in England at the time to explore human nature.

According to Wallace Notestein, an understanding of the minds, hopes or fears of people that lived in Elizabethan and Jacobean England necessitates some knowledge of the witchcraft of this period (1). Peasants, clergymen and medical quacks were anxious about their crops, Christians and patients respectively. On their part, inquisitors took keen interest in witchcraft, carefully phrasing their questions in order to convict the innocent while creating a mythology of witchcraft. The mythology surrounding witchcraft arose from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, written in the previous century by the Pope to instruct the Inquisition how to try witch suspects for the supremacy of the Catholic Church. At the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I, there were attempts to inscribe in the statute-book severe penalties for conjuration, witchcraft and related crimes. To this end, an Act was passed in 1580 proscribing the use of any means, such as prophecy, conjuration and witchcraft, to harm the queen. The practice of any of these evils was considered a felony and suspects could suffer death.

During the monarchy of Elizabeth I, the most important witch trial took place in 1566 at Essex and incriminated Mother Waterhouse and Elizabeth Francis for practising witchcraft. This trial was the consequence of the passing of the 1563 witchcraft laws in England and Scotland, proscribing the practice of witchcraft. Another famous case was that of Ursley Kemp in 1579. Known for midwifery and nursing practices, Ursley was accused of causing lameness to a child following her earlier threats of revenge if she were not paid for treating this child. Ursley was reported to have confessed about using spirits to do mischief. Some of the charges against witch suspects were manipulated for personal and political gains and confessions were always secured through threats of physical and psychological torture. For instance, the harsh execution of Elizabeth's mother and Henry VIII's wife, Anne Boleyn, in 1536 on charges of witchcraft was simply an attempt by the king to create a reason to behead her, although charges of adultery and treason were probably the most relevant accusations that led to her execution. Moreover, the political rise of Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell was attributed by some people to their manipulation of witchcraft suspicions to their advantage (Notestein 19). These examples, therefore, indicate the debate on witchcraft. As a result, there was an increasing number of pardons and reprieves issued to witch suspects during this period. However, the coronation of King James, a Scot, in 1603 reignited the witchcraft debate.

King James, probably influenced by the preponderance of belief in witchcraft in his native Scotland, took witchcraft charges seriously. Consequently, in 1604, an Act was passed against conjuration, witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits, making such offences punishable by law. James' Act went one step further than Elizabeth's,

whose law against witchcraft was primarily one against treason whereas James disconnected the issue from that traditional political context. According to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, James, like some of his counterparts, insisted that the supernatural was manifested, for example, through witches, ghosts, fairies, demons, prophecy, divination, dreams and astrology (13). In *Basilikon Doron*, James states that certain crimes such as witchcraft, incest, murder, sodomy and poisoning were unpardonable (38). Of these categories, witchcraft appeared the most dominant.

Prior to James' coronation, the English had attempted to qualify witches. A typical witch was often perceived as a poor old woman. The primary motivation others used to accuse her of witchcraft was revenge. She was thought of inducing deaths through several forms, killing cattle, or nurturing spirits in children. At times, she was believed to be capable of transforming into animal totems in order to conceal her mischief. Some people claimed to see representations of witches in shadows; others argued that apparitions were hallucinations of the beholder.

As a result, sceptics like Reginald Scot, in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584), challenged the belief in witchcraft. In fact, Scot wrote essentially to refute the claim about supernatural practices and also to protest against the increasing persecution of innocent people by a superstitious judiciary and clergy. He argued that most of the evidence in favour of the supernatural was frivolous and incredible, and most of the presumptions were contrary to reason. And that whatever was reported or thought of as witchcraft was undeniably false and the attribution of divine power to witches was the

result of blasphemy and idolatry (9). Scot also explored the practice of alchemy, divination and astrology, indicating how they were rooted in speculation and assumptions.

On his part, James interrogated the idea of witchcraft in *Daemonologie* (1597). In this book, he classified spirits into four categories: spirits that trouble houses or solitary places; spirits that pursue some people and trouble them at certain hours; spirits that enter human bodies and make them possessed; and fairies. According to James, women were more susceptible to witchcraft than men, and they could make “spirites either to follow and trouble persones, or haunt certain houses, and affraie oftentimes the inhabitants” (47). Unfortunately, women were often the victims of witchcraft during this time because they had fewer rights compared to men to whom women owed obedience. Ultimately, old, poor and socially and economically disadvantaged women increasingly became witch suspects.

In fact, James warned his subjects about the dangers posed by witchcraft and also supported the persecution of witches. The king was personally involved in the North Berwick witch trials of 1590, which implicated seventy people from East Lothian, Scotland, of communicating with the devil and attempting to sink the king’s ship. Having grown up in the predominantly catholic Scotland, James was wary of witchcraft. The king was thought to have survived a mischievous storm at sea because of his piety (Notestein 94-95).

As an old practice in England, L'Estrange Ewen reports in *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* that enchantment, prophecy, witchcraft, sorcery and invocation of evil spirits had been considered a public danger and suspects were punished by both ecclesiastical and civil courts (1). In this regard, from the 1533 first Act of Parliament relating to witchcraft, the penalty for invocations and conjurations of evil spirits ranged from imprisonment to death. In fact, in the post 1603 period, the witch cult was so strong that it led to the employment of enterprising citizens as witch finders in place of local searchers. Regrettably, these privileged citizens sought to enrich themselves out of the provincial fear of witches. For example, Samuel Cocwra, in 1579, was appointed by the Privy Council and paid 7s.6d. for searching conjurers in Salop, Worcester, and Montgomery counties (Ewen 69-70).

Moreover, different attitudes towards witchcraft resulted from social class and economic preoccupations, both eventually leading to witchcraft being a cultural commodity. While some witches were purported to bring good fortune, others were linked with evil. And it was usually the latter tendency that was more prevalent because elderly women were accused of demonic powers essentially because of their underprivileged status. Witches were assumed capable of reading secrets in water, in the air, fire, or smoke. And they were thought to do this, according to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, by consulting souls of dead people and even reading meaning in the crowing of cocks (30). The less harmful practice of witchcraft was considered the work of palmists, who claimed to predict events by reading palms.

However, interest in witchcraft persecution began to wane because, as was the case of the Elizabethan period, it was discovered that some of the suspects simply admitted guilt because of threats of being starved of food, sleep or cramped in a small place for several hours. Furthermore, some people realized that some of the witch trials were ludicrous in the sense that questionable evidence such as hearsay, or the word of an ‘honest’ witness, was taken into consideration. In fact, as Christina Hole argues, in an atmosphere of uncertainty, any chance coincidence or “untoward happening was enough to set men [sic] looking askance at some hapless individual” (77). For example, in 1616, Sir Humphrey Winch and Sir Randolph Crew found guilty nine witches at Leicester on the word of a young boy of thirteen who suffered from fits. Fortunately, James intervened in this case, exposing this boy as an impostor and rebuking the judges for their sentence on the suspects (Hole 80). Subsequently, Hole continues, witchcraft judges were more critical in their cross-examination of suspects in order not to be reprimanded by James, who urged judges to be “exceedingly circumspect when dealing with prisoners committed for trial on the evidence of bewitched persons” (187). Progressively, four out of five of those accused of witchcraft were acquitted or given light sentences (Rosen 51).

Igbo Embodiments of the Supernatural

Although both Shakespeare and Achebe are separated by a time lapse of over four centuries, Shakespeare’s England bears some similarity to Achebe’s traditional Igbo society in terms of the belief systems in both cultures. In other words, both communities manifest various forms of the supernatural in terms of witchcraft and concepts like the

Chain of Being and divine rule of kings, on the one hand, and divination, gods/goddesses, reincarnation and others, on the other. The spaces investigated by Shakespeare and Achebe may be historically distant, but ideologically close from the standpoint of the supernatural.

Igbo representations of the supernatural, like most traditional societies of Africa, are clearly evident in their traditional religion, cultural beliefs, mythology and divination, as well as their conception of the universe and the relationship between the living and the living dead. All these perceptions of the world translate into a traditional Igbo vision of the interconnectedness between the physical and the spiritual, in a way that a rupture in the delicate balance between these spheres might result in disorder or even death. The traditional Igbo world view seems holistic, embracing the living, the departed and the unborn; this entire community “has a sensibility to the delicate balance between human society and natural forces in the universe—sometimes visible, sometimes, invisible” (Mezu 190). Therefore, the traditional Igbo vision of life can be said to have been shaped by its ethos, history and belief-system, as well as by the consequences of colonialism. Put differently, Igbo traditional religion has to do essentially with the belief in local gods/goddesses, the offering of kola nuts to ancestors and guests, the practice of circumcision, the taking of oaths and titles, the mourning for dead husbands and wives and the celebration of festivals (Okoye 30).

From a conceptual perspective, traditional Igbos, like some Africans, perceive the world in a three layer structure—the heavens, the earth and the underworld (Oha 203), although it can still be argued that the last two spaces are one. The heavens or sky “was

the domain of spirits of both the living and the yet to be born as well as powerful forces: lightning, thunder, rain, drought, etc. The earth was the domain of the dead ancestors” (Ayittey 172). Nevertheless, these different categories are thought to be subtly linked. According to Mbiti in *Introduction to African Religion*, the uppermost level, the heavens, is believed to be inhabited by God, who is also associated with the moon, stars, thunder and lightning. The middle level is connected with the earth. At the third level is the underworld thought to be composed of evil or baneful forces, which manifest themselves through witchcraft, death or misfortune (35-36).

According to Elizabeth Isichei in “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions,” the Igbos have an eclectic perception of religion, seeing all religions as worshipping the same God and that “the particular forms they take are those appropriate to the needs and forms of each society” (214). Thus, while, for example, most Western societies embrace Christianity, some Igbos have, as its equivalence, traditional religion. As earlier mentioned, most traditional Igbos are essentially a profoundly religious people that embrace polytheism. They believe in three levels of being, that is, the supreme god, *Chukwu* or *ama ama amasi amasi* (the one who cannot be truly understood); lesser gods/goddesses or *Umuagbara* like *Amadiora* (god of thunder), *Ufiojioku* (god of harvest); *Agbara*, the god that governs the affairs of men; *Chi*, a person’s individual god; *Anyanwu* (sun god) and beneath them the spirits of dead people otherwise known as *Ndi Ichie* (Okafor 69). Mazi Elechukwu Njaka qualifies Igbo traditional religion as non-aggressive in its preoccupation with humans and the world of spirits; it accepts the principle that customs vary from one place to another and, although

they may be satisfactory to those who believe in them, they may as well be objectionable to non-believers (28-29).

Moreover, Igbo pantheon is said to consist not only of nature deities like *Ofa*, but also protective village deities such as *Idemili*, *Ogwugwu*, *Udo* and *Ogba* (Nwoga 17). Put differently, traditional Igbos believe in an array of transcendent beings, thought of to be anthropomorphic (Njoku 127). This idea is born out of the awareness of a higher force that oversees human free will, which assesses and judges human actions (Tempels 114). This force is also perceived as the concept of immanent justice, which once violated could incur retribution to the violator. In this connection, there are three kinds of death in traditional Igbo society: *Onwu Ekwensu* or violent death through accident; *Onwu ojoo* or bad death caused by suicide, lightning, leprosy, cholera or smallpox; and *Onwu chi* or natural death. The first two types of death are not desirable and most people would give sacrifices, offerings and even make necessary medicine in order to avoid these first two forms of death (Metuh 140-41).

The idea of reincarnation is also strongly upheld among traditional Igbos, hence the argument that death is transient with some of the dead coming back to the world through the newly-born. After all, what apparently separates the human world from its ancestral counterpart is a spiritual force. Thus, the emphasis on the interconnectedness between the living and the departed, the latter perceived as watching over the activities of the former. In other words, as Placide Tempels avers, the Bantu hold that there is interaction of being with being, or force with force that transcends mechanical and psychological boundaries, resulting in a relationship of forces (59).

There is also belief among traditional Igbos in the phenomenon of *ogbanje*, a practice whereby a dead baby is believed to return into its mother's womb multiple times if a ritual ceremony is not done to stop it. According to Chidi Maduka, an *ogbanje* child is generally a paragon of beauty and constitutes a source of "anxiety to his/her parents because of his/her idiosyncratic behaviour which may manifest itself in any form of mental or physical illness" (18). Often, traditional Igbos tend to believe that if a material object, otherwise known as *iyi uwa*, that is thought to belong to the baby is dug up, then, the cycle of birth and death could be stopped. This ritualistic activity could be handled by traditional priests and priestesses who, as diviners, ensure the spiritual health of the community.

At the social level, Edmund Ilogu, in *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, identifies some of the social values cherished by traditional Igbos as being respect for age and its seniority order; acceptance of the fact that the community is more important than the individual; honesty; cooperation; justice; social harmony; order and unity (131). In this connection, religious celebrations or even rituals are intended to strengthen these social values, as well as teaching young people to observe elderly people as they practise or perpetuate these values. Of course, traditional Igbos have various deities or objects that represent some of these virtues. For example, the *ofo* staff symbolizes justice.

As a cohesive society, traditional Igbos rigorously abide by precise tenets. For example, during the week of peace, the village is expected to resonate with joy and not hate. Any violator of this sanctity is punished regardless of his or her status. In addition, there are contending forces and spirits that nurture and regulate the society. Examples

include the belief in *osu* or slave heritage and the casting away of evil people into the Evil Forest. As regards the *osu* system, some traditional Igbos tend to believe that if ordinary people interacted in terms of marriage with this group, they could incur several misfortunes in life. Traditional Igbo society, according to Anthonia Kalu in “Achebe and Duality in Igbo Thought,” was quite wary about ill luck and tended to dispose of fractious individuals, oracles or gods/goddesses who threatened its well-being. The result was the creation of new avenues for success and the maintenance of individual and social harmony (144).

Although some Igbos believe in the phenomenon of *chi* or a personal god shaping one’s destiny, there is also consolation in the fact that human beings could still realize their ambitions through hard work, hence the Igbo proverb that we should not condemn a day when it is not yet over. The *chi* shrine, according to Austin J. Shelton in *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, is sometimes contiguous with that of a forefather and is often situated in the entrance room where guests or visitors are received (64). In this regard, traditional Igbos attempt to be at peace with their *chi* because it plays an important psychological role in liberating the mind from worry or torture (Njaka 32). As a result, every event in human life, whether fortunate or unfortunate, is considered *onatará chi* or a gift of destiny. Human goal in life is to achieve the destiny imprinted on his or her palm, aided, of course, by his or her spirit guardian (Metuh 23-24). According to Tempels, a “man’s [sic] will may be determined in the same sense that in respect of life and hierarchy of forces, he [sic] wills in accordance with that ordering of forces that has been willed by God” (104). Even though Tempels’ analysis appears to emphasize divine will, the Igbos

reconcile this apparent conflict in wills by foregrounding individual initiative over predestination.

In fact, in order to enhance one's or the community's chances of success, supernatural forces are either invoked or appeased by using equally mysterious forces in the forms of charms or amulets called *Ogwu*. Although Victor Alumona argues in "Portrayal and Criticism of Culture and Societal Institutions in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" that these objects are sometimes deified and propitiated as a god or goddess, the idea of deification is questionable. Instead, the traditional Igbo individual envisions these objects as representations of a superior force or God, in the same way as Christians use crosses or crucifixes to represent the presence of Christ. Alumona also states that oracles could be consulted to unravel a mystery or envision the future as testified by the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. It seems, therefore, incumbent on Achebe's characters to strive for righteous lives according to societal ethics because failure to do so could result in painful consequences. This is important because an individual's existence is perceived in terms of the social framework of his/her community. His or her self-interest is often subordinated to the collective interest of society. As a result, an individual is subjected to its laws, taboos and beliefs. However, this does not logically transform a person into a robot because his or her individuation could still be dominant.

Generally, some traditional Igbo gods and goddesses are represented by priests and priestesses, some of whom may have shrines in caves, forests, seas, mountains and trees for these gods and goddesses. Examples of nature gods/goddesses include *Amadiora*, *Ani* and *Idemili* that are believed to control such things as rainfall, drought and

the wind. Often, individuals who are earmarked for such functions may not be determined ahead of time because of the belief in consultation with some of these gods/goddesses before choosing their representatives. However, those who exert such divine duties are usually chosen from families which have been exercising priestly functions.

Traditional Igbo gods/goddesses do not enjoy the same level of respect. In this regard, Achebe remarks in *Arrow of God* about how some of the smaller gods/goddesses gain prominence only on feast days like the New Yam Festival: “But it was also the day for all the minor deities in the six villages who did not have their own special feasts. On that day each of these gods [sic] was brought by its custodian and stood in a line” (203). Nonetheless, these gods/goddesses are still revered in the sense that people are careful not to offend them. This is because, as Emmanuel Obiechina rightly argues, the world view of a traditional West African village is dependent on the interplay of the physical, seen world and the invisible world of the gods/goddesses, spirits, ancestors, magicians and witches. People in oral, traditional societies generally tend to “explain their problems, as well as all mysterious phenomena, through recourse to a theory of supernatural or mystical causality” (39). Spirits are believed to inhabit the forest, air, hills and even streams.

Moreover, in Igbo cosmology, life does not end with death; an individual is expected to live a life of several cycles, dying and coming back to earth to complete any interrupted cycle, possibly in the form of ancestors. According to Isichei in *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History*, Igbo people who die a good death at a respected age and

receive befitting burial rites would be considered ancestors and would be expected to defend the living against misfortune. On their part, the living propitiate these ancestors with regular offerings. However, dead people who are not given burial rites, probably because they died a “bad death,” are said to roam places and become dangerous ghosts (237). Some of these spirits are believed to hover above the earth, seeking for revenge. In fact, as Clement Okafor points out, Igbo cosmology accepts the existence of evil spirits, *Umunadi*, which are thought “to live in the liminal, uninhabited spaces beyond the village settlements and also in the bad bush” (69). Until revenge for committed offences is achieved, perpetrators of evil cannot have fulfilled lives. Again, some Igbos strongly believe in the possibility of change, which can always be procured through one’s effort even though the idea of destiny is upheld. Society, according to them, is in constant mutation either for better or worse depending on which external forces a person solicits.

Like most traditional Africans, traditional Igbos acknowledge that there is a mystical order ruling the universe. This belief is evident in the practice of traditional medicine, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. As a result, some Igbos maintain that there is a mystical power, controlled by God or *Chukwu*, which could be transmitted to spirits and some human beings. Those in possession of this power could see departed people, invisible fires and light; have visions and premonitions of forthcoming events; communicate with invisible powers; and perform superhuman feats. Knowledge of this mystical power could be used in helping people, particularly in healing; determining causes of misfortunes; and identifying mischief. To get control of this knowledge requires time and devotion, and such knowledge is often guarded jealously. Its

transmission could be effected through inheritance or unconsciously acquired. Violations of divinely or supernaturally acquired knowledge could result in the loss of it. When such knowledge is used harmfully, it is seen as witchcraft or evil magic.

According to G.T. Basten, the supernatural constitutes an integral part of the Igbo society:

In most towns of the Ibo country there are public deities. They are of many types, crude figures of human beings of wood or clay, or merely maids of earthy or again no more than pieces of timber set upright in the ground . . .

It is customary to offer sacrifice to these deities when invoking blessing on the community, or seeking relief in times of distress. Further, it might fall to the lot of a man [sic] to do something specially either acting upon a not-to-be neglected hint from the native priest [sic], or in order to satisfy his [sic] own conscience, or when wanting some particular benefit. (246-47)

Shrines, diviners and traditional priests/priestesses are used to establish communication between the living and the living dead. According to Taiwo in *An Introduction to West African Literature*, among the traditional Igbos, there is a close relationship between human beings and the spirit world because it is believed that ancestors, seen as custodians of morality and order in the community, would be grieved to see contravention by the living of laws which were either established or upheld in their time. And when these laws are violated, propitiation must be made otherwise misfortune would befall the community (136-37).

Indeed, it is incumbent on human beings, within Igbo cosmology, to attempt to live righteous lives in accordance with the ethics of the community and to refrain from violating societal taboos. Granted that traditional Igbo society values the individual, he or she is still subordinated to the community. Although prior choice (in an individual's

earlier existence) may predispose a person to act in a way that is in line with a pre-established destiny, Okafor argues that the Igbos still believe that human agency is crucial to the actualization of one's destiny. After all, he continues, amnesia at birth ensures that an individual is unaware of the choice previously made as to whether he or she would be successful in life or not, but this does not deter him or her from fully living his or her life, something that can be best expressed, as earlier stated, in the Igbo proverb that when somebody says yes, his or her *chi* says yes also (71).

There is also the belief among some Igbos that traditional gods/goddesses are thought to ensure justice and harmony in society. Among these gods/goddesses, there is hierarchy with *Chukwu* considered supreme. Alongside him are other gods/goddesses who are charged with specific duties like riches, which is the prerogative of *Eru*, and *Ani* is responsible for morality. In fact, traditional Igbos pay much respect to traditional priests/priestesses and diviners not only because of the institutions that they represent, but, more importantly, the knowledge that they have. Such knowledge, as earlier mentioned, is thought to be acquired supernaturally, through intuition, ancestral revelations, innate impulses and experientially.

According to Wolfgang Behringer, one form of the supernatural—witchcraft—serves as “a residual category with considerable explanatory power, if no other explanation seems to apply” (7). Witch-beliefs are neither the same nor proportionally spread out. For instance, a 1968 survey conducted at the University of Ghana indicated that 41% of the students were inclined to believe in witchcraft, and 31% of the respondents were fully convinced that it existed (Behringer 14). Daniel Jordan Smith

argues that witchcraft accusations, particularly in postcolonial Nigeria, tend to be in response to the “social, moral, and emotional consequences of selfishness, greed, and excessive accumulation [of property] in societies organized around obligations of reciprocal exchange” (592). In fact, the increasing disparities in terms of lifestyles between a predominantly young group of *nouveaux-riches* and the unenviable standard of living of poor people has fuelled the belief within the latter group that the former often employs demonic methods to enrich themselves. The result has been constant suspicion of rich people, and a growing feeling of resentment towards this group. However, the idea of witchcraft is more complex than this explanation, involving even the intervention of governments.

In 1965, the Ugandan government, for example, introduced legislation for the persecution of witchcraft, and in Malawi and Cameroon, diviners can give testimonies in courts against suspected witches. Indeed, in the words of Behringer, it has become “acceptable for courts to judge cases of suspected witchcraft with the aid of occult practices, like divination, resulting in physical punishment and prison sentences for the accused” (224). Another contributory factor for the spread of witchcraft in Africa, Behringer adds, could be the growth of new churches. Charismatic leaders of Christian groups, like Alice Lenshina of Zambia, have claimed to be informed by visions that could enable them to detect witchcraft (225).

In traditional Igbo society, a woman who practises witchcraft is known as *Amusu* or witch and her male counterpart is called *Ajalagba* or wizard. The latter, unlike in Shakespeare’s society, is believed to be more dangerous and powerful than the former,

hence the Igbo saying that *Amusu ada ebu ajalagba* or a witch cannot carry a wizard. Furthermore, a witch is believed to be possessed by some psychic powers which permit her spirit to leave her body and inflict injuries on people. Traditional Igbos also hold that witchcraft could be acquired or inherited. While witches are thought to steal people's souls or cause sterility to women or even destroy crops, wizards are believed to kill their victims through smothering. Such evil people are often identified by diviners or oracles and some of these people are said to confess their crimes on their death-beds when pressed on by *Ala*, the Earth goddess (Metuh 100-02).

Indeed, the issue of witchcraft appears to have been re-ignited with the introduction of Christianity into the hitherto traditional Igbo society. With the advent of colonialism in Igboland, Christianity attempted to supplant Igbo traditional religion. In fact, during the period of colonial rule in Nigeria (circa 1885-1960), Britain sought to impose its political and social values on the Igbos, although the people still retained some of their native customs like local traditional authority through a process of indirect rule. The colonial masters attempted to impose their alien culture or, at least, destroy some Igbo traditional practices in the belief that their culture was superior to the native one (Falola 18). As a result, local practices such as polygamy, paying respect to ancestors and certain sacrifices were summarily condemned. Christianity was actively introduced by the colonial missionaries, producing new converts who considered indigenous beliefs and practices sinful.

Regrettably, most of the early missionaries in Africa, in general, and Igboland, in particular, were inclined to assume that the African or Igbo was governed by a cruel and

irrational system which necessitated his or her being liberated. Such practices like human sacrifice, rituals, ancestral worship, traditional funeral ceremonies and divination were perceived by most Europeans as reprehensible and sinful, obliging Christianity to redeem blacks from damnation (Coleman 97). In this regard, European religion was considered more credible to native religions, a more rational and scientific form of spirituality compared with the so called barbarous, mysterious and supernatural status of indigenous religions. As part of the prejudice by the West towards the non-West is the assumption, according to Adiele Afigbo, that all pre-industrial societies, traditional Igbo as a case in point, are necessarily other-worldly oriented or superstitious (297).

Whether perceived as traditional, Western or superstitious, religion, according to Falola, is vital to most people as they seek solutions to their emotional problems, answers to the problems of life, and an understanding of the complexity of existence (29). Thus, when death, sickness or misfortune befalls an individual, he or she seeks help from religious rituals in order to overcome the situation. In fact, in the traditional African perception of life, diseases, accidents or calamities are believed to spring from mystical forces. For example, during the 2000 convention of the P.D.C.I. (*Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire*) held to select a candidate to represent the party in the presidential elections, a giant photograph of late President Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1905-1993) was rumoured to have fallen off the wall. Cracks were reported seen on the grave of Houphouët-Boigny, founder of the party. These incidents, according to some P.D.C.I. militants, probably indicated the disapproval of the departed patriarch about the conduct of party affairs. As a result, the hitherto proposed presidential candidate, Henri Konan

Bédié, was rejected by the party conclave and Emile Constant Bombet was chosen to replace him. Thus, within the traditional African cosmos, it may not be enough to attempt to explain things scientifically, or according to the logic of causality, because some people are interested in knowing who or what has made something happen. Among some of the causes could be magic, witchcraft, sorcery, abominations, or curses. Once the source of a misfortune has been traced, steps are taken to resolve the issue at stake. This could involve, according to Mbiti in his essay “African Religion and World Order,” the intervention of diviners, mediums, ritualists, or traditional priests/priestesses who solicit assistance from extraterrestrial forces (366-67).

Agreed that modern Igbo society has evolved significantly from its earlier counterpart, some of the traditional practices like divination, paying homage to ancestors and others have undergone revision, although the essence has remained basically the same. In this connection, Edmund Ilogu argues in his essay “The Religious Situation in Nigeria Today: A Sociological Analysis” that some Nigerian Christians do not distinguish between Christianity and traditional religion in the hope that “what they fail to get from their membership in the former they might get from the latter. This again leads the many prophets [sic] and charismatic organizers of sects and prayer-houses to include in their teachings, rituals and worship-techniques” (516). The result is the fusion of Christian and traditional African practices, something that blurs the apparent boundary between these forms of spirituality.

The idea that some Igbos did not embrace Christianity and instead pursued their indigenous religions made some Europeans consider these Igbos pagan. According to

Ania Loomba, the European perception of Africans, with the Igbos inclusive, appeared to have grown out of misconceptions, as well as the idea that “religious and cultural prejudice against both blackness and Islam, each of which was seen to be the handwork of the Devil, intensified the connection between them” (106). The colour black recalled to some Europeans biblical associations of blackness with evil, Satan and hell.

Indeed, it is against such a backdrop of multifarious gods/goddesses and belief systems that I intend to appreciate the behaviour and actions of Achebe’s characters. Only then can it be possible to understand their minds and their apparent vulnerability to external forces in the forms of traditional religion and Christianity, for example.

Literary Manifestations of the Supernatural

Among some of the supernatural devices used by Shakespeare and Achebe are prophecies, omens, dreams, magic, witchcraft, myths, ghosts and others. These literary devices are richly used by both writers to emphasize character, amplify motifs and problematize meaning.

Prophecies are predictions or knowledge about the future, often believed to be divinely inspired. A glaring instance is the witches’ prophecy of kingship to Macbeth, or the Oracle’s warning, in *Things Fall Apart*, to Obiako that he will die from falling off a palm tree. Slightly related to prophecies is divination, which is the belief in the ability to successfully predict the future using unusual insight. Or, it may be simply defined as the belief in the ability to discover hidden knowledge through supernatural powers or augury. In other words, it is the search for patterns of meaning in human existence, and this could

be done through a particular divinity or spirit. For example, in *Julius Caesar*, the augurers foretell danger to Caesar because of their inability to find a heart in a sacrificial animal, and in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu visits the shrine of *Ulu* and informs Umuaro that *Ulu* is against his convening of the yam festival.

On their part, omens, also known as portents, are believed to foretell events. Omens may be considered good or bad depending on their interpretation, or the culture within which they are found. They generally have prophetic significance. While earth tremors or the idea of horses eating each other may presage the murder of Caesar, the explosion of Okonkwo's gun during Ezeudu's funeral is perceived within the traditional Igbo society as a sign of misfortune for him.

In the worlds of Shakespeare and Achebe, the actions of some of their protagonists appear to spring from dreams or visions, which are visionary creations of the imagination, or thoughts that intrude into the mind when a person is sleeping. Sometimes, dreams, according to L.W. Rogers in *Dreams and Premonitions*, forewarn about impending dangers, but the waking consciousness is oblivious (10). In many instances, dreams possess metaphorical signification which may be elusive to the dreamer, but perceptible to others. Sigmund Freud opines in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that primitive people and those of the prehistoric ages hold that dreams are related to the world of supernatural beings and brought about by inspirations from gods/goddesses and demons. Moreover, dreams are significant to the dreamer because of the fear associated with their likelihood to prefigure events. Freud, however, tempers his classification of dreams as products of ignorance and fear by indicating that, even in contemporary times,

some people “base their religious belief in the existence and co-operation of superhuman spiritual powers on the inexplicable nature of the phenomena of dreams” (5-6).

In Shakespeare’s tragedies, the use of dreams acquires a new dramatic significance as they mirror the interior consciousness of the protagonists and blur the boundary between the real and the unreal, the objective and the subjective. For example, the dagger which Macbeth claims to see could instead be, according to Marjorie Garber in *Dream in Shakespeare*, a self-made omen, a sign produced by his mind as he quakes in fear (110). The stress, in this situation, is on the anxiety of the hero rather than on hallucination. And Ezeulu, while incarcerated in Okperi, has a dream in which he is manhandled by an irate Umuaro, a probable symbol of his eventual rejection by his clan.

In his artistic conception, Achebe incorporates Igbo mythology on creation, rituals and gods/goddesses, for example, to articulate character, foreshadow events and comment on behaviour. Generally, myths are oral narratives explaining ritual performance, or according to Okpewho in *Myth in Africa*, a myth can be defined as “a quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity” (69). A myth acquires an aesthetic beauty, as well as an informative role in explaining the culture of a people. Considered aetiological, myths are contrived to explain “by means of something concrete and intelligible an abstract idea or such vague and difficult conceptions as Creation, Death, distinctions of race or animal species” (Malinowski 31). Myths often express, enhance and codify beliefs, as well as safeguarding and enforcing morality.

On his part, Shakespeare made dramatic use of the cult of witchcraft, the Great Chain of Being and other supernatural practices of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. For instance, evil spirits were thought to occasionally inhabit human bodies, taking utter control over people and rendering them helpless. Individuals so possessed were often secluded in a dark room and subjected to flagellation (Dyer 56). Some religious institutions, notably Protestantism and Catholicism, exploited belief in witchcraft for their own ends. Among some of the reasons to explain fondness for supernatural display, especially among the Elizabethans and Jacobeans, would be the fact that it was subject to rich allegorical interpretation; it satisfied the audience's love for masques; and it provoked 'magical' stagecraft (Plank 394).

Another important display of the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedy is the phenomenon of ghosts or spirits believed to be visible to some characters. In this connection, Campbell argues that the Catholic Church advises ghost beholders to subject these apparitions to enquiry in order not to be misled by baneful spirits, which are often reflections of sinners attempting to atone for their evil:

And whersoever these spirits be, they say, that they endure punishment. Besides that soules do not appeare, nor answeare unto every mans interrogatories, but that of a great number they scantlie appeare unto one. And therefore they teache. Whensoever suche visions of spirits are shewed, men should use fasting and prayer or ever they demaund any question of them. (122)

As suggested by the 'Papists,' a good spirit is said to terrify the beholder before comforting him/her whereas an evil spirit is likely to appear as a bear or a lion and one must watch out for its voice, be it sorrowful, frightful or reproachful. Campbell argues that Papists insisted that it was imperative for humans to yield to the demands of the

ghost because “they teach that it is an horrible and heynous offence, if a man [sic] give no succoure to suche as seeke it at his [sic] hands, especially if it be the soule of his [sic] parents, brethren and sisters” (124).

With regard to the preponderance of the belief in supernatural practices within Elizabethan England, Simon Trussler in *Shakespeare's Concepts* posits that no absolute distinction was felt during this age as in our own between the supernatural and the everyday. Whereas the medieval church had insisted that God was the source of the magic realized through exorcism, transubstantiation, or the powers of a saintly relic, the Reformation in England had made the element of the supernatural in the Christian religion far less immediate and tangible (106). Stephen Greenblatt in an essay entitled “Shakespeare Bewitched” reports that Burchard, Bishop of Worms, in his influential penitential canon, *Canon episcopi*, declared that belief in witchcraft was itself a sin, indeed a relapse into paganism. The fact that fantasies are widespread does not, according to Burchard, attest to their reality (110).

The above discussion clearly indicates how the supernatural appears to be rooted within the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo cultures. While Shakespeare's England manifested different forms of the supernatural in witchcraft, for example, and such concepts as the Chain of Being, divine right of kings and other cultural embodiments like astrology, medicine and others, Achebe's traditional Igbo society embraced the supernatural in their belief system, as well as their socio-cultural norms. The people of both cultures recreated by Shakespeare and Achebe in their works are portrayed as essentially superstitious, partly through their Christian and traditional Igbo

religions. In a sense, both Shakespeare and Achebe utilize the supernatural beliefs of their respective societies to explore the human mind, illustrating character, prefiguring events and as instruments of poetic justice as I shall demonstrate in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAKESPEARE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Although Shakespeare's tragic heroes are primarily to blame for their downfall, some events in the tragedies of Shakespeare appear to be preordained through certain signs, symbols or happenings. Supernatural figures such as ghosts, witches, dreams or augury seem to dictate the pace of action and orient characters. In the Elizabethan age, for instance, it was generally believed that the positions of the stars and planets in the sky meant good or bad fortune on earth. Eclipses were thought of as harbingers of misfortune. This belief resulted from strong adherence to astrology that was associated with the concept of order. The smooth movement of heavenly bodies reflected an orderly pattern of events in human life; a rupture in this oscillation indicated confusion, a break down in the natural order of things and this pattern gives a certain symbolic signification to Shakespeare's plays.

John Arthos avers that Shakespeare thinks of the visionary as inherent in the character of tragedy and comedy, and it is predicated on the supernatural (9). Concerning the prevalence of supernatural forces, like ghosts, in Shakespearean tragedy, Arthos admits that

there are many reasons we should rest content with accepting many of these intimations simply as responding to our need to marvel, seeing in such representations that faithfulness to the sense of things the ancient honored in saying that thought begins and ends in wonder. (10)

However, beyond the marvel which supernatural devices may evoke in the audience is the fact Shakespeare endows them with symbolism, as a way of probing the human mind through images or signs.

According to Saint Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*, a sign is

a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses. Thus if we see a track, we think of the animal that made the track; if we see smoke, we know that there is a fire which causes it. (34)

Signs, Augustine continues, are generally natural, for example, smoke or conventional, for example, traffic signs. Signs are often used by living creatures to convey meaning. The overall objective in the use of signs is the “bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action of the mind in the person who makes the sign” (35). In fact, signs generally appeal to human senses of sight, hearing and others. Whereas some signs are simple like a head nod, others are complex because of the gestures or motions that are embedded in them as typical of actors.

Augustine also maintains that signs are literal, figurative, or unknown or ambiguous. This actually led to four-fold exegesis of scripture—history, aetiology, analogy and allegory. Unknown signs can be found in unknown languages, making it imperative to study these languages in order to understand these signs. This is important because of the sensitiveness of words which sometimes leads to meaning being misunderstood by some people.

At times, it is important to approach literature centrifugally, paying attention to external sources if realistic significance can be made out of it. This seems logical because of the awareness that “human life and society are to a significant degree a matter not only

of freedom but also of constraint” (Hoopes 12). In fact, place, time or the individual appreciating a sign are important in attributing an aesthetic function to it.

Charles S. Peirce, in his study of semiotica, identifies three kinds of sign. The ‘iconic’ where the sign somehow resembled what it represented such as the photograph of a person; the ‘indexical’ whereby the sign is associated with what it is a sign of, for example, smoke with fire; and the ‘symbolic’ where the sign is arbitrarily or conventionally associated with its referent. Semiotics groups these categorizations into two basic classes, that is, denotation or what the sign stands for and connotation or other signs associated with it. There are general principles of representation that give rise to valid inference which itself is a kind of symbolization (Parker 6). In a work of art, a sign may have a contextual meaning or a historical symbolism. Therefore, meaning in a text is not restrictive, but takes into consideration other texts, codes and ethos in literature and society.

In his tragedies, Shakespeare is preoccupied with exploring questions about the ways in which we attempt to control our own fate, using the conventional mythologies of his culture. To discuss the supernatural in Shakespeare is to reveal how he was evoking questions in his audience’s mind, not primarily about the supernatural, but fundamentally about the reason why characters make the choices they do. Indeed, Shakespearean tragedies tend to follow a defined pattern in relation to the supernatural. The actions of the protagonists seem to be influenced by external forces. As they wrestle with supernatural forces, they expose their innermost minds, traits which might have been less apparent without Shakespeare’s dramatic exploration of the supernatural. Such an artistic

investigation of the human struggle against apparent fate can be traced to ancient Greeks, precisely Sophocles.

In *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles uses the supernatural to comment about human perception of one's struggle against fate. Decreed by the oracle to murder his father and then wed his mother, Oedipus strives to avert the prophecy of the gods by escaping from those whom he considers his parents. Thereafter, he kills his real father because he is provoked by the deceased. He also marries his mother as well, showing how his attempt to escape his fate actually fulfils it. Among other things, Sophocles' use of the supernatural in this play foregrounds Oedipus' character as irascible, inquisitive and impulsive. Thus, Oedipus' interactions with Tiresias and Creon, for example, bring out his weaknesses like rashness and impulsiveness. His story is tragic because, throughout his life, Oedipus attempts in vain to avoid the fulfilment of the prophecy. He also punishes himself in excess of his crime by blinding himself with his mother's brooch. In the end, Oedipus' humane qualities like compassion and love towards fellow Thebans cannot preclude his misfortune.

According to Kiernan Ryan, Shakespearean tragedies are presented either as dramatizing the validity of the established social order and vindicating conventional beliefs and values, or as reconciling us to what is perceived as our intractably flawed human nature, and thus to the inescapable necessity of the given human nature, however monstrous and unbearable its cruelty and injustice (44). It would seem that, whether overtly or covertly, Shakespeare's tragedies, through their portrayal of human interaction with the supernatural, explore moral and spiritual reality. They are concerned, in the

words of Robert Ornstein in “Shakespeare’s Moral Vision: *Othello* and *Macbeth*” with “what man [sic] knows and what he [sic] needs, with his [sic] capacity to conceive and adhere to ideals” (219). Like religion, Shakespeare’s tragedies attempt to answer cosmic problems because of humankind’s belief in a purposeful and orderly universe (Ribner 1). George C. Herndl intimates that the universal system of natural law is represented in the physical world “as a regular and purposive ordering, in society as duties morally incumbent on men [sic] because innately a part of the civil life for which man’s [sic] nature ordains him [sic]” (2). This association between humans and the physical and spiritual worlds is most evident in *King Lear*.

King Lear

Throughout most of *King Lear*, there is the initial reflection of the belief, among some of the characters, that human beings are pawns at the mercy of stars, and these heavenly bodies are seen as being indifferent to human suffering. In this connection, Gloucester, for instance, says about the gods that: “As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods;/ They kill us for their sport” (4.1.37-38). This leaves the impression that Shakespearean tragedy is preoccupied with life as it is lived “in a universe wherein mightier forces than those of man [sic] are perpetually exerting their powers in shaping the lot of mankind [sic]” (Charlton 231). However, it is important to note that Gloucester changes his perspective of the gods as influential in human action after the cliff scene with Edgar.

Among the characters which Shakespeare uses in *King Lear* to explore human belief in the supernatural, King Lear appears prominent. According to William J. Grace, the heavens and the gods [sic] are subordinated to individual passions (443). Put differently, the supernatural helps to explore the human mind. Unlike Macbeth or Caesar who question the validity of supernatural forces, Lear, from the outset, swears by certain gods, imploring them to torment his enemies, although his comments are often epithets, not a vindication of his belief in the gods as much as a reflection of a belief in the justice of his own actions. He, like Gloucester, initially subscribes to the belief that heavenly bodies appear to determine the fate of the world and people. Their apparent superstitious bent of mind is in consonance with the pagan setting of the play, which seems different from that of *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*. Both Lear and Gloucester appear to embrace Renaissance conventions by exhibiting an overemotional and unstable fear of what was believed to be the determining heavens, apparently showing extreme credulity or respect for divine powers, and resolute belief in the effects of celestial events on human life (Elton 147). In this way, Shakespeare dramatizes the conflict within his protagonists, between them and other forces such as human greed and ambition and how, at the end, some of the characters accept responsibility for their downfall.

The opening scene of *King Lear* shows Lear as a polytheistic-naturalistic man, apparently dependent on superior powers. Lear presents himself as a character who is deeply concerned with the role of pagan gods and goddesses in human affairs as evidenced when he solemnly swears by some deities for a rupture in his relationship with Cordelia, whom he thinks loves him least of his daughters:

For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care. (1.1.107-111)

The mysterious sources to which Lear refers reflect his violent passion against Cordelia. The sun god, *Apollo*, and night goddess, *Hecate*, that he invokes were deities worshipped by ancient priests of Britain, Gaul and Ireland. Therefore, this appeal to these gods/goddesses represents the elemental impulse of superstition in Lear and his tragic pride. Moreover, his perception of Cordelia's death as an end itself rather than a passage to eternity reinforces his heathen attitude to life. In fact, Lear's polytheistic attitude "impinges on an animism whose deities are extensions of nature" (Elton 261). He perceives the gods/goddesses from essentially two perspectives: as vengeful and wrathful spirits reminiscent of the Old Testament and as indifferent beings who watch the world disintegrate into evil and corruption. Throughout the play, Lear seeks to define himself in a world of opposing values and contradictions.

The gods and goddesses in *King Lear* are equally seen by Lear, Gloucester, Albany and other virtuous characters as kind, with the Nature goddess shown as having two traits. For instance, Lear appeals to her to punish Goneril with an ungrateful child: "Turn all her mother's pains and benefits/ To laughter and contempt, that she may feel/ How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/ To have a thankless child" (1.4.269-272). When he is in distress, he calls on this goddess to comfort him.

Lear initially suspects supernatural forces of being responsible for the filial ingratitude shown by his daughters towards him: "If it be you that stirs these daughters'

hearts/ Against their father, fool me not so much/ To bear it tamely” (2.4.270-272). As he bemoans his plight, there is a corresponding storm that appears, according to Lear, to disapprove of the injustice meted out to him by his daughters. However, the storm, from the audience’s perspective, reflects Lear’s disordered mind. As nature pelts him, Lear reviews his concept of the gods/goddesses. He sees them as siding with evil doers: “But yet I call you servile ministers,/ That will with two pernicious daughters join/ Your high-engendered battles ‘gainst a head/ So old and white as this” (3.2.21-24). Curiously, Lear continues to blame other forces for his suffering rather than admitting his shortcomings. By referring to thunder as he is tormented by the storm, Lear, in the eyes of Elton, is either representing a pagan viewpoint about it as being naturally provoked, or expressing doubt about the reliability of the gods [sic] (212). When he is happy, the weather is genial, but when he is suffering, there is a rupture in the sequence of events as marked by the storm. In fact, the violent storm, as earlier remarked, symbolizes the tempestuous mind of Lear; as he is exposed to it, his “wits begin to turn” (3.2.68).

Again, in *King Lear*, the storm is regarded by us as the cosmic representation of the disorder within the kingdom. Lear, thus, insists on blaming others, and not himself, for his misfortune as he envisions in the storm the destruction of all ungrateful people, particularly his daughters:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow,
You cataracts and hurricanos, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulph’rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to ask cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head. And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ th’world,

Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man. (3.2.1-9)

Even though the evil forces in the play are eventually rooted out, this pronouncement still has not shown Lear change his position from victim to tragic hero responsible for what has happened to him. Shakespeare's technique here is one of dramatizing Lear's perception of the outside world.

Unlike Lear who interrogates the role of the gods/goddesses or the supernatural in human endeavours, Edmund solicits them to further his cause. For example, Edmund makes a prayer to the Nature goddess requesting her to facilitate his machination of disinheriting Edgar:

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why "bastard"? Wherefore "base"? (1.2.1-6)

In this soliloquy, Edmund denounces the orthodox view of life, and he presents himself as an outsider, determined to subvert the orderliness in the world. He dissociates himself from any moral influence of Nature, except for the purpose of his materialism. He is aware that humankind is capable of manipulating physical and human nature for personal benefits. As a result, he assumes a feeling of superiority towards others. According to John Danby in "Edmund and the Two Natures," Edmund is seen as belonging to a new age of scientific inquiry, of the new man [sic] in an era of individualism, suspicion and glory (53-54).

Throughout his soliloquy, Edmund strenuously attempts to justify his intentions of supplanting Edgar and climbing socially. He is disgruntled that, according to him, he is badly treated in society because of his illegitimacy. Edmund is unhappy that he has all along been slighted by his father. Ronald Cooley argues that Edmund, as a bastard, is further removed from any “legitimate” claim on the family’s wealth and property (341). Viewed closely, Edmund’s prayer indicates a flagrant denunciation of the moral law and the acceptance of the law of the jungle or survival of the fittest. His ideas on legitimacy and inheritance question how a culture invents and perpetuates itself. He sees moral conventions as social constructions designed by a culture to protect its vested interest and proscribe competition. By stating that he owes his services to the Nature goddess, he announces his creed that “Nature sanctions ruthless competition in which the race goes to the swiftest” (Bevington 142). However controversial the role of this goddess may appear, Shakespeare does not overtly subvert *natura*. He seems to acknowledge that the good may not necessarily expect justice in this life, and that God hardly directly intervenes in human affairs. Using *King Lear* as a case study, T. McAlindon states that the play seems to indicate “the limitlessness of suffering and evil” and the injustice of life as it negatively affects innocent and virtuous people (195-96).

On his part, Gloucester, before his fall from an apparent cliff and rescue by Edgar, attributes human suffering to the gods/goddesses; he argues that human destiny is at their mercy. On the strength of this argument, humankind is perceived simply as a tool in the hands of gods/goddesses that can toss human beings to satisfy their caprices. This assertion looks sweeping if note is taken of the individual contribution of the characters

towards their downfall. Gloucester, like Lear, is susceptible to gullibility; the one accepts without questioning while the other allows his pride to be humoured. Harriett Hawkins concurs with this thinking in his submission that no gods/goddesses in this tragedy, as in *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* or *Macbeth*, would intervene to prevent the rejection of all humane values, nor would they intrude to punish those who reject these values. The only evil, the only justice, the only mercy, and the only miracles which occur in this play result from the actions of men [sic] (167). As a result, the tragic heroes owe their downfall mainly to flaws in their character such as wrath in Lear or gullibility in Gloucester.

Like Lear in terms of suffering, Gloucester is tortured on the instruction of Cornwall and Regan; as he is tormented by this evil couple, he predicts retribution for the merciless Regan: “Naughty lady,/ These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin/ Will quicken and accuse thee” (3.7.37-39). He urges the gods/goddesses to seek justice for transgressors:

Heavens deal so still.
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly.
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. (4.1.68-73)

At the same time, Gloucester succumbs to the temptation of a spirit when he is made to believe by Edgar that his life has been miraculously saved. Thereafter, Gloucester becomes optimistic about life as he envisions divine intervention in human endeavours. After all, it has brought to light his weaknesses such as gullibility and naïveté, traits which he is worried might have driven him into despair. Interestingly, in the incident of

Gloucester's contemplation of death, Edgar is perceived by Gloucester as a spirit because of his prevention of Gloucester's attempted suicide. In this way, the supernatural is made natural or human.

In the same orbit of apparent supernatural influence on human life, Albany solicits the heavens to punish Goneril for tormenting Lear and Gloucester. As if the gods/goddesses were listening to this appeal, a messenger reports on the death of Cornwall; Albany feels vindicated when he remarks: "This shows you are above,/ You justicers, that these our nether crimes/ So speedily can venge" (4.2.78-80). Kent echoes Albany when he emphasizes, concerning fate, that "It is the stars,/ The stars above us, govern conditions" (4.2. 33-34). Here, Shakespeare interrogates the extent of *deus ex machina* in the fates of characters given that their destruction or downfall can be attributed to their failings.

According to William R. Elton, Gloucester's superstitious mind shows different impressions about the gods/goddesses whom he believes control human destiny. Throughout the play, Gloucester manifests varying perceptions of the gods/goddesses. In the first act, he portrays himself as credulous as he appeals for punishment of evil doers by the gods/goddesses; in the second act, he affirms that the all-governing heavens expose men's [sic] virtues and vices; in the third act, he is fearful, suspicious and vengeful while manifesting Stoic resignation to the will of the gods/goddesses; in the fourth act, he is humble, repentant and states that the gods/goddesses kill men for their sport; finally, he is convinced about the decay of the world (154). Contrary to Elton's insistence on the pessimism of Gloucester, this character, at the end of the play, accepts

responsibility for his fall rather than blaming the gods/goddesses. In a sense, Gloucester's interactions with the supernatural mark his anagnorisis—the moment when he realizes that he is to blame for his downfall. This is particularly evident, as earlier pointed out, in the scene where Edgar stages Gloucester's fall from an apparent hill and makes the latter believe that he was miraculously rescued by spirits. Thereafter, Gloucester learns not to blame the gods/goddesses for his downfall, but is aware of his shortcomings such as gullibility, waywardness and naïveté that cause his tragedy: “You ever gentle gods [sic], take my breath from me./ Let not my worser spirit tempt me again/ To die before you please” (4.6.212-213).

Similarly, Lear's inquisitive, impulsive and suspicious mind can be perceived in his claim, as earlier stated, that supernatural forces are responsible for the ingratitude of his daughters towards him. This mindset would lead him to be particular about supernatural occurrences, betraying his naïveté in due process, and overlooking the merit of studying the character of his daughters. The violent storm that Lear experiences as he wanders about highlights his tragic flaws of pride and wrath, which are especially evident in his hasty decision to banish Cordelia who loves him most of his daughters. This incident also indicates Lear's love for Cordelia, whom he has always looked upon as his favourite daughter: “Now, our joy,/ Although our last and least” (1.1.80-81). The storm also gives depth to his stature as king by eliciting the sympathy of the audience towards him because he is subjected to both human and physical torture.

The character of Lear and Gloucester may best be appreciated in their interactions with other external forces such as astrology and Lear's abdication of the crown.

Astrology in *King Lear* is merely a sign for the character's perspective on the world.

Gloucester, for instance, argues that recent eclipses witnessed in Britain possibly account for Edgar's supposed villainy:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide in the cities, mutinies, in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction: there's son against father. The king falls from bias of nature, there's father against child. (1.2.97-103)

As a result, according to Gloucester, conflicts within families are presaged by the partial or complete obscuring of one celestial body by another. Thus, the misunderstanding between Lear and his daughters and the impending strife within the Gloucester household appear to Gloucester to be replicated in the unnatural phenomenon of an eclipse, indicating also how domestic strife can be played out in the larger cosmos of nature. This also gives tragic grandeur to Lear and Gloucester as they learn, in the course of the play, how the tragic events are their own doing.

Alternatively, the rumbling thunder and the beating rain can be seen by us as an outward display of the conscience of Lear as he analyzes his actions, particularly his misjudgement of Cordelia. These sufferings appear indispensable in the sense that they are regarded, by the audience, as the throes of knowledge:

But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. (3.2.21-24)

Here, Shakespeare shows some dramatic development on the part of Lear as he admits that his daughters probably took advantage of his poor judgement of issues to set in motion his downfall. Underscoring the role of the supernatural as a dramatic technique, John F. Danby in *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* draws a parallel between the thunder in *King Lear* and other supernatural incidents in Shakespearean drama in the following light: "It is the super-natural and the super-rational and the super-human. It belongs not only with the Thunder in *Julius Caesar*, but with the ambiguous ghost in *Hamlet*, the delphic Cassandra of *Troilus and Cressida*, the doubtful witches of *Macbeth*" (184).

Another event that has been viewed from a supernatural standpoint is Lear's abdication of the throne which, according to Richard L. Levin, is fraught with signs of misfortune:

To understand the enormity of Lear's sin, we must recognize the peculiar position of the king in the highly ordered world which Renaissance Christian humanism carried over from the Middle Ages. Lear's resignation of his throne . . . would have been regarded by a Jacobean audience with a horror difficult for a modern audience to appreciate, for . . . [it was] a violation of the king's responsibility to God, and . . . could result only in . . . chaos on every level of creation . . . By his resignation of rule Lear disrupts the harmonious order of nature . . . [and the] infinite good of God's order which decrees that the king rule for the good of his people until God relieves him of his responsibility by death. (15-16)

Thus, Lear's selfishness can be metaphorically perceived, by the audience, in the storm, which apparently mirrors his abdication of kingship. In line with the notion of the Great Chain of Being, his decision to relinquish the throne is thought by the Jacobean to have ruptured the harmony in the general order of things.

Even though Edmund, Goneril, Regan and other evil characters in *King Lear* attempt to impose their political and romantic dictates on others, Shakespeare indicates, through Lear, Gloucester, Albany and others, that the pursuit of individualistic goals through reprehensible practices would most likely result in a reversal of fortune. Granted that the play shows, to a certain degree, how arbitrary law and justice could be, Shakespeare leaves the audience with a question at the end of the play: is there a God up there ensuring divine justice or is that which we dress as the “supernatural” truly within the human potential to love one another, no matter cause or cost? In a sense, *King Lear* demonstrates how the fates of Lear and Gloucester are described through phenomena like eclipses and storms, an indication of how patterns in human life can be related to cosmic happenings, and this explanation about life is also foregrounded in *Macbeth*.

Macbeth

A disruption in the natural order of things appears to be the initial feeling of a spectator at a performance of *Macbeth*; he or she finds himself or herself transported into a world where human beings are apparently closely observed by supernatural spirits eager to create confusion and to take advantage of human infirmities. The apparitions in *Macbeth* are neither benign spirits of order nor agents of an inescapable fate, but, in a way that is particularly characteristic of Shakespeare’s dramatic art, combine elements of popular belief and a syncretistic mythology (Mehl 108-09). Majorie Garber in *Dream in Shakespeare* rightly states that the witches perform a prophetic role in that they combine omen with riddle and warning. As spirits of a dream world, they serve to perpetuate

mischievous (115). However, Ace Pilkington makes a compelling argument about the witches that Shakespeare's use of them in this play puts us in an ambiguous situation: we are not allowed to forget that these supernatural creatures may be imaginary nor are we allowed to dismiss them as such (82).

In *Macbeth*, the relationship between character and the supernatural is most apparent in Macbeth's encounter with the witches and the ghost of Banquo. The interaction between Macbeth and the witches has been a subject of much critical enquiry. According to William Hazlitt in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, Macbeth appears driven by the violence of his destiny, like a vessel drifting before a storm (11). Hazlitt blames the witches for enticing Macbeth into evil, and considers them "foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music" (20). As a result, Macbeth is throughout the play haunted by reality and unreality, thoughts and counter thoughts that seem to confound him, making him apparently unaware of where fancy leaves off and reality begins. According to Irving Ribner, the witches do not suggest evil to man [sic], but they suggest, through prophecy, an object which may activate man's [sic] inclination to evil (158). Put differently, in their meetings with Macbeth, the weird sisters do not act as Fates, but as oracles who prophesy the future, without attempting to control it (Pilkington 85).

Robert G. Hunter in *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments* appraises Macbeth's situation in the following light. If the source of Macbeth's horrid images after

hearing about the prophecy of the witches is from within him, and within his control, then he is morally responsible for his criminal acts. If the source of his images is his mind, but outside his control, then he has psychological problems as his diseased mind presents him with hallucinations. If his images could be attributed to supernatural forces, which he could ignore, then he is to blame for allowing demonic powers to overrule him. If the images stem from supernatural forces which are beyond his will, then Macbeth could be perceived, from a Calvinist standpoint, as one damned by God and abandoned to the forces of evil (168). Nevertheless, these images are not realistic depictions, but merely dramatic devices to ponder on these issues.

Taken as a whole, the play, *Macbeth*, is full of dramatic use of demonic forces, which appear to animate nature and ensnare human souls through diabolical persuasion, hallucination, infernal illusion and possession (Curry 92-93). For instance, Banquo's nobility of character and the fact that the witches foretell inheritance of the throne for his descendants provoke Macbeth's jealousy. Consequently, Macbeth plots the death of Banquo with the help of some murderers. This murder is not without consequences for Macbeth. Each time that he stands up to give a toast to the noblemen while at the same time pretentiously regretting Banquo's absence, the latter's ghost appears and troubles him. As he tries to sit down, he notices that his seat is occupied. He addresses the ghost which none but him sees: "Thou canst not say, I did it./ Never shake thy gory locks at me!" (3.4.51-52). The ghost, which Macbeth claims to see, embodies the perils of the psyche; it symbolizes the detached soul of the tragic hero, which now threatens his personality (Aronson 101-02).

The appearance of Banquo's ghost before Macbeth is, in part, indicative of a feeling of guilt on Macbeth's part, and his growing sense of fear and insecurity. Macbeth is also portrayed as the victim of a fevered brain. The noblemen question his behaviour and his wife spontaneously makes excuses for him, claiming that since childhood, he has been suffering from a fit. She cautions the guests at his coronation not to pay attention to him because he would get enraged. This incident reveals Macbeth's emotional and weak-willed nature. His mind is not yet hardened enough to conceal his role in the death of Banquo. As a result, he is driven into uttering these incriminatory words towards the ghost:

Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth
hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes. (3.4.94-97)

If these words do not confirm, before the noblemen, his responsibility in the death of Banquo, it is because of the extraordinary work done by Lady Macbeth in shifting attention from him by appealing to the noblemen to disregard Macbeth's strange behaviour.

Macbeth's killing of Duncan can, according to the protagonist, be attributed to the witches that entice him into evil by deceiving him about what the future holds. Even one of the witches is conscious of Macbeth's lack of will when she later refers to him as "wayward" (3.5.11). Indeed, from the time when the thought of murder first forces its way into his consciousness, Macbeth moves almost continuously in a state of nervous tension, a state in which a very palpable obscurity is suddenly and unexpectedly shot through by strange revelations and terrifying illuminations of feeling (Traversi 156). His

forsaken virtue fills him with fear and makes him conscious of his guilt; it presents to his view a dagger in the air leading him to Duncan. Bradley's opinion on the witches is telling:

The witches and their prophecies, if they are to be rationalised or taken symbolically, must represent not only the evil slumbering in the hero's soul, but all those obscurer influences of the evil around him in the world which aid his own ambition and the incitements of his wife. (291)

According to T. McAlindon, the witches play on Macbeth's two-fold nature, ensnaring him "in doubleness, and projecting him unrestrained into a realm of multiplying villainy" (204). In other words, the weird sisters appear to be the dramatic manifestation of the bipolar forces of conscience and evil, loyalty and ambition which are plaguing Macbeth.

Evidently, the weird sisters are important in that they enable us to probe Macbeth's vaulting ambition. The suggestion that he harbours vaulting ambition is sanctioned by the fact while Banquo was the first person to address the witches and should have been the one entreating them to stay on, Macbeth, at this moment, takes the offensive. He is the first to express regret at their disappearance: "Would they had stayed" (1.3.83). When news is brought of his being made Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth utters to himself: "The greatest is behind" (1.3.119). Although the witches cannot compel Macbeth's will to evil, they arouse his passion by whetting his desire for power and glory, much as anything we perceive superstitiously arouses passion we already have. Their dramatic function is to challenge us to appreciate the moral or emotional nature of Macbeth. According to H.B. Charlton, the witches constitute the malevolence of the world; their roaming in darkness or in thunder is an attempt to fuse the natural and the

supernatural worlds (145). Stated differently, they represent supernatural devices that humans use when they attempt to understand their fate.

Against a background of thunder and lightning, three witches appear and arrange to meet Macbeth when the battle involving Macbeth and some rebellious Norwegians will be over. Their talk of meeting “In thunder, lightning, or in rain?” (1.1.2) apparently suggests evil that they embody, which already sets the tone of the tragedy. They admit that “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.11); therefore, evil can represent itself in all guises. The fact that the witches are three in number appears to be a parody of three as a magical number. In fact, Shakespeare seems to exploit the incantatory nature of the number three as evidenced in Macbeth recruiting three murderers to kill Banquo; the Porter envisions three sinners in Hell; there are three displays by the witches before Macbeth; and they intervene three times in the course of the action as though to tickle his ambition, fulfil it, and then ensure his downfall.

Again, the three witches meet upon the heath and discuss what they have been doing. One of them complains about a sailor’s wife who refused her chestnuts, and she intends to transform into an animal and punish the lady’s husband. With the help of others, she pledges to tempest-toss the sailor: “I’ll thither sail, / And like a rat without tail, / I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do” (1.3.9-11). The supernatural power wielded by these weird sisters seems glaring in these words which, though primarily focused on the sailor, portray the witches as a chorus in the play as they relate information about what will happen to Macbeth in terms of his scorning of fate, for example. The weird sisters appear capable of anything as one of them displays a pilot’s thumb in her possession. The

symbolism of their cauldron lies in the ability to project a magical future for Macbeth, which will also result in his doom (Favila 17). They conduct a weird dance and as their charm is ready for action, Macbeth and Banquo confront them. Macbeth's initial comment captures the atmosphere of uncertainty and unnaturalness in which Scotland is enveloped: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.39).

Indeed, the witches appear to arouse an eerie feeling in the beholder, as noted in Banquo's words:

What are these,
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,
And yet are on't?--Live you? Or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. (1.3.40-46)

Turning to Macbeth, they greet him as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and that he shall be king hereafter (1.3.48-50). Are the witches simply predicting the future, or are they, like Lady Macbeth, exciting Macbeth towards kingship? Whatever the case, their ability to read the future appears undoubted; even Banquo shares this line of thought:

I'th' name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope
That he seems rapt withal. To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate. (1.3.53-62)

Upon stating that although Banquo is currently inferior to Macbeth in social status, but he shall ultimately be father to a line of kings (1.3.66-69), they vanish, keeping their

interlocutors anxious. The witches can be seen as incarnations of evil in the universe because their nature is not defined. Hazlitt considers them hags of mischief, panders to iniquity, “malicious from their impotence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences” (189).

The prophecy of thanehood and kingship for Macbeth by the witches soon becomes true when Rosse and Angus greet Macbeth with the new title of Thane of Cawdor. Although the audience is already aware that Macbeth is Cawdor, so surprised are Macbeth and Banquo that the latter asks: “What, can the devil speak true?” (1.3.109). While, on the one hand, Banquo sees the weird sisters as evil forces that encourage humans to pursue evil: “And oftentimes to win us to our harm,/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us with honest trifles, to betray’ s/ In deepest consequence” (1.3.125-128), Macbeth, on the other, admits their supernatural constitution, and debates on the sincerity of their prophecy:

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not. (1.3.133-145)

The thought of kingship agitates him and he wonders how this prediction can be accomplished without him influencing it foully. The above speech also indicates how

Macbeth's conscience is at war with the evil thought of murder, unlike Banquo who decidedly dismisses the witches as agents of evil and destruction.

However, upon reading Macbeth's letter about his encounter with the supernatural creatures, Lady Macbeth starts nursing prospects of becoming queen. In order to achieve her dream, Duncan must be killed; she sees the croaking of the raven as a bad omen for Duncan: "The raven himself is hoarse/ That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan/ Under my battlements" (1.5.37-39). Ultimately, when Macbeth is killing Duncan, an owl shrieks and crickets shrill; Shakespeare appears to use these happenings for the *mise-en-scène* effect. Moreover, Lenox complains about the unusual events of the night: chimneys are destroyed, strange cries of death in the air, an owl wails, and the earth trembles. Indeed, the murder of a king is an act of high treason and the result could be complete chaos because God's representative on earth has been eliminated. Consequently, nature appears aware about this appalling deed.

Shakespeare has Rosse and Old man comment on the supernatural happenings in the night of the king's death, indicating how he uses supernatural devices for dramatic effect. For one, Old man, there is a strong association between the death of a falcon at the hands of an owl and the misfortune within the kingdom. For the other, Rosse, the strange behaviour of the king's horses suggests evil for the monarch. Both of these men find it strange that a falcon is killed by an owl and envisage disaster to Scotland in the light of the unusual behaviour of the king's horses:

And Duncan's horses—a thing most strange and certain! —
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,

Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would
Make war with mankind. (2.4.14-17)

These horses later eat each other. These strange occurrences, in the eyes of the characters, invariably point to the murder of the king. It would seem that the death of an important person like a king is foreshadowed by the cosmic disorder that comes from disorder within the kingdom.

In another domain, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a personification of a witch, a force apparently more ineluctable than the witches themselves:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (1.7.54-58)

In trying to prove himself a man, as demanded by Lady Macbeth, Macbeth severs himself from the feminine within his own nature, the sacred taboo of pity and trust (Davies 169-70). In fact, if the witches are metaphorical representations of Macbeth's internal dilemma as his mind battles between good and evil, Lady Macbeth seems to be an outward display of his mind:

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both. (1.7.48-52)

Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth's resolve to kill Duncan, asking why he wrote her the letter about meeting the witches. Her taunts on Macbeth's bravery and commitment seem to symbolize his conscience wrestling with his ambition and selfishness. Thus, the play,

Macbeth, in the words of Arthur Sewall, is not only about doubt or indecision; it is also about those ineluctable processes which follow decision (106).

Macbeth's situation is further compounded by the attitude of Lady Macbeth, who appears to be somehow in league with evil and Macbeth its agent, persuading him to sacrifice his conscience for her ambition to become queen. She is resolved to do whatever shall ensure the power and monopoly of kingship. She thinks of Duncan's death as a heroic action: "This night's great business" (1.5.66), and ignores the cruelty of the deed. When she proposes to make drunk the chamberlains and to smear their swords with blood so that suspicion of the murder should be shifted to them, Macbeth appears compelled to endorse evil. His will, according to Walter Curry, is distracted by the inordinate passions of courage and resolve which she arouses in him and is thus encouraged to approve the decision to kill Duncan (119).

Later, Macbeth exposes his whetted ambition when he harps on the imperial idea, debating on the honesty of the prophecy. It is obvious that the witches are simply metaphorical representations of the mind of Macbeth, exteriorizing his ambition and fears about the successful murder of Duncan. Thus, the witches' prophecy ties in with the Renaissance theory of witchcraft that it serves the interest of Satan and evil doers. As a result, Macbeth perceives Malcolm's appointment as heir as a hindrance to his ambition of becoming king, and he begins to nurse evil thoughts:

The Prince of Cumberland!- That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires. (1.4.49-52)

In fact, the influence of the supernatural clearly exposes Macbeth's inquisitive and ambitious mind. Bradley intimates that the prophecies of the witches may be dangerously tempting to Macbeth, but the hero is not under the compulsion to accept them (257). In other words, according to Dieter Mehl, the witches can suggest, not direct, and they do not directly circumscribe the freedom of their chosen victim (109). Thus, Macbeth is mainly responsible for his fate.

Overcome by a feeling of insecurity and despite his elimination of threats to his kingship in the person of Banquo, Macbeth decides to consult the witches. Before he undertakes this journey, the leading witch is aware of his coming. She pledges to use her supernatural power to draw him to confusion; she will make him "spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/ His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear" (3.5.30-31). As earlier mentioned, the bubbling cauldron of the witches could represent Macbeth's psyche in the sense that some of its animal items could be associated with his state of mind. For example, "tooth of wolf" and "tiger's chawdron" (4.1.22; 4.1.33) may symbolize his ambition for power. Moreover, Macbeth counts seriously on the witches' prophecy that none of woman born shall harm him. He is rationalizing to justify his own acts. However, in that old Ralph Waldo Emerson formulation, events are in the saddle and riding him.

Nevertheless, Macbeth is mainly the architect of his destruction. Talking in relation to this, J.M. Murry states that "Macbeth makes no bargain with the emissaries of the powers of darkness; nor are they bargainable" (326). The witches never cease to work in the world around Macbeth and, on the instant of his surrender to them, entangle him inextricably in the web of fate (Bradley 292). Even though the witches may not be the

cause of destruction and suffering, they seem to relish them. In other words, as Bernard McElroy aptly says, the witches are not there to make wounds, but to rub salt in them and delight in the pain that ensues (214).

Moreover, Shakespeare uses the weird sisters to indicate the cause-effect relationship as seen in the idea that Macbeth's nefarious intentions are anticipated; his visit to the witches appears, to us, to be symbolized by unusual pains in their bodies. According to Macbeth, the ability of the witches to prognosticate events cannot be disputed, hence his recourse to them in order to know his future:

Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the churches, though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up,
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,
Though castles topple on their warders' heads,
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure
Of nature's germens tumble all together
Even till destruction sicken, answer me
To what I ask you. (4.1.52-60)

When he questions them about what the future has in store for him, several apparitions are displayed before him. The first, an armed head, probably represents his own head that shall be cut off by Macduff; the second, a bloody child, could stand for baby Macduff and the message it carries is that "none of woman born/ shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.80); the third, a crowned child with a tree in his hand, bears the statement that Macbeth shall never be defeated until Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane; there is a show of eight kings, the last carries a mirror in his hand in which Banquo's ghost is reflected meaning that King James' descendants would be kings. Besides the point that Shakespeare uses the supernatural in this instance to anticipate the actions of Macbeth, the dramatist also

indicates how Macbeth now is the person ordering the witches around, and should be seen as the architect of his downfall.

Interestingly, the displays of the weird sisters appear revelatory. These spirits seem to predict the future in metaphorical terms, but Macbeth reads the message from a literal viewpoint. He blindly accepts his invincibility considering that it is rare to find two forests moving towards each other, or to see people that have not been born by women. Put differently, this shows Macbeth's arrogance, thinking that he knows all and commands the witches rather than the other way round. Upon disappearing, these supernatural creatures keep Macbeth more perplexed; he had come to know his future, but he ends up bewildered. He wonders whether he is dreaming, or had actually seen them. Turning to Lennox, Macbeth asks: "Saw you the weird sisters?" (4.1.136). He seems frustrated and resolves to embark on the complete elimination of his enemies in order to assure his security. To match words with action, he attacks the Macduff family in order to affirm his independence from the witches and assume responsibility for his fate. At this juncture, Macbeth's actions indicate that he does not need external forces like the witches or Lady Macbeth to influence his decisions: "From this moment/ The very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The firstlings of my hand" (4.1.146-148).

Granted that, according to Bradley, the witches are nothing but women, their possession of supernatural powers makes them extraordinary. Thus, they could invoke hail, tempests, bad weather, lightning and thunder; they can move from place to place while maintaining their invisibility; they can keep devils and spirits in the likeness of toads and cats; they can transfer corn in the blade from one place to another; and they can

“manifest unto others things hidden and lost, and foreshew things to come, and see them as though they were present” (255-56). In fact, the witches set the tone of the play, or are a dramatic device used by Shakespeare to illustrate character. They can be perceived as a physical symbol of the evil dominant in the play, showing that the evil therein will be of a terrible sort (Stephen and Franks 63).

In fact, the supernatural is used by Shakespeare in *Macbeth* to explain Macbeth’s fate allegorically. According to G. Wilson Knight in *The Wheel of Fire*, the symbolism of the witches lies in the fact that they are not evil or good; neither beautiful nor ugly. They are independent entities, objectively conceived, and do not seem the subjective effect of the evil in Macbeth’s mind (157). As a result, Shakespeare uses the witches to essentially play out the inner mind of Macbeth as it grapples with issues of power, ambition and evil. However, inspired by the argument of Charles Lamb in “Specimens of Early Dramatic Poetry” about the role of the witches in *Macbeth*, Hazlitt avers that they are instrumental to Macbeth’s behaviour in that he is mesmerized upon beholding them. They seem to swear his destiny with their prophetic words, which he finds difficult to ignore. The fact that these weird sisters are childless, are not descended from any parent, and, with the exception of Hecate, anonymous heightens their mysteriousness (194).

Julius Caesar

Hazlitt’s appreciation of the witches as all powerful does not exonerate Macbeth from blame for initiating his downfall by embracing ambition and evil, in the same way as Julius Caesar owes his downfall essentially to his failings. Caesar’s power in *Julius*

Caesar appears extraordinary; his greatness makes us league him with celestial powers. This can be seen in the manner in which he revenges on his murderers, apparently destroying all of them, long after he is dead. Moreover, the great comet, which had brightly shone for a week immediately after Caesar was assassinated, suddenly disappears on the eighth night. These supernatural devices, along with others such as dreams and ghosts, are attempts by Shakespeare to explore the human mind against the backdrop of external forces, indicating how outside factors enable us to better appreciate the downfall of his protagonists.

Although Caesar tends to ignore the symbolism of dreams or signs, he partakes of certain rituals like the feast of Lupercal, in which he instructs his wife to stand in the way of Antony in order to be cured of infertility. Given that we can sense malicious character without the supernatural, it is understandable why Caesar associates Cassius' lean appearance with discontent and evil. Furthermore, Caesar expresses his suspicions about Cassius' diabolical intent, indicating Caesar's vigilant and critical mind: "Let me have men [sic] about me that are fat,/ Sleek-headed men [sic] and such as sleep o' nights./ Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look,/ He thinks too much. Such men [sic] are dangerous" (1.2.192-195). Caesar will even complain about the fact that Cassius reads much; is a great observer of things; has a deep knowledge of people; does not love music and plays; smiles in a scornful manner; and seems uneasy when he beholds people who are greater than himself (1.2.200-210). Caesar will also ignore the warning from a soothsayer about impending danger to his life: "Beware the Ides of March!" (1.2.18). It seems that with the aid of supernatural agency, the soothsayer is aware that Caesar will

be killed on March 15. Unfortunately, Caesar brushes aside all these warnings because of his pride and belief that he is beyond an individual's control.

In fact, besides the diviner, an unnatural force seems to forewarn Caesar about the danger to his life, but he undermines it, showing how he, like Macbeth, thinks that he can control his fate. Evidently, Caesar appears to be guided by his sense of pride, which is played upon by Decius, Cassius and other conspirators, who extol his greatness while, at the same time, ridiculing the belief in the supernatural. As Caesar rides on the crest of power, he is blinded by his invincibility just like Macbeth's assurance in the witches' prophecies that none of woman born can hurt him and that he cannot be defeated until Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane. The portents that prefigure Caesar's assassination are used to show his arrogance—how convinced he is of his own invincibility.

Throughout the play, Caesar's interactions with supernatural forces like Calphurnia's dream, earth tremors and augury attest to his pride and belief in his invulnerability, something that makes him boast that

Cowards die many times before their deaths,
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come. (2.2.32-37)

As the great warrior that he is, Caesar thinks that he is above fear and dismisses outright the warning that he stay at home on the Ides of March. Like Cassius, he seems to agree that humans are responsible for their destinies and should not be guided by supernatural forces. Caesar, though, does not heed the omens because he considers himself above them by virtue of his office. In other words, although as a human being he is liable to the

dangers which are common to mortality, as a sovereign ruler, he considers himself above other humans (Peterson 25).

However, dreams, according to the Renaissance, were natural, divinely inspired, or diabolical. Their origin could be traced to the consciousness of individuals or external sources. After all, the Renaissance person tended to believe that spirits existed, and these affected his or her universe in storms and dreams; he or she knew that dreams were a method of communication between the world in which he/she lived and the world in which spirits lived (Mandel 63). It is questionable whether, had Caesar paid attention to the strange occurrences or, rather, if he had been less arrogant, he could have avoided his fate. He seems unaware that unnatural happenings like horses eating each other, the groaning of dead people, or the shrieking of owls that precede his assassination are, according to Dieter Mehl, in the tradition of foreboding and mirror the character of the conspiracy and its fatal consequences (139). All in all, Shakespeare's use of the supernatural in this play illustrates the boldness and pride of the tragic hero. As the conspiracy of Brutus, Cassius and others mounts against Caesar, the latter constantly indulges in his super-ego, not the ego, thereby making himself vulnerable to the conspiracy. In fact, his super-ego appears dissociated from the ego or reality (Wilkinson 74).

According to Arthos, *Julius Caesar*, for the most part, insists on the mysterious and enigmatic. Signs and warnings are continuously played out before us, compelling us to discover "if the sense of supernatural agency is indeed giving us a light to see by" (130). In terms of prophecies and signs, Caesar's tragic fate bears some similarities with

that of Macbeth. However, unlike Macbeth, who takes the supernatural seriously, Caesar tends to ignore it. Like Caesar, Macbeth expresses his recognition of his own flaw, in the second half of the play, in trusting his reason since the witches spoke in a “double sense.” He thought that he knew what the witches said and even commanded them, an arrogance that led to his downfall. His arrogance is manifest, for example, when he believes in the witches’ prophecies that nobody born of woman can hurt him. However, his moment of anagnorisis is seen in his remark about the witches: “And be these juggling fiends no more believed,/ That palter with us in a double sense” (5.8.19-20).

However, with the exception of the feast of Lupercal, Caesar’s arrogance towards the supernatural appears consistent. His disregard for dreams: “For these predictions/ Are to the world in general, as to Caesar” (2.2.28-29) and other signs like earth tremors that, in the eyes of some characters like Calphurnia and Casca, possibly foreshadow his death reiterate his pride and intransigence. He compares himself to danger and concludes that since he is stronger, he is invincible. Caesar superciliously believes that he is above supernatural beliefs. The difference between him and Cassius, for example, who insists on the idea that people control their destinies rather than fate being in charge, is that while Cassius tends to disapprove of superstition, Caesar just thinks that he is above it.

Moreover, the strange events in the night of Caesar’s killing, as recounted by Casca to Cicero, is an overt device to show that something is brewing in the state:

Are not you moved, when all the sway of earth
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,
I have seen tempests when the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen
Th’ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,
To be exalted with the threatening clouds.

But never till tonight, never till now,
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,
Or else the world, two saucy with the gods,
Incenses them to send destruction. (1.3.3-13)

In the light of these happenings, Casca advises that it is logical for humans to be fearful. However, diabolical Cassius gives a tendentious explanation to these signs. First, he rebukes Casca for misinterpreting these omens. He states that the heavens have infused birds, beasts and fires with spirits to make them “instruments of fear and warning/ Unto some monstrous state” (1.3.71-72). According to him, these strange events are a warning to Rome that one individual has grown too powerful. He questions why Caesar should be a tyrant; after all, he argues, the Romans have made themselves willing slaves. He pretentiously regrets unpacking his mind before Casca and gets the desired result when the latter pledges his support to the conspiracy. Cassius envisions the plot against Caesar simply as an act of “honourable-dangerous consequence” (1.3.125). He views the feverish night as a reflection of the delicate plot they are nursing. Thus, Shakespeare uses the supernatural as a foreshadowing device with regard to the conspiracy against Caesar.

Against a background of thunder and lightning that possibly suggest impending disaster, Caesar makes this comment: “Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight./ Thrice hath Calphurnia in her sleep cried out,/ “Help, ho! They murder Caesar!”” (2.2.1-3). Calphurnia pleads in vain with Caesar not to step outside the next day because of her frightful dream. Again, the strange things that the watchmen saw like a lioness screaming in the streets, graves opening up and throwing out the dead, fierce warriors fighting upon clouds, horses neighing and eating up each other, and ghosts shrieking and squealing

about the streets (2.2.13-25) seem to augur, according to some Elizabethans, misfortune for Caesar.

As a result, Calphurnia somehow alludes to the assassination of Caesar when she states that: “When beggars die, there are no comets seen./ The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes” (2.2.30-31). Based on these happenings, Caesar’s death, according to Calphurnia, appears imminent. Yet, he refuses to heed this warning, claiming that these predictions are to the world in general as they may relate to him (2.2.28-29). In other words, Caesar claims to be above humanly fears. He blocks his mind even to his wife’s opinion that these unusual events always accompany the death of an important person. In addition, he is deaf to the fears of the augurers who, unable to find a heart in a sacrificial animal, attempt to dissuade him from undertaking the perilous journey to the capitol.

In fact, the absence of a heart in one of the sacrificial animals, according to Roman augury, seems to represent death to Caesar: “They would not have you stir forth today/ Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,/ They could not find a heart within the beast” (2.2.38-40). Unfortunately, Caesar considers himself invincible, convinced that the gods’ prediction is simply done to make cowards feel ashamed: “The gods do this in shame of cowardice” (2.2.41). However, his overlooking of the symbolism of augury is in contrast to its significance to ordinary Romans who pay particular attention to the supernatural, one that is in consonance with the views of Rod Horton and Vincent Hopper about augury in terms of the belief in its ability to foretell events by “noting the

flights of birds, examining the entrails of sacrificial animals, or utilizing other occult means of divination” (190-91).

Therefore, as earlier stated, Calphurnia’s dream wherein she saw Caesar’s statue spouting blood is suggestive of his assassination. But the dishonest Decius distorts the interpretation of the dream:

This dream is all amiss interpreted,
It was a vision fair and fortunate.
Your statue spouting blood in many pipes,
In which so many smiling Romans bathed,
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.
(2.2.83-89)

It is interesting to note that although Decius says this simply to persuade Caesar to come and meet his death in the Capitol, there is some truth in this exegesis in that Mark Antony’s funeral speech will excite mourners to get relics of Caesar. In this instance, Shakespeare exemplifies how characters can interpret omens to fit their own wishes. Decius adds that it would be ridiculous if senators were to postpone the coronation of Caesar just because Calphurnia has had a bad dream. He flatters Caesar about the latter’s fearlessness and Caesar, in turn, ignores his wife’s dream by resolving to go to the Capitol. Commenting on the significance of the events on the night of Caesar’s assassination, T. McAlindon opines that the portentous upheavals “provide a vividly coloured backdrop to the human transformations which constitute the fabric of the drama” (93). In other words, the supernatural is seen as being in the service of humankind and not the other way round; its fundamental role can be said to articulate character.

Other signs that are used by Shakespeare to prefigure the death of Caesar include the letter from Artemidorus, in which he unequivocally states that if Caesar abides by its warning not to go to the Capitol, Caesar would be saved. However, if he ignores this letter, he would be doomed. Artemidorus' letter even identifies Brutus, Cassius, Casca, Trebonius, Decius Brutus, Metellus Cimber and Caius Ligarius as those plotting against Caesar's life (2.3.1-4). Unfortunately, the intrigues of Cassius and the conspirators in pooh-poohing the whole idea of violent storms and the nightmare of Calphurnia as being ominous coupled with Caesar's obstinacy frustrate the goodwill of benefactors such as diviners and Artemidorus, who establish some correlation between unnatural happenings and threats to Caesar's life. Nevertheless, immediately after Caesar is murdered, Mark Antony prophesies revenge on the conspirators, a prediction which, according to Mark Rose, makes one envisage the play's action as an attempt at exorcism that changes into conjuration, two rituals that are dangerously alike in that each involves the demonstration of power over spirits (235). This indicates the merging of human prediction and divine prophecy.

Marjorie Garber in "Dream and Interpretation: *Julius Caesar*" states that Shakespeare's audience would certainly have been familiar with the story of *Julius Caesar*, in which a collection of portents and premonitions would have seemed to them to be decidedly leading to the moment of murder. The play, according to her, is complex and ambiguous in its concern with the irrational powers that seem to control human life. Again and again, Shakespeare demonstrates in this play the symbolic power which resides in the dream, as it elucidates aspects of the play which otherwise might have been

obscured (226-229). Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar*, not only makes great use of the supernatural to anticipate events in the play, but essentially to amplify the arrogance of Caesar, a flaw that considerably accounts for his tragedy with the supernatural forces employed by the dramatist to instantiate the hero's character.

Hamlet

Hamlet, like *Julius Caesar*, portrays heroes who interrogate the effect of the supernatural in human activities with the difference that while Caesar tends to dismiss its credibility, Hamlet seems to be investigating its validity. The supernatural in *Hamlet*, amply illustrated by the presence of the ghost, not only probes into the circumstances surrounding the death of the late king, but also exposes the character of Hamlet. The ghost was a stock element of revenge tragedy; it represented a restless spirit appealing for vengeance against a person that had wronged it. Its purpose was to rouse its avenger into action in case of reluctance.

The ghost of Old Hamlet gives a "plausible" account for the death of the former king by revealing the machinations of Claudius against the departed king. In dramatic terms, the ghost is an external representation of Hamlet's interior suspicions. It considers Claudius a wretch "whose natural gifts were poor" (1.5.51), as compared with those of Old Hamlet. According to the ghost, the villainous Claudius stole himself to the departed king and poured some deadly poison into his ear. Thereafter, Claudius went about propagating the story that the former king was stung by a snake. The ghost regrets the fact that the killing took place in the bloom of sin, without the opportunity for repenting.

This explains the ghost's constant wandering on earth. Consequently, it calls on Hamlet to revenge this deed, ensuring that no harm befalls Gertrude; her conscience is supposed to be her judge even though the extent of her complicity in King Hamlet's death is unclear.

Maurice Francis Egan affirms that it is Hamlet's duty to obey the command from his father's spirit, represented in the ghost. According to Elizabethan ethics, Egan continues, Hamlet's struggle was one against duty, not a virtuous doubt as to whether it was right for him to destroy the evil Claudius. During this period, the family was duty-bound to exact revenge for private murders. However, Egan's insistence on the idea that Hamlet invariably had to abide by the ghost's message of revenge is questionable given the fact that Hamlet stages a play in order to determine Claudius' culpability in the death of the king. It is clear in the play that Hamlet does not know whether to believe the ghost or whether this is his own suspicion made manifest and has to be tested.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare, Egan insists, fills the ghost with so much pathos and nobility that it seems evident that the spirit speaks not to deceive (25). According to Marcellus: "We do it wrong, being so majestic,/ To offer it the show of violence" (1.1.143-144). Its previous appearances before Bernardo and Marcellus can be seen as attempts by the ghost to identify itself. Indeed, its beard and armour are reflective of those of the late king. In conclusion, the fact that the ghost makes four appearances before four witnesses is, according to John Dover Wilson in *What Happens in Hamlet*, an attempt to assure us about its objectivity (59). Through these multiple appearances of the

ghost, Shakespeare may have been preoccupied with exploring the various impressions and states of mind of his characters towards this phenomenon.

However, there were generally three schools of thought—Catholic, Protestant and Sceptical—in the 16th and 17th centuries concerning ghosts. Before the Reformation, there was little doubt about the existence of ghosts as most Catholic Christians, according to John Dover Wilson, “believed that ghosts might be spirits of the departed, allowed to return from Purgatory for some special purpose” (62). On their part, Protestants accepted the reality of apparitions, and used the bible to support their belief in the supernatural, citing, for example, the apparition of Samuel upon being conjured by the witch of Endor. Protestants argued that it was possible to associate spirits with departed people because dead people went either to heaven or to hell. Moreover, Protestants stated that although ghosts might be occasionally seen as angels, these spirits were often perceived as satanic because of their ability to instil fear and bodily harm in beholders. These different impressions about the ghost reflect the different views held by Elizabethans and Jacobean and even some of the characters in *Hamlet* about the supernatural. Therefore, Shakespeare exploited the variety of beliefs his audience held to lead them through an enquiry into Hamlet’s action.

Two types of ghosts, namely, the objective and the subjective, can be identified in Shakespearean drama. According to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, an example of an objective ghost is that of Old Hamlet. It presents itself to several people, particularly those that are within its vicinity. And when some characters such as Horatio doubt its authenticity, the ghost obligingly resurfaces to convince the unbeliever. A

subjective ghost is only visible to the beholder, the one with whom it is directly concerned (31). Such is the situation of Macbeth when he beholds the ghost of Banquo to the consternation of his guests. Similarly, Richard III is troubled in his sleep by the spirits of those that he slew. In the same vein, Brutus' eventual downfall is presaged by the ghost of Caesar that he sees prior to his death. What appears important, in my mind, about the ghost is not so much its objectivity, but its dramatic function in the play, or how Shakespeare uses it to explore human nature.

The double appearances of the ghost before Bernardo, Marcellus and others as they keep guard enable them to appraise its symbolism. First, they are overcome by fear as to the purpose of its visitations and, therefore, refer to it as a thing. Before the sceptical Horatio could dismiss stories of its appearance, it surfaces, taking the form of the late king. Horatio cannot hide his fear when he remarks concerning it that: "It harrows me with fear and wonder" (1.1.43). When he nerves himself and questions it about its nocturnal appearances, it disappears. He is, however, convinced that this ghost is that of the late king, considering the resemblance. Horatio maintains that this apparition may signify misfortune for Denmark; the feverish preparations for war and the general sense of uncertainty in the kingdom forebode evil:

Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war,
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week-
What might betoward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day? (1.1.71-78)

Horatio is convinced that the appearance of the ghost has far-reaching consequences for the state; he even establishes some relationship between it and the events leading to the murder of Caesar:

A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The grave stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets,
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun, and the moist star
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
And even the like precursor of fierce events,
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climatures and country men. (1.1.114-125)

On the strength of this argument, Denmark appears poised for disaster as Rome was at the time of Caesar's assassination. Horatio even contemplates crossing the path of the ghost, an act that was thought, by the Elizabethans, to bring evil to whoever attempted it. However, he refrains from interfering with it. These cosmic signs are a macrocosmic demonstration of the prominence of the late king.

Moreover, Horatio's scepticism towards the ghost of Old Hamlet recalls opinions of people like Reginald Scot who questioned the ability of spirits to take human forms. As earlier mentioned, Scot considered apparitions the products of melancholic minds. It would seem that through the opinions of Marcellus, Hamlet and Horatio, Shakespeare dramatizes different perceptions of ghosts in Elizabethan England. However, Stoll insists on the point that, far from being just allegorical or subjective, the ghosts of Elizabethan drama are purposeful; they serve to impel the action and influence it (Stoll 189). What is primordial about Shakespeare's incorporation of the supernatural in his drama is

essentially the idea of creating complex characters that continuously challenge our analyses of their actions and behaviour.

On his part, Hamlet subjects the ghost to interrogation after which he suspects some foul play in Claudius' rise to kingship, suspicion that breeds intense rivalry between him and Claudius, culminating in their deaths. His conversations with the ghost vindicate his suspicions about the diabolical nature of Claudius and make him question his views of life. However, the distrust of the message of the ghost causes Hamlet to seek other evidence in the form of an improvised play. Even with this new evidence, it would seem that the deaths of Claudius, Gertrude and others are indirect mischance and not the initiative of Hamlet.

Immediately after the ghost disappears, Hamlet shows some fortitude by affirming his disposition to implement its message:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter. (1.5.98-103)

However, his resolution begins to wane just when one thinks that he has made up his mind. In other words, no sooner has the ghost gone than he allows his reason to dog his action. It is difficult, as Roland Frye argues, to categorically state that Hamlet could either accept the ghost as real, or reject it as evil because Elizabethan attitudes were sophisticated or "too carefully balanced to allow of any unilateral judgment on this issue" (24). In fact, the ghost of Hamlet, like other Shakespearean ghosts, can be seen as a

“theatrical ectoplasm produced to make visible an otherwise invisible inner strife” (Flatter 156). As a result, Hamlet is perceived by Piotr Sadowski as an exostatic character, a behaviour that accounts for his idealism, unpredictability, juvenile antics and restless imagination and intellect. Exostatic individuals like Hamlet may manifest initial enthusiasm towards a goal: “Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift/ As meditation or the thoughts of love,/ May sweep to my revenge” (1.5.29-31), but that soon dissipates. As a person, Hamlet is always given to “exostatic posturing and moods whether on or off the stage” (109-11). Indeed, he indulges in acting in order to release his emotions.

In fact, Hamlet would be beleaguered by unpleasant consequences if he were to kill Claudius, a situation that contrasts sharply with the guile and machinations of Lady Macbeth as she encourages Macbeth to murder Duncan: “To beguile the time,/ Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,/ Your hand, your tongue. Look like th’innocent flower,/ But be the serpent under’t” (1.5.61-64). Quite different from the steadfastness of Lady Macbeth, Hamlet is torn between murdering Claudius and risking criminal persecution, and committing suicide thus putting into doubt his existence hereafter. Moreover, Hamlet argues that there could be life after death and, by taking away his own life, he could be exposed to the tortures of hell:

But that dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of? (3.1.78-82)

This superstitious pose of Hamlet reflects his philosophical bent of mind, which retards the killing of Claudius. Appreciating Hamlet's character, Sewell remarks that despite various explanations, he remains a puzzle; the entire play is not only a challenge to our psychological ingenuity, but also "a challenge to the faith we seek to live by. The puzzle and the explanation both lie in our common predicament; that action is imperative for man [sic], but that all action whatsoever involves man [sic] in evil" (57).

Hamlet appears to subscribe to the concept of Immanent Will, an overwhelming force that is believed to control all human actions reducing humankind to a pawn: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10). He comes to this realization when he escapes death in England through his forging of a royal letter that ordered his death. Fate appears to be on his side since he had a ring bearing the royal seal of Denmark. In other words, his innocence saved him. Thus, the play, *Hamlet*, helps to expose humankind's relationship with the outer world and, more importantly, reveal the inner mind through its interactions with external forces.

Old Hamlet's ghost, like the weird sisters of *Macbeth* and Caesar's ghost, hovers in the minds of the characters, helping to expose their thoughts in due process. The ghost appears to be more retrospective, as an external symbol for something lurking within Denmark. The ghost's presence on the stage is a manifestation of the suspicions many in Denmark already harbour and which initiate the action. To a certain extent, the downfall of Claudius and Gertrude, particularly the former, is due to his having committed murder and treason. At the same time, the various appearances of the ghost enable us to probe

Hamlet's character as he evolves from being doubtful, philosophical, fearful and anxious to being determined and revengeful.

Othello

The role of Old Hamlet's ghost in influencing action in *Hamlet* is primordial, almost like the effect of the handkerchief in the relationship between Othello and Desdemona. Unlike the indecisive Macbeth or the philosophical Hamlet, Othello is portrayed as resolute, as a hero whose military prowess and ability to win the love of Desdemona, especially in a predominantly racist Venice, make some people associate him with the extraordinary. Brabantio, for one, rejects the possibility of a natural affection between Othello and his daughter, Desdemona. He steadfastly holds to the belief that Othello charmed his innocent daughter: "Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;/ For I'll refer me to all things of sense,/ If she in chains of magic were not bound" (1.2.63-65). He appeals to our reason by arguing that only witchcraft could have prompted Desdemona, who despised marriage to the extent of shunning handsome young men in Venice, to run into the arms of Othello. Brabantio's ignorance of his daughter and towards the supernatural explanation of her relationship with Othello cannot be more evident.

According to Brabantio, the love relationship between Desdemona and Othello is, as earlier observed, the result of witchcraft, something which he denounces before Roderigo:

Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood

May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing. (1.1.170-172)

Of course, Roderigo accepts the charge of witchcraft on Othello not so much because he necessarily believes in it, but primarily to increase his chances of marrying Desdemona. In fact, Brabantio's refusal to sanction Desdemona's wedding to Othello exposes Brabantio as a blocking agent. Moreover, Brabantio warns Othello about Desdemona's disobedience towards him, an attitude which, according to Brabantio, would be manifested towards Othello: "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:/ She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.290-291). This hint at disloyalty takes a tragic twist over the missing handkerchief.

In a disarming manner, Othello seemingly accepts the charge of witchcraft against him by Brabantio, but begs the senate to be patient and listen to him talk of the drugs, charms and incantation which he used in seducing Desdemona. Almost relentlessly, Brabantio emphasizes the accusation of witchcraft against Othello by stressing the purity of his daughter:

I therefore vouch again
That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram, conjured to this effect,
He wrought upon her. (1.3.104-107)

In the eyes of Brabantio, it is foregone that only devilish practices on the part of Othello could make such an embodiment of perfection as Desdemona, as he claims, stray. More importantly, Brabantio's charge of witchcraft on Othello is undergirded by the former's surprise at Othello's power of persuasion.

Othello, then, informs the senate of how Desdemona loves him because of the interesting stories that he narrated to her, and he loves her because she pitied him. In other words, their love is reciprocal; or to borrow Othello's understatement, the stories constitute the witchcraft he used in winning Desdemona's affection. André Green aptly says that Othello possesses a particular charisma since the deeds of valour associated with his 'star' may indeed be imputed by some people to extra-terrestrial power (327), influence which appears to belie the symbolism of the handkerchief in the eyes of some of the characters.

Initially handed to Othello's mother by an Egyptian gypsy as something to use in retaining the love of her husband entirely to herself, the handkerchief is perceived, by Othello, as an object of charm:

'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love--but if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathed, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She dying gave it me
And bid me, when my fate would have me wived,
To give it her. I did so; and take heed on't,
Make it a darling like your precious eye. (3.4.58-64)

However, if it is lost, it would make Othello's mother sexually repulsive, turning her husband's attention to other women. As a result, she jealously guarded this handkerchief as a way of preventing any flirtatious behaviour on the part of her husband. Upon dying, she passed over the handkerchief to Othello in the wish that he could give it as a love present to his wife. Othello is, in turn, advised by his mother that if the handkerchief is lost or given away, he should expect disappointment in love. Thus, the handkerchief is dramatically significant to Othello in that it can bring about luck or misfortune to him.

When Desdemona complains to Emilia about the disappearance of her handkerchief, the latter feigns ignorance about its whereabouts. Desdemona is worried, but consoles herself that her husband is not jealous: “I think the sun where he was born/ Drew all such humours from him” (3.4.26). It is worth noting that there was belief among some Elizabethans that body fluids such as blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy were assumed to determine a person’s temperament. Unfortunately, Desdemona overlooks this association between character and humours. Indeed, Othello’s behaviour and actions appear to betray an imbalance of blood and choler, making him susceptible to sudden fits of anger and impulsiveness, like when he swears to kill Desdemona immediately after Iago tells him about Cassio’s apparent admission of love to Desdemona in a dream (3.3.447-449), or when he strikes Desdemona in public (4.1.232).

As a love token given by Othello to Desdemona, the handkerchief symbolizes more than faithfulness. It is supposed to endear Desdemona to Othello, provided that she does not misplace it. Unfortunately, Iago instructs Emilia to steal the handkerchief, intending to use it to taint Desdemona in the eyes of Othello. The significance of the handkerchief is avowed by Emilia, who says that Desdemona jealously guards it, kissing and talking to it frequently as representative of the love of Othello.

The inability of Desdemona to provide the handkerchief when it is requested by Othello means, in the latter’s eyes, betrayal of love on her part. Moreover, when Othello tells her about the symbolism of the handkerchief, this object is now perceived by Desdemona as an ominous sign. While she is stunned by the mysterious nature of the handkerchief, Othello gives a harrowing talk about it, commenting on the fact that it was

magically designed by a sibyl, hallowed with worms, and “dyed in mummy, which the skillful/ Conserved of maidens’ hearts” (3.4.72-73). Therefore, the loss of the handkerchief suggests, to Othello, her infidelity.

Furthermore, Othello’s overtly active interpretation of signs makes him associate Desdemona’s moist hand with infidelity. This is mainly because Othello’s suspicions of Desdemona’s unfaithfulness are exacerbated by Iago in such a way that he turns to supernatural interpretation of signs. Commenting on her hand, he states that it “argues fruitfulness and liberal heart:/ Hot, hot and moist!” (3.4.36-37). As a result, according to Othello, she needs constant fasting and prayer to atone for her apparent unfaithfulness.

In addition, some Elizabethans believed that the moon had baneful effects on the human mind. The following remark on an impending eclipse of the moon by the increasingly superstitious Othello suggests that his relationship with Desdemona is inexorably poised to disaster: “Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse/ Of sun and moon, and that th’affrighted globe” (5.2.101-102). This is also a return to the cosmic disorder in the Chain of Being reflecting the disorder in the human mind.

If note is taken of Othello’s words about the significance of the handkerchief, it is increasingly clear that his relationship with Desdemona is decidedly moving towards disaster since, as pointed out by him in relation to the handkerchief, “To lose’t or give’t away were such perdition/ As nothing else could match” (3.4.66-67). As misfortune looms over her head, Desdemona regrets having seen the handkerchief: “Then would to God that I had never seen’t!” (3.4.76), and is forced to lie that it is not missing in order to mitigate his emotions. Unfortunately for her, the more she importunes him for Cassio’s

reinstatement, the more compelling the need for the handkerchief. It is as if its sudden reappearance would clear her of the charge of infidelity: “Sure, there’s some wonder in this handkerchief” (3.4.98). Her downfall with that of Othello appears, to a certain extent, to have been orchestrated by the ‘magical’ handkerchief, giving us the impression that this play suggests the working of a sometimes all-determining destiny and providence (Arthos 138). However important the role of the handkerchief is in Othello’s downfall, he is primarily responsible for his fate. He loses “faith” in Desdemona much as the world has lost trust in the divine order of the Chain of Being once the new science has disproven it.

Shakespeare’s use of the handkerchief is in response to the New Science of empiricism that claims we can only know something we can see and touch. This is why “ocular proof” (3.3.362) figures so prominently throughout the play. Othello does not suspect Desdemona’s infidelity only by the handkerchief—he is exasperated in the extreme by Iago’s suggestions about her unfaithfulness. It is just the one thing that pushes him over the edge as the “real proof.” Hence, he is one who “loved not wisely, but too well” (5.2.343). Shakespeare, in part, is using the play to say that we cannot only trust in empirical senses (the handkerchief), but must have faith in each other as well. Othello’s *harmatia* is that he thinks he can judge truth from opinion, when it is the latter that blinds him.

In a sense, Shakespeare embeds supernatural devices like ghosts, witches, augury, portents, signs and others in his tragedies not simply as gratuitous concessions to the popular demand for the sensational, but fundamentally, as metaphorical representations

of the states of mind of his tragic heroes. Besides the fact that these symbolic representations are a dramatic technique to explore human nature and to sanction behaviour is the awareness that Shakespeare sometimes uses this device to anticipate action in his plays. While Shakespeare employs more of ghosts, witches, dreams and omens to signify the crises confronting his heroes, Achebe, as I shall show in the following chapter, draws more upon traditional Igbo beliefs, gods and goddesses in his characterization.

CHAPTER FOUR

ACHEBE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The Supernatural and Character

Somehow similar to the behaviour of Shakespeare's tragic heroes like Macbeth, Othello and others, the actions of Achebe's protagonists—Okonkwo, Ezeulu, Obi Okonkwo and others— appear to be modulated by supernatural features. It would seem that Achebe constructs his novels against a backdrop of multifarious cultural beliefs and practices which impinge on the behaviour and actions of his characters, making it questionable to discuss the novels in isolation from the culture and history that inform them. This is because the realm of the supernatural appears to be linked to that of reality in his novels, something which problematizes meaning in the works. For example, while Okonkwo's death could be explained as a result of suicide or his awareness that his society does not share his approach to violence as a way to chase away the white colonizers, it is still possible to trace Okonkwo's downfall to his non-respect of traditional Igbo ethos like refraining from being party to the death of somehow filial relations like Ikemefuna, without ignoring the part played by colonialism and Christianity towards his fall. Nonetheless, the mystically minded African holds that not everything may be explained rationally. Indeed, there are ancestors, spirits, gods and goddesses believed to influence the affairs of the living, as well as natural laws which, when violated, could trigger punitive responses from the spiritual world (Ojaide 47).

Understandably so because in traditional Igbo thought, nothing exists in its own terms, and wherever something exists, “there will always be a complementary or opposing force beside it” (Whittaker and Msiska 28).

Emphasizing the significance of the supernatural within the socio-historical context of Achebe’s writings, Kalu Ogbaa avers that an awareness of the Igbo cosmology is indispensable in the understanding of Achebe’s characters. This knowledge, according to Ogbaa, enables readers

to gain useful insights into what informs and shapes the world-view, moral code and ethics of the characters in the novels: namely, the relation of man [sic] to other creatures or forces in the universe, to his [sic] fellow men [sic], and to the supernatural force behind all creations, variously called cosmic force, God, or as in the case of the Igbo people, *Chukwu* or *Chineke*. (9)

In this way, the reader can better appreciate the actions of the characters and the choices that they make; he or she can also analyze their downfall while taking into consideration the social and historical milieus that inform their behaviour.

In fact, the novels of Achebe often portray heroes bedevilled by not only their minds, but also by external forces that, more often than not, are not in consonance with their thinking. Although Alastair Niven argues that Achebe’s fiction demonstrates an essentially tragic picture of human action in a way that the pattern of destiny cannot be easily understood or determined (45), at times, there are signs forewarning Achebe’s tragic heroes about the outcome of their actions, but the heroes, out of volition, choose to ignore some of these signs. As a result, the heroes must assume responsibility for their downfall rather than blame only external forces. The fates of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for example, seem to indicate how these characters ignore apparent signs or symbols that

point to their fall. The heroes are constantly challenged to reconcile at times discordant opinions on different lines of action, and it is their ability to rise up in the face of bewildering circumstances that engages our sympathy and/or admiration. Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for example, are always enjoined to resolve the puzzle between the inner voice and external interventions in the forms of oracles or gods/goddesses. It is a technique used by Achebe to foreground the idea that despite the apparent intrusion of supernatural forces in the action, the protagonists still exercise freewill in their choices.

Arrow of God, for example, is the story of a somehow headstrong priest who is confronted by the struggle for supremacy between tradition and Christianity in his native clan. Acting on his instinct for survival against a foreign way of life, Ezeulu sends his son, Oduche, to the new school to embrace the virtues of this new dispensation. In doing so, he alienates himself from his people who now see him as flirting with the colonial administration. A feeling of suspicion is bred between Ezeulu and his compatriots culminating in the collapse of the priest's authority and the birth of Christianity that progressively wins more followers from the hitherto traditional society. Throughout this altercation between tradition and the twin forces of Christianity and colonial administration, Ezeulu claims to have been guided by the god, *Ulu*, and not by grudges nursed by himself against his people.

As chief priest of the six villages of Umuaro, Ezeulu enjoys considerable respect within this traditional society to the extent that his leadership acumen is perceived within this clan not as a result of his making, but as that of a supernatural force. We are told concerning Ezeulu: "It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves

and for the New Yam Festival; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his” (3).

Although he is humble enough to admit that he is simply a messenger of the gods/goddesses, his people perceive him as being extraordinary because of his challenging function of priesthood, one that insinuates interaction between human beings and spirits. Within the same logic of associating Ezeulu with the god, *Ulu*, some people in Umuaro believe that the priest’s relationship with supernatural beings accords him a particular prescience of mind, one that enables him to appreciate complex issues. As evidence of Ezeulu’s uncanny prescience of mind, while many Umuaro people blame Akukalia’s death in the Umuaro-Okperi War on the god, *Ekwensu*, Ezeulu holds that the deceased is responsible for his misfortune. Precisely, according to Ezeulu, Akukalia had refused to listen to his *chi* or personal god by refraining from destroying Ebo’s *ikenga* or ancestral emblem, and thus brought about his death.

Moreover, Ezeulu is not a person like any other in Umuaro. By virtue of the fact that he is the custodian of *Ulu*, one half of him is human and the other half believed by his comrades to be spirit, hence the paradox of his being known and unknowable. It is, as Jonathan Peters points out, this unknown quantity in him that helps make his actions, even when they seem inconsistent and on the verge of madness, largely inscrutable and incontestable (120). For instance, his exhaustion after the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves is attributed within Umuaro not to strenuous dancing and old age, but to the gravity of the sins that he trampled upon. Ezeulu’s supernatural abilities are also hinted at in this authorial remark: “For who could trample the sins and abominations of all Umuaro into

the dust and not bleed in the feet? Not even a priest as powerful as Ezeulu could hope to do that” (87). Thus, external forces in the form of gods/goddesses are believed to intervene in human endeavours, although it could still be argued that Achebe employs the supernatural to explore human weaknesses like pride, vindictiveness and others. Put differently, even though there is insistence, by traditional Igbos, on the idea of *chi* (pre)determining a person’s fate, an individual is said to be still capable of imposing his/her will on life. In this regard, commenting on the fate of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe points out: “But it was not true that Okonkwo’s palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky” (21).

In fact, when Ezeulu rebuffs his appointment by Captain Winterbottom as warrant chief, the district officer is astonished and orders his arrest, an incident that brings to the fore Ezeulu’s apparent supernatural qualities. The same day that Winterbottom signs a summons for Ezeulu’s arrest, the former slumps into delirium and speaks like a mad man. This is how Achebe describes the scene: “But on that very morning when two policemen set out to arrest Ezeulu in Umuaro Captain Winterbottom suddenly collapsed and went into a delirium” (150). The point here is to emphasize the greatness of Ezeulu and the authority which he enjoys among his compatriots. Winterbottom’s illness is dramatic and there is the belief within Umuaro that an invisible hand is behind it. If one reasons, like most people of Umuaro, that the priest is innocent and has the freedom to reject Winterbottom’s appointment, then injustice is done to him when the district officer plans

to detain him. Through Ezeulu, Umuaro insists, *Ulu* is probably seeking revenge on the white officer for attempting to humiliate its priest. According to John Nwodika, Ezeulu has made Winterbottom sick because of the former's unjust detention:

“Did I not say so?” he asked the other servants after their master had been removed to hospital. “Was it for nothing I refused to follow the policemen? I told them that the Chief Priest of Umuaro is not a soup you can lick in a hurry.” His voice carried a note of pride. “Our master thinks that because he is a white man [sic] medicine cannot touch him.” (155)

Moreover, Ezeulu's appraisal of Winterbottom's health belies the possibility that he may have hit him in retaliation: “If he is ill he will also be well” (157). As a result, Ezeulu's actions are perceived within Umuaro as having supernatural undertones. For example, the two policemen who are sent to arrest Ezeulu are intimidated by his apparent supernatural might as they seek assistance from a local *dibia*, who instructs them not to eat anything which they took from Umuaro. In this regard, Mathew Nweke, the police officer, is given some strong protective medicine by the *dibia* because Nweke is greatly afraid of Ezeulu's revenge. Talking about the extraordinary might of the chief priest, the medicine man informs Nweke thus: “You have done right to come straight to me because you indeed walked into the mouth of a leopard. But there is something bigger than a leopard. That is why I say welcome to you because you have reached the final refuge” (158). As a result, Nweke and his comrades provide two cocks for a sacrifice on their behalf. For what they had eaten in Umuaro, they are given, by the medicine man, some substance to drink and to pour in their bathing water. It is only after this intervention that Nweke and his friends can attempt to sleep comfortably. In fact, the manner in which the

characters react to the supernatural problematizes meaning in this novel considering the conflation of ideas from both Christian and traditional Igbo viewpoints.

Indeed, Ezeulu's esteem in Umuaro rises as long as Winterbottom is sick. This illness, according to several people in Okperi, is simply a warning to the district officer. After all, according to Nwodika, Ezeulu knew long ago about the failing health of Winterbottom. Therefore, Ezeulu is perceived within Okperi as a victim of Winterbottom's highhandedness and so the priest could justifiably torture the district commissioner supernaturally. Ezeulu's sarcastic statement about Winterbottom insinuates the priest's supernatural qualities: "I prefer to deal with a man [sic] who throws up a stone and puts his [sic] head to receive it not one who shouts for a fight but when it comes he [sic] trembles and passes premature shit" (178).

On his part, Winterbottom's health deteriorates as long as Ezeulu is incarcerated. As a consequence, the chief priest's reputation rises dramatically. After all, he

had done no harm to the white man and could justifiably hold up his *ofo* against him. In that position whatever Ezeulu did in retaliation was not only justified, it was bound by its merit to have potency . . . So he could not be blamed if he now hit back by destroying his enemy's sense or killing one side of his body leaving the other side to squirm in half life, which was worse than total death. (178)

Again, according to Nwodika, who is representative of the ordinary traditional Igbo person, Ezeulu has fearsome supernatural power that commands admiration for the priest. The priest is also believed to have given several opportunities to the colonial administrator to recant his provocative actions. Unfortunately, the colonial administrator is believed by the natives to have ignored these chances.

While the supernatural appears to illuminate Ezeulu's character as brave, daring and revengeful, it seems difficult to state categorically whether Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* foregrounds his individual qualities over supernatural forces or the other way round. Three events—Ezinma's *ogbanje* status, Okonkwo's relationship with Chielo and Okonkwo as *egwugwu*—help to expose the character of Okonkwo. In traditional Igbo society, some critics argue that the fate of humankind seems to be tied up with the gods/goddesses, who appear to be responsible for whatever fortune or misfortune befalls a person. According to Kalu Ogbaa, as Okonkwo strives to bring honour to himself by avoiding the lifestyle of his father, he commits criminal and moral crimes, possibly under the influence of gods/goddesses, which result in his downfall (114).

Despite Ogbaa's stress on the predominance of the supernatural on human fate, supernatural forces are simply incidental because the hero is primarily responsible for his fate. In fact, Achebe's presentation of at times conflicting opinions of the gods/goddesses as seen, for example, in the case of Ikemefuna where the Oracle requests the child's death while, according to Ezeudu, the Earth goddess opposes this killing indicates the complexity of Achebe's characterization and meaning in this novel. In other words, while it is possible to exonerate Okonkwo from wrongful behaviour, there is also evidence in the novel that questions his action. This incident also demonstrates how the novelist envisions a grey boundary between human and divine actions, or between the natural and the supernatural worlds. What Robin Horton says about the Kalabari people of the Niger Delta of Nigeria may be applicable to the traditional Igbo heroes recreated in Achebe's

fiction: that these characters tend to be partly activated by offences against ‘town laws,’ ancestors and spirit beings (170).

Indeed, Okonkwo’s love for bravery has made him kill several people in wars and he even drinks palm wine from human skulls. His preference for violence as a solution to problems attests to his desire to control events, a feeling that reflects his powerlessness, according to David Jefferess, in the face of complicated issues like how his clan should respond to colonial influence (198). Analyzing Okonkwo’s tragedy mainly in terms of his predilection for violence is only partly explaining his downfall which is the cumulative result of several factors, some personal and others external. While his impulsiveness and rashness are contributory to his demise, it would seem that it is also his slavish respect for some of the precepts of his society such as bravery, chauvinism, colonialism and others that account for his downfall.

Concerned with the desire to distinguish himself from others, and embracing violence as one way of identifying himself, Okonkwo perceives “any change that questions the need for violence as a softening of the culture” (Jefferess 199). This attitude can be seen when, before the Umuofia assembly to discuss how to respond to the humiliation of its elders by the colonial administrator, Okonkwo pledges to disregard any call for peace by Egonwanne, his compatriot, and fight the male white colonizers, even if he has to do so alone: “Afraid? I do not care what he does to you. I despise him and those who listen to him. I shall fight alone if I choose” (160-61). Ultimately, Okonkwo would be less rational, but more abrasive and impulsive in his appreciation of complex issues like the situation of the messenger sent by the colonial administration to disrupt the

meeting of Umuofia people about their relationship with the whites. In this regard, colonialism, as shall be discussed later, can be seen as influential in the downfall of Okonkwo because of its introduction of a new way of life that is at odds with Okonkwo's traditional Igbo viewpoint. Thus, the advent of a new colonial government that even humiliates Umuofia dignitaries like Okonkwo provokes rebellion in him, one which will culminate in his own destruction.

In another domain, Okonkwo's humane qualities such as love and compassion for his family can be seen when he pursues the priestess of *Agbala* as the latter takes his daughter, Ezinma, to the shrine of her goddess. As a representative of the goddess of morality, Chielo is most feared in Umuofia. This priestess takes delight in carrying on her back Okonkwo's beloved daughter and takes this baby to the shrine of *Agbala*, even at midnight. Okonkwo is bold enough to attempt to restrain the action of this priestess, questioning Chielo's decision to take Ezinma whenever and wherever she so desires. Chielo is astounded by Okonkwo's bravado: "Beware of exchanging words with *Agbala*. Does a man speak when a god speaks?" (80). Even when he ultimately yields to the priestess' wish, he still pursues her to the shrine of *Agbala*, late in the night, to ensure the safety of his daughter. Kwadwo Osei-Nyame sees failure in Okonkwo's inability to prevent Chielo from taking Ezinma, even with a machete in his hand. At a time when Ezinma and Ekwefi are in danger, Okonkwo's helplessness prefigures "for him a loss of authority and a deeper disillusionment about his position within the clan that he is later to experience" (159).

Nevertheless, Okonkwo's love for his daughter and family is undeniable and can be seen when he recruits a medicine man to stop the cycle of birth and death plaguing his daughter. Because she is an *ogbanje*, Okonkwo ensures that her *iyi-uwa*, a bond linking her to the spirit world of *ogbanje*, is destroyed. As the search for the pebble believed to connect Ezinma to the spirit world is underway, Okonkwo shows impatience and anxiety as he threatens his daughter about her capriciousness. She is inconsistent in her answers about the whereabouts of the pebble. At one moment, Okonkwo almost loses his patience despite objections from the medicine man that Okonkwo should allow him to handle the situation. This is how Achebe describes Okonkwo as he threatens Ezinma: "Okonkwo stood by, rumbling like thunder in the rainy season" (66). This incident shows the close proximity between the natural and supernatural worlds in Achebe's fiction as the *dibia* attempts to permanently rescue Ezinma from the spirit world to its human counterpart.

Preoccupied with exploring the natural and supernatural worlds, Achebe revisits the concept of priestess in his conception of Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*, although not with the latitude of authority and influence exerted by Chielo in *Things Fall Apart*. On her part, Beatrice admits that she sometimes feels like Chielo, the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and the Caves. Although she may not be fully aware of her spiritual qualities, she seems to have a prescience of mind that associates her with *Idemili*: "Barely, we say though, because she did carry a vague sense more acute at certain critical moments than others of being two different people" (96). As a daughter of *Idemili*, Beatrice "could in ancient times have been priestess-diviner, intermediary between divinity and the world" (Mezu 140). This perception is undergirded by her

forthrightness and decency as can be seen when she deplores the tyranny of the regime of Sam and when she challenges Chris' love to her, asking him why he would let his fiancée attend a party with the President, aware of the possibility that she could be seduced by him. As an assertive woman, she prefers a caring husband to the rather calculating Chris. According to Chris, Beatrice's independence of mind associates her with a screaming Cherubim and Seraphim prophetess (103). Her zeal in every endeavour that she undertakes, including even love making, makes her unique as evidenced in this appraisal of her by Chris: "Clearly this was her grove and these her own peculiar rites over which she held absolute power. Priestess or goddess herself?" (104). According to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, as a character constructed along a divine frame, Beatrice assumes the duty of the "elimination of the flaws in the social structures through a pruning of the excesses of those individuals in positions of authority" (30) like Sam.

However, Beatrice's concern with justice does not reflect that of Okonkwo because Achebe conceives both characters differently; while she lacks the spiritual aura of Chielo that could effect meaningful change in Ambazon, Okonkwo is perceived as part of an institution of justice that is incarnated by the *egwugwu*, a traditional display of justice fraught with supernatural coloration. The cult of *egwugwu* is one of the most revered rituals in traditional Igbo society partly because its members are carefully chosen from a group of elders, who, at the same time, are believed to represent ancestral spirits. As custodians of traditional values like fair play, decency and societal ethics, members of this select group are believed to be infused with superhuman qualities by virtue of the idea, held by their compatriots, that they are representative of the ancestors. In fact, the

house in which members of this cult deliberate has its entrance facing the forest so that not everybody can peer into it. Women are not allowed inside it nor are they expected to ask questions about it. As the *egwugwu* make their appearance, women and children flee in fright.

As a member of this cult, Okonkwo incarnates its precepts. Usually, when this group meets in the open, nine stools are left vacant representing the nine villages of the clan. It is believed in traditional Igbo society that spirits collaborate with men during solemn occasions like this one. A.G. Stock argues that the person who impersonates these spirits “speaks with the supernatural wisdom of the ancestors, much as the Catholic priest saying mass ceases to be himself and becomes a channel of the divine” (107).

At the head of the *egwugwu* is Evil Forest, standing for the village of Umeru, foremost in the clan. It is before this judicial institution that Uzowulu presents his case of abandonment of the marital home by his wife, Mgbafo. Thus, the nine *egwugwu*, with Okonkwo inclusive, are agents of justice, listening to complaints and proposing solutions. It is thanks to them that Uzowulu’s marriage is repaired when they instruct that his in-laws should drink his wine and return his wife.

While *Things Fall Apart* illustrates a traditional society at the brink of collapse and under the pull of the supernatural, *No Longer At Ease* signals the dawn of a new Igbo society pulsating under the influence of Christianity. In other words, the torchlight has shifted from Okonkwo to Obi as Achebe re-imagines the relationship between the colonized and the colonizers, as well as exploring the psychological effect of the supernatural on the tragic hero. *No Longer At Ease*, like *A Man of the People*, is

predominantly set in an urban milieu, one that is far removed from the traditional Igbo society typically found in the countryside. Obi Okonkwo, the hero of the former novel and grandson of the conservative Okonkwo, falls prey to corruption in spite of his prestigious education in England. His misfortune, in the eyes of many people of Igbo traditional society, is the lingering result of his social interaction with an *osu*, an outcast. Moreover, in *A Man of the People*, it is upheld that individuals such as Josiah can exploit supernatural practices to their advantage and to the detriment of others. The societies in both stories are characterized by the rivalry between tradition and modernism, among Christian groupings clamouring for space in a divergent and volatile religious landscape.

As a result, Obi's proposal of marriage to Clara is challenged by the latter on grounds that she is an *osu*, a social misfit within the traditional Igbo society in the sense that she would only bring misfortune to her husband. Obi's friend, Joseph, questions the wisdom of marrying Clara because "her great-great-great-great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god" (65). Although Obi is aware that his Christian parents would also oppose his union with Clara because of the evil spell believed, by Obi's society, to loom over her, he shows defiance in his decision. In fact, *osus* represent a social structure of traditional Igbos which is despised and discriminated against because it is associated with slavery and disdain. Obi's would-be bride questions the wisdom of his choice on grounds of her *osu*, or slave status, a repugnant situation within traditional Igbo society. According to Christophe Kambaji, *osus* are not only simply slaves, but also slaves of a god/goddess. Condemned to the rank of "thing" or taboo, they may neither marry the freeborn nor be married by them. *Osus* are circumscribed to a special area in the village.

They are compelled to carry with them “wherever they go the mark of their caste, which is long, disordered, and dirty hair” (15-16).

Armed with love and Christian qualities of equality and solidarity, Obi is determined to dismantle the social institution of *osus*. Within the context of this novel, Christianity is presented as a classless society whereas the status of *osus* implies a structured and class conscious traditional Igbo society. Obi’s apparent resolve to destroy the *osu* caste system can be seen when he storms out of his village meeting in Lagos because his compatriots question his relationship with Clara. Faced with the thought of failure, embodied in the social outcast, Clara, wrecking his life, Obi manifests a spirit of independence by assuming responsibility for his actions and exhibiting a democratic view of society. In other words, Obi is perceived, by his kinsmen, as representative of supreme arrogance and social revolution in the face of traditional Igbo belief system.

Obi challenges the idea of barring a girl from marriage just because her ancestors had been dedicated to serve gods/goddesses. In a fitting proverb, Joseph tells Obi that Umuofia does not want him to be “like the unfortunate child who grows his first tooth and grows a decayed one” (68). In other words, Obi, as a worthy son of Umuofia, should not turn out to be a failure in life by choosing to wed Clara. Furthermore, the heavy downpour in the village on the occasion of Obi’s visit to his parents appears as a reminder to him to re-evaluate his decision to marry Clara, as noted in this authorial comment: “Actually such rain was unusual” (57). In the light of these symbolic signs, it seems not surprising to Obi’s country people that he eventually succumbs to bribery and overlooks the burial of his mother.

Indeed, upon learning from Obi about his engagement to Clara, Obi's father immediately dismisses this proposal because of her caste status, irrespective of Obi's argument that Christianity forbids discrimination against people on grounds of status. According to Obi's father, any marriage to Clara is synonymous with bringing the mark of shame and leprosy to the family (121). This incident shows that even though Obi's father is a Christian, he is still at heart a traditional Igbo man, who seeks to reconcile in his being opposing religions. Moreover, he states that, in marrying Clara, Obi would be bringing misfortune even to their offspring. On her part, Obi's mother argues that Obi would have her blood on his head if he were to wed Clara (123). Put differently, he would be cursed by her and this could bring misery to his life.

As Obi drives back to Lagos, frustrated because of the refusal of his parents to welcome his marriage to Clara, he almost loses his life in an accident. It would seem that this accident is simply a warning to Obi from his parents to refrain from the idea of wedding Clara. As one of the drivers involved in the accident puts it: "But you lucky-o as no big tree de for dis side of road. When you reach home make you tank your God" (127). This incident also demonstrates the permeability between the natural and the supernatural worlds, or how external forces are perceived within the traditional Igbo society as affecting human action.

Obi's determination to pursue his marriage with Clara, despite opposition to it from his parents and friends, makes him believe that his Western education would enable him to overcome any crisis. However, any Western values that he may have embraced such as disregard for certain ethnic practices like discrimination against *osus* are only

layered on his earlier traditional beliefs. In other words, Obi's perceptual framework appears to be neither one of a committed Westerner nor a traditional Igbo person as he navigates his way through these seemingly conflicting ways of life. As Robert Green puts it, the crisis of Obi's life lies in the fact that he is "left with no deep inner convictions, neither Pagan nor Christian, Nigerian nor European" (224). In this connection, Achebe describes the unsettled mind of Obi after the latter's meeting with his father over the issue of marrying Clara thus:

He waited for his father to speak that he might put up another fight to justify himself. His mind was troubled not only by what had happened but also by the discovery that there was nothing in him with which to challenge it honestly. All day he had striven to rouse his anger and his conviction, but he was honest enough with himself to realize that the response he got, no matter how violent it sometimes appeared, was not genuine. It came from the periphery, and not the centre, like the jerk in the leg of a dead frog when a current is applied to it. (124)

Thus, Obi is portrayed as one in search of an ideological anchor point, without conviction in the traditional belief system of his people or trust in the Western one that he is hankering after. Like Samba Diallo in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, Obi appears to have lost his bearing, the resonance of his native landscape and that of the West and nothing appeals to him meaningfully. In this connection, Rose Mezu rightly argues that Obi's tragedy could be traced to his lack of stable, socio-cultural referents because of the intermediary space that he occupies between traditional life and modern life, or that he is caught in the dialectic of difference and identity (84-85).

Without overlooking the pride and waywardness of Obi, his tragedy partly resides in the clash of cultures, between a traditional Igbo society into which he is born and a new European society which he embraces because of his study abroad (Egblewogbe 7).

But he chooses to turn his back to his societal ethos and so must assume responsibility for his actions. In a sense, Obi's tragedy, from the perspective of traditional Igbo society, could, to a certain extent, be ascribed to Western influence which makes the hero question some of the cultural beliefs of his people, an influence that insulates him from the belief system of his society. However, the explanation of Obi's tragedy to Western influence is only part of the issue because other factors contribute to his downfall. Thus, Achebe essentially uses the belief frame of traditional Igbo society to probe the mind of Obi, bringing to the fore the arrogance and indecisiveness of the tragic hero.

Similarly, Josiah in *A Man of the People* can be seen as driven by his individualism, one which makes him trample on societal norms by allegedly embracing reprehensible practices such as witchcraft in his business dealings. In this regard, it is rumoured within his society that he replaced a blind man's stick with another one in order that his (Josiah's) business prospers. As an elderly woman in the novel puts it: " 'So the beast is not satisfied with all the money he takes from us and must now make a medicine to turn us into blind buyers of his wares'" (87). Even Timothy, a Christian, insists on the idea that a person like Josiah uses supernatural practices to enrich himself. As a result, Josiah's prosperity in business is said to be due to his guile and selfishness rather than good management. He is thought to have trampled on societal ethos and justice has to be restored in expelling him from the community.

Achebe's last two novels, *No Longer At Ease* and *A Man of the People*, vindicate a society at the crossroad of the supernatural, between its acceptance and disavowal, between tradition and modernism. Put differently, there is a tendency of it being

considered shibboleth by the likes of Obi who now increasingly explains events and actions scientifically, without recourse to the supernatural. Despite this proclivity, the traditional Igbo person seems portrayed as being impinged upon willy-nilly by external forces. In other words, Achebe employs supernatural devices like gods/goddesses or oracles to explore character; the apparent capriciousness of the gods/goddesses, for example, helps to expose human traits like pride in Obi. Beyond the effect of the supernatural, human beings are primarily presented by Achebe as being responsible for their destiny. At the individual level, Obi and Josiah may not fully endorse the influence of the supernatural, but they live in communities anchored at the shore of supernatural forces. They are, consequently, presented as being affected in one way or the other by the overbearing pull of the supernatural as it rides on the crest of their societies.

The Supernatural as Premonitory

In his novels, Achebe often uses the supernatural to envision action, making the sensitive reader sometimes not surprised with the trend of events because of the suggestive hints to which he or she is privileged in the forms of oracles, omens, dreams and others. In other words, the element of predictability appears to be crafted in the narration, helping to alert the reader to pause and (re)evaluate some of the actions of Achebe's protagonists. There is the impression of organic unity in Achebe's artistic world, which appears to respect the principle of causality. Nothing apparently happens without justification or some foreknowledge for the reader. This tendency appears most glaring in *Arrow of God*.

Arrow of God is extremely rich in the supernatural; most events or signs in the story appear premonitory in the light of the actions of some of the characters. For instance, the appearance of a moon in Umuaro is of cultural signification. According to Ezeulu, the moon marks the start of a new month, a renewal of life within his clan and a time to propitiate the god, *Ulu*. The moon is also used by Ezeulu to mark the lunar year, a period during which he eats thirteen sacred yams. Moreover, the appearance of a moon, in the eyes of Ezeulu, symbolizes the harmony between the chief priest and his god, and between the people of Umuaro and their ancestors and spirit beings. When Ezeulu sees the moon in the sky, he is aware that it is time for him to seek benediction from *Ulu* in terms of agricultural yield and protection of his people from any harm. As a result, Ezeulu makes the following prayer to *Ulu*: “As this is the occasion of planting may the six villages plant with profit. May we escape danger in the farm—the bite of a snake or the sting of the scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland” (6). In fact, the moon, like *Ulu*, is perceived as having symbolic signification on the welfare of the natives, or the one is seen as preceding celebrations in honour of the other. If this god is happy with its people, many good things would happen to them, and if it is angry, disaster would await them.

As the custodian of *Ulu*, Ezeulu strives for justice in his undertakings. Armed with this conviction, he speaks out against the war with Okperi. According to Ezeulu, *Ulu* does not want Umuaro to fight Okperi over a disputed piece of land that, Ezeulu insists, rightfully belongs to Okperi. *Ulu*, Ezeulu argues, would not support a war of blame. As a result, Ezeulu envisages a disastrous outcome for Umuaro if it were to embrace war: “If

in truth the farmland is ours, *Ulu* will fight on our side. But if it is not we shall know soon enough” (18). In this way, Achebe hints at the idea of how traditional Igbos believe in the influence of the supernatural in human justice.

Following the killing of Akukalia in Okperi, Ezeulu dissuades his people from avenging this death. By seeking to revenge the death of Akukalia, Ezeulu adds, Umuaro is challenging their god, *Ulu*, and he envisions the latter being opposed to the Okperi war: “Umuaro is today challenging its *chi*. Is there any man or woman in Umuaro who does not know *Ulu*, the deity that destroys a man [sic] when his [sic] life is sweetest to him [sic]?” (26). Ezeulu’s advice is ignored and both clans engage in a war that is abruptly stopped by Captain Winterbottom, the colonial administrator. Winterbottom passes judgement over the disputed piece of land in favour of Okperi. This decision brings about a rift between Ezeulu and some of his compatriots, some of whom perceive him as siding with the white man against the interest of the clan. However, Ezeulu justifies his stance on the war on grounds that his divination had earlier informed him that this war was purposeless, a lost cause for Umuaro. Thus, despite the apparent influence of the supernatural in the Umuaro-Okperi War, Achebe places responsibility at human actions in Umuaro’s decision to launch war on Okperi. In other words, character overrides the supernatural.

Like the case of the people of Umuaro in *Arrow of God*, the inhabitants of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, represented by Okonkwo, possess shrines that harbour personal gods/goddesses and ancestral spirits. Okonkwo, for one, daily pays homage to these spirits with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine in the hope that they would

bless his family (12). As said by the Priestess of *Agbala*, when a man [sic] is at peace with his [sic] gods and ancestors, he [sic] is rewarded with good or bad fortune according to the strength of his [sic] arm (14). In fact, major deities in the Igbo pantheon have special shrines allotted to them, and these gods and goddesses are served by priests and priestesses. Because of the great respect for these gods/goddesses, human beings strive at all times “to live righteously by conducting their lives in accordance with the ethics of the community and by avoiding societal taboos” (Okafor 69). Thus, Okonkwo seems aware that in order for him to have a prosperous life, he needs to abide by the wishes of the gods/goddesses and ancestors. However, his attempt to enthusiastically follow some of the dictates of the oracles soon places him at odds with traditional Igbo social or communal values.

In a different domain, Okonkwo’s relationship with his daughter, Ezinma, appears to forebode his fate. Born after several unsuccessful births on the part of Ekwefi, Ezinma remains a source of anxiety to her parents. Her health constantly vacillates between buoyancy and frailty, making Okonkwo and his family anxious about her. After consulting with a diviner of the *Afa* Oracle, Okonkwo is told that his daughter is an *ogbanje*, one of those children who, “when they died, entered their mothers’ wombs to be born again” (54). Although *ogbanje* children are sometimes shown less affection in traditional Igbo society because of the belief that they would soon die and they seem to derive satisfaction in tormenting their parents, Okonkwo and Ekwefi demonstrate much concern towards this child. However, children stigmatized as *ogbanjes* appear to be

associated with misfortune. This perception is most evident in the multiple births which Ekwefi has had. This is how Achebe describes her predicament:

Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, *Onwumbiko*— ‘Death, I implore you.’ But Death took no notice; *Onwumbiko* died in his fifteenth month. The next child was a girl, *Ozoemena*—‘May it not happen again.’ She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child *Onwuma*—‘Death may please himself.’ And he did. (61)

This episode illustrates the complexity of the supernatural in relation to human action and how it appears to be inherited in reality.

In a sense, Ezinma’s tumultuous health appears to be symptomatic of Okonkwo’s changing fortunes in life. Thus, the explosion of Okonkwo’s gun and the concomitant killing of Ezeudu’s son seem, to Okonkwo, as foreshadowing his tragedy. Again, these incidents indicate how Achebe juxtaposes human and external forces as influencing action, compelling the reader to sometimes trace the downfall of his heroes to the belief system of traditional Igbos. More trouble would befall Okonkwo when his eldest son, Nwoye, deserts him in favour of Christianity. This development leaves Okonkwo worried and anxious as evidenced in this question, which he asks himself: “Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye’s steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation” (108).

Okonkwo’s counterpart, Ezeulu, not only struggles to meet the wishes of *Ulu*, but also attempts to impose his authority within his clan against constant opposition from his detractors. Ezeulu’s beleaguered authority in Umuaro is persistently taunted by Nwaka,

an eminently rich and titled man, who considers him an extension of British colonial rule because of Ezeulu's apparent friendship with Winterbottom. Ezeulu's stature as chief priest is further threatened by the news of his son's attempt to kill a royal python, an animal considered sacred in Umuaro. This ill omen, in the eyes of some people in Umuaro, probably forebodes the misfortune that will befall Ezeulu at the end of the novel when he will lose his son, Obika, and he himself will become demented, misfortunes which the priest of *Idemili* and Nwaka will trace to Ezeulu's son's defilement of the sacred python and the concomitant humiliation of the god, *Idemili*. In this regard, Anosi's words best capture the uncertainty and anxiety to which Umuaro is subjected in the light of the attempted killing of the royal python by Oduche, without ignoring Ezeulu's relationship with Winterbottom: "What that man Ezeulu will bring to Umuaro is pregnant and nursing a baby at the same time" (52).

As part of the supernatural cosmos within which Achebe is writing, certain things are considered unassailable in traditional Igbo society. For example, the sacred python belongs to *Idemili* and it is understood that no harm should be done to it. It is believed, by natives, that any threat to its life could risk calamity for the entire clan. Even the Christian Moses Unachukwu's account of the creation of Umuaro attests to this. The story goes that six brothers of Umuama killed the python, prepared yam pottage with it and shared it among themselves. Quarrelling and fighting soon cropped up among the brothers and stretched across Umuama. Many lost their lives and the surrounding villages were scared, and consulted a deity. They were told never to kill the sacred python. It is this python that Oduche imprisons; his action demands serious cleansing. In symbolic

terms, the struggles of the sacred python in Oduche's box represent the threat to traditional religion from Christianity. Oduche's mother, Ugoye, looks forward to the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves with anxiety; it would afford her an opportunity to avert any disaster provoked by her son's defilement of the land. Although Ezeulu is angry with the priest of *Idemili* for demanding an explanation as to what he would do to cleanse Oduche's sacrilege, Ezeulu is deeply aware of the gravity of his son's offence and Ezeulu is prepared to appease *Idemili* during the Pumpkin festival.

This Pumpkin festival, within the clan, is intended to propitiate the gods/goddesses for any wrongdoing on the part of the living, and to placate spiritual beings to destroy anything that impedes progress and good health in the land. Once more, Achebe attempts to synthesize the human and spiritual worlds. Ezeulu's dramatic appearance at the ceremonial ground of the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves, re-enacting the origin of this ritual, underscores the role of the supernatural as something that probably ensures the well-being of the chief priest and his brethren. His painted body, as he officiates in this festival, indicates his role of mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds and his attempt to synchronize both these spaces. As he paces about the arena, ululating women wave pumpkin leaves, symbolic of sins, above their heads and throw them at the fleeing priest, who is believed, by the natives, to be representative of wronged gods and goddesses that are implored for forgiveness. The prayer of Ugoye, Ezeulu's wife, underscores this point:

Great *Ulu* who kills and saves, I implore you to cleanse my household of all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard it with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has

come through my children or my friends or kinsfolk let it follow these leaves. (72)

Therefore, the chief priest is not thought of as an ordinary being because of his role as mediator between the worlds of the living and that of the ancestors.

Ezeulu's consciousness of his role as a custodian of Igbo tradition would make him ensure that his son's intended wife is subjected to a ritual involving a medicine man whose duty it is to induce fertility on the part of the bride. This incident indicates the people's merging of the worlds of reality and the supernatural as they draw interconnectedness between both spaces, an endeavour that makes it challenging for the observer to know where one world begins and the other ends. After all, we are told, for example, that Okeke Onenyi ties up the womb of Ezeulu's first wife because of the rivalry between the two half-brothers (148). The *dibia* charged with ensuring the fertility of Okuata, Obika's bride, bores a hole in the ground into which he places yams, pieces of white chalk, cowries and the flower of the wild lily. Afterwards, he makes a prayer to the gods/goddesses on behalf of the bride: "Any evil which you might have seen with your eyes or trodden with your feet, whatever your father might have brought upon you or your mother brought upon you, I cover them all here" (119). In fact, this entire ceremony is intended to make Okuata have a successful marriage and, above all, jealously guard her virginity. In the end, Ezeulu's family is not surprised by the quick pregnancy of Okuata and the respect which she shows to her husband.

Another sign that shows the supernatural as a foreboding device in *Arrow of God* is Ezeulu's dream. While in detention in Okperi, Ezeulu has a dream in which the assembly of Umuaro refuses to listen to his grandfather: "That night Ezeulu saw in a

dream a big assembly of Umuaro elders . . . But instead of himself it was his grandfather who rose to speak to them. They refused to listen. They shouted together: He shall not speak; we will not listen to him” (160). In the same dream, Nwaka urges people not to heed Ezeulu’s call because he is now the priest of a dead god that has abandoned its people. In this vision, Ezeulu is tossed about in a crowd, spat on, and dismissed outright. This vision, in the eyes of Ezeulu, apparently bespeaks Umuaro’s desertion of the chief priest and *Ulu* along with what both represent. Put simply, Ezeulu’s downfall, according to him, appears imminent, as attested to by the nightmare which he has about mourners invading his compound. This incident, Ezeulu fears, probably prefigures the death of his beloved son, Obika.

In the belief of the supernatural as something that could predict events, Odili, in *A Man of the People*, is envisioned by his society to be a failure in life, given the fact that he is said to have brought along misfortune upon his birth. As somebody presumed by the people of Orua to have caused the death of his mother during child birth, Odili’s fate appears as a *fait accompli*. As young Odili grows up, his mates insult him in relation to his mother’s death: “Bad child that crunched his mother’s skull” (27). His eventual political and social blunders, in the eyes of his society, are ascribed to the ill omen at the time of his birth. Indeed, Odili’s society appears to seek supernatural explanation to issues that confound their comprehension, or even to ward off evil. In this connection, Odili’s father, a District Interpreter who is greatly hated in his society because his profession is notorious for bribery and ruthlessness, plants protective medicine at crucial locations in his compound to forestall possible attacks from his enemies. In fact, one of

his rooms harbours very powerful protective medicine and so this space is constantly kept “under lock and key” (29) by Odili’s father lest somebody harm his family.

Nevertheless, Achebe may be said to use the supernatural in this novel to complicate character as seen, for example, in the controversy about the birth of Odili, or Achebe can be said to allow room for different perspectives about Odili’s inability to effect meaningful change in his society in the light of the moral decadence embraced by politicians like Chief Nanga. In a sense, the paucity of supernatural indices in *A Man of the People* may be a covert indication of the need for such forces to rid modern Nigeria of the political corruption that is rooted in it.

The Supernatural and Morality

With some exceptions, most traditional Africans, according to John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy*, believe that a person is not punished in the hereafter for his or her wrong deeds, but rather in the present life. As a result, misfortunes, like the ones of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, are explained as indicating that the sufferer has violated some moral or ethical conduct against spirits, elders or the society (205). In this light, each society or community has its own code of conduct and set of laws to ensure justice, propriety or decency. These punishments are meted out in accordance with the gravity of the offence committed. It could vary from fines, curses to even exile. The gods/goddesses, or spiritual beings in Achebean novels, act as moral authorities within the society as is true of *Ani* that ensures good conduct and morality by rejecting suicide.

Therefore, if a person kills himself or herself, he or she is not buried by kinspeople because of the idea that the deceased has desecrated the land.

In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu's contemplation of revenge on Umuaro for abandoning him in the crisis with the white man, or for attempting to reprimand the priest of *Idemili* because of the latter's denunciation of the mishandling of the royal python, is apparently dissuaded by *Ulu* as attested to in these words that ring in Ezeulu's mind: " "Ta! Nwanu!" barked *Ulu* in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. "Who told you that this was your own fight?" (191). But the stubborn priest appears determined to retaliate on Umuaro during the feast of the New Yam: "But his greatest pleasure came from the thought of his revenge which had suddenly formed in his mind as he had sat listening to Nwaka in the market place" (161). Upon leaving Okperi, Ezeulu seems to harbour thoughts of revenge on Umuaro. He appears to undermine his imprisonment by Winterbottom as he enthusiastically looks forward to confronting his people: "I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklet" (179).

As priest of *Ulu*, Ezeulu is tempted to conflate his personal ambitions with his role as mediator between his people and the supernatural. This is an attempt by Achebe to juxtapose the physical and spiritual worlds of Igbo traditional society. Ezeulu seems to constantly push and stretch "the exercise of his power, testing its limits to gauge how far he can apply it" (Mezu 39). For example, his controversial role in the yam festival makes some of his subjects, like Nwaka, argue that he may be seeking personal revenge on the

clan for abandoning him in his conflict with Winterbottom. Attempting to explain the behaviour of Ezeulu, Rose Mezu states that he internalizes four concepts of psychoanalysis such as repression as he struggles to suppress his anger and bitterness at his enemies; isolation as he rebuffs the kind gestures of friends, family and even Winterbottom; intellectualization as he rationalizes his conflicts with Nwaka, Ezidemili and members of his family; and neurosis as evidenced in the dementia he suffers at the end of the story (52-53). Ezeulu, therefore, presents himself as a complex character whose actions can be understood across a spectrum of socio-cultural factors, as well as his idiosyncrasies.

Going back to the issue of the yam festival, it would seem that Ezeulu refuses to listen to the pleas of the elders that he eat the remaining yams and convene the feast. He is also, according to Margaret Turner, torn between the old order and the new circumstances in his clan, represented by Christianity and Western education, until his credibility and that of his god is destroyed (36). The disagreement between Ezeulu and the elders as to when it is appropriate to convene the yam festival reveals, according to D. Ibe Nwoga, different perceptions of religious duties and differences between “the adherence to strict ritual and the dynamic recognition of the human function of religious belief and practice” (22-23). Ezeulu insists on eating one yam at a time as prescribed by his duty as chief priest whereas the elders see religion as something in the service of people and therefore subject to change, hence their argument that he should eat two yams simultaneously. It is also fair to admit, as Olakunle George does in “The Narrative of Conversion in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*” that, by refusing to convene the yam festival, it is

possible that Ezeulu “is not in full knowledge and control of his motivations” (352).

These details surrounding the yam festival show how challenging it may be to adequately explain Ezeulu’s downfall without referring to the socio-cultural milieu that informs his behaviour.

Interestingly, Ezeulu appears defiant in his decision not to convene the yam festival. He argues that *Ulu* is unhappy that no one broke kola nut for him for the past two months while Ezeulu was incarcerated in Okperi. Unfortunately, starvation creeps into the land and many people dissociate themselves from the chief priest. He is increasingly isolated since some people hold that he is seeking personal revenge on Umuaro. Many join the ranks of the Christians in search of protection against the wrath of *Ulu*. The consequence of Ezeulu’s behaviour is swift and drastic. Obika’s death, according to Ezidemili, should “teach him [Ezeulu] how far he could dare next time” (228). In addition, the chief priest is demented and Umuaro, as a whole, learns the following message from his calamity:

Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man [sic] however great was greater than his [sic] people; that no one ever won judgement against his [sic] clan. (230)

However, Ezeulu’s apparent innocence about the postponement of the yam festival and his anguish following the death of Obika appear to exonerate the chief priest from blame: “But why, he asked himself again and again, why had *Ulu* chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god’s will and obeyed it?” (229). Despite Ezeulu’s justification of his action,

Umuaro attributes its misfortune to him, to his stalling attitude towards the convening of the yam festival, and to his flirtation with the colonial administration and Christianity.

Attempting to justify his inability to convene the yam festival, Ezeulu states that the gods/goddesses, at times, use priests/priestesses as whips in punishing societies for negligence or disrespect to the gods/goddesses: “He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god” (191). It should be recalled that the yam feast is particularly significant to Umuaro. Not only does it mark an abundance of agricultural yield, but it also acts as an occasion for social communion between the living and the living dead, between human and supernatural forces. Achebe informs us that: “It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man [sic] might look to his [sic] right and find his [sic] neighbour and look to his [sic] left and see a god[sic] standing there” (203). The belief within this traditional Igbo society is that ancestors oversee human beings, rewarding or punishing them in the light of their actions. In this connection, the elders of Umuaro plead with Ezeulu to consult the shrine of *Ulu* in order to avert disaster in the land. There is consternation in Umuaro when Ezeulu announces that “his consultation with the deity had produced no result and that the six villages would be locked in the old year for two moons” (210).

It seems difficult to state categorically whether or not Ezeulu falsifies *Ulu*'s message about the yam festival, given the hostility which he and his family face in Umuaro and the fact that he mediates between his people and *Ulu*, which makes it challenging for the observer to know whether Ezeulu's divination is truthful or not. However, some Umuaro notables, like Ogbuefi Ofoka, point out that Ezeulu is hiding behind *Ulu* to punish the clan: “But today he would rather see the six villages ruined than

eat two yams” (212). Other people, including his enemies like Nwaka, aver that it would be foolhardy for Ezeulu to misrepresent the god’s message. According to Nwaka, Ezeulu “would not falsify the decision of *Ulu*. If he did it *Ulu* would not spare him to begin with” (212). Still, some elders argue that a person as proud as Ezeulu would not mind incurring suffering provided that he can hurt his adversaries. However, according to Akuebue, Ezeulu’s confidant, the chief priest would not deliberately punish Umuaro by refusing to set a date for the festival. Perhaps, Akuebue adds, Umuaro has committed a crime for which the god is exacting a toll, or put metaphorically, “a thing greater than *nte* had been caught in *nte*’s trap” (220). Whatever the case, Ezeulu’s intention on the issue of the yam festival appears confounding given the fact that he nurses within his mind both anger and compassion for Umuaro. As a result, while it is plausible to argue that Ezeulu seeks revenge on Umuaro because of the idea that some of his compatriots support Nwaka’s opposition to the chief priest, it is also compelling to blame Ezeulu’s and the clan’s misfortune on the community because of their failure to check the excesses of Christianity and the colonial administration on traditional religion. Nevertheless, concerning these different explanations about the downfall of Ezeulu, he seems to have considerably provoked his misfortune because of his pride and revengeful attitude.

Ultimately, when Ezeulu hears from Akuebue and Oduche that the Christian Church is encouraging people to bring their yams to God for protection against the possible wrath of *Ulu*, he reprimands his son, Oduche, for not having told him this news: If Ezeulu were seeking personal revenge on Umuaro, would he have changed his mind and convened a yam festival? If he were acting according to *Ulu*’s advice, would he have

pleaded with the god to reconsider the postponement of the festival, given the threat from Christianity? From a different perspective, it is questionable why *Ulu* does not intervene to stop the exodus towards Christianity and it is possible to assume that the Christian Church presents itself as a stronger supernatural force compared with *Ulu*. After all, Christianity implants itself in an evil forest considered dangerous by the natives; it welcomes outcasts into its fold; and promises protection to anybody who disobeys native gods/goddesses.

According to Richard Bryan McDaniel, Christianity presents itself as a great threat to the survival of traditional religion. For example, in deciding to kill the python, converts into Christianity like Oduche see it as symbolic of the Serpent in the Garden of Eden (106). Therefore, Oduche's attempted desecration of the sacred python enjoins Ezeulu to synthesize the worlds of Christianity and traditional religion. In the same vein, Ezeulu's sending of Oduche to the white colonizers' religion can be seen as an attempt by Achebe to explore the intersection of traditional and Christian religions, exemplified even in the person of Moses Unachukwu who, though a Christian, opposes any attempt by Christians to harm the royal python. Unachukwu even sends a strongly worded letter to the bishop of Niger, who obliges local priests to refrain from provoking conflict between these two forms of spirituality.

On the issue of spirituality, the conversion to Christianity by several people in Umuaro redefines the boundary between this religion and its traditional counterpart by shifting spiritual momentum in favour of the former. Prior to the birth of Christianity in Igboland, the traditional society perceived things, humans and gods/goddesses, in a

hierarchical postulation. This explains, in part, the existence of social classes that discriminated against people by virtue of birth, wealth, achievement and other issues. However, the coming of Christianity challenged this way of thought, tearing apart social boundaries by advocating for a more inclusive society fostered on the tenets of solidarity and egalitarianism. This new perception of life placed the traditional vision of life at odds with Christian ideas that were increasingly admirable to more people who earlier espoused traditional values.

Caught in the religious crisis, Ezeulu's dementia can be seen as an "expressive manifestation of the passing of the old and the drawing of new symbolic boundaries" (Kortenaar 38). It is possible to trace Ezeulu's downfall to his decision to embrace Christianity through Oduche. His decision to send his child to a Western school causes a split within his community, encouraging some people to take liberties with *Ulu* and traditional religion. As a result, several Umuaro people carry their yams to church, convinced that the Christian God is more powerful than traditional gods/goddesses and could protect those who disobey traditional institutions against any possible repercussions. In fact, the rivalry between Christianity and traditional religion over the yam feast is "a binary contest between feast and famine, between protection and threat, between the knight and the dragon—and, implicitly, between good and evil" (Mackenzie 135). In due process, Christianity appears to undermine traditional religion as people flock to the church with yams and the natives review their conception of divinity. Should they adhere to the dictate of *Ulu* and incur starvation, or embrace Christianity and eschew famine? Ezeulu is caught in this religious conflict and his collapse, as Margaret Turner

argues, is probably due “to the tension in maintaining two worlds and attempting to reconcile their conflicting demands” (37).

By sending Oduche to the mission school and with the possibility that he could succeed Ezeulu as chief priest, Ezeulu probably attempts to harmonize Christianity and traditional religion. In this regard, Emefie Ikenga Metuh argues that among both Igbo Christians and believers in traditional religion, the traditional world view is placed simultaneously with the Christian world view such that the ordinary Igbo belongs to both worlds. In fact, he “draws from the one or the other according to circumstances, and easily combines them” (49). As a result, Ezeulu appears to appraise his sons in terms of who best can synthesize Christianity and traditional religion. Edogo, his oldest son, seems to relish carving and lacks leadership qualities while Obika, though greatly loved by Ezeulu, is erratic and prone to violence. This now leaves Nwafo and Oduche as the two probable candidates for the office of chief priest. The suggestion that Ezeulu may be interested in the peaceful coexistence of Christianity and traditional religion is buttressed by the idea that the chief priest may be wary of the fact that Christian churches win their early converts from among those who are rejected by the traditional society such as *osus* or slaves, witches and mothers of twins. He probably wants to stem a possible exodus of his natives to this alien religion. Ultimately, Ezeulu’s loss of Obika seems to indicate the sacrifice that he must make for attempting to reconcile Christianity and traditional religion.

On his part, the misfortunes of Okonkwo are perceived by some people within his society to be a result of his intransigence towards the gods/goddesses. For instance,

Okonkwo's killing of Ezeudu's son and Okonkwo's eventual exile can be traced, to a certain extent, to supernatural forces. Viewed closely, the explosion of Okonkwo's gun and the concomitant death of Ezeudu's son appear as a culmination of the warnings which Obierika and Ezeudu had earlier given Okonkwo against taking part in the killing of Ikemefuna. Okonkwo's killing of Ezeudu's son is regarded in Umuofia as despicable in the eyes of the earth goddess. As a result, men of Umuofia, dressed in battle gear, demolish his compound and ravage his barns. This destruction is perceived by some people of Umuofia as an attempt to cleanse the land which Okonkwo has desecrated in shedding the blood of a clansperson, and a fulfilment of the justice of the earth goddess. After all, Okonkwo had earlier offended her by killing Ikemefuna. In this regard, David Carroll sees the earth goddess as the watch-dog of society:

Ala, the earth goddess, is usually considered the most powerful [deity]; she is the queen of the underworld and 'owner' of men [sic] both dead and alive. Closely associated with the cult of the ancestors, she is also responsible for Igbo morality and her priests provide a powerful integrating force in society by guarding her laws and punishing offenders. (12)

It may be admitted that this goddess singles out Okonkwo for disgrace and destruction just when the latter is at the height of his achievements and on the verge of greater fame. Obierika, at one time, was forced to swallow the will of the earth goddess when she decreed that his wife's twin children be destroyed because they were an offence to the land.

In fact, Ikemefuna comports himself appreciably during his stay in Okonkwo's home: "He had become wholly absorbed into his new family" (42) and there is no sign or event, according to David Hoegberg, suggesting that Umuofians would be punished by

the gods if this lad were not killed. Thus, his sudden death appears to be “a denunciation of the adaptation process, a reminder that in the Oracle’s and the elders’ minds, Ikemefuna can never be accepted no matter how well liked or well-assimilated he may be” (73-74). Hoegberg’s argument that Umuofia is not compelled by the Oracle to kill Ikemefuna can be challenged in the sense that Achebe does not have to necessarily state the kind of punishment reserved for disobeying supernatural powers because, according to the belief system of the Igbo traditional society that he recreates, the consequences of disrespect towards the gods/goddesses are already enshrined in the ethical and moral code of this society. If Achebe did that, it would be as though he were attempting to justify the power of the gods/goddesses whereas his intention seems to be depicting the beliefs of a traditional Igbo society.

On his part, David Carroll perceives the impact of the death of Ikemefuna, with regard to Okonkwo, in the following light:

The death of Ikemefuna is a turning point in the novel . . . The execution of Ikemefuna is the beginning of Okonkwo’s decline, for it initiates the series of catastrophes which ends in his death. But this event is not only a milestone in the career of the hero. The sympathetic rendering of Ikemefuna’s emotions as he is being marched through the forest to his death has wider implications. (48-49)

In spite of the assumption that this incident, from the perspective of the traditional Igbo society that envisions a correlation in events, has disastrous consequences for Okonkwo, Achebe, in this particular instance, uses the supernatural to dramatize Okonkwo’s character, putting into focus Okonkwo’s irrationality and impulsiveness as architects of his tragedy rather than primarily attributing it to fate, although it can still be argued, as Emeka Nwabueze does, that Achebe depicts Okonkwo as a man with a bad *chi* or

personal god, one “whose tremendous vitality and vigour are sometimes annulled by the gods [sic] in a vexed and unconscious impulse of spiritual inertia” (169). However, the influence of the gods/goddesses in the fall of Okonkwo is secondary rather than primary.

Indeed, the story of Ikemefuna can be seen as Achebe’s exploration of cultural boundaries and their permeability. Like the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, the Oracle asks Okonkwo to give up his adopted son for the interest of the clan. Ikemefuna could be considered Okonkwo’s adopted son in part because Okonkwo accords him privileges, often reserved for a person’s sons, like carrying Okonkwo’s stool to important village meetings. Moreover, Ikemefuna is like an older brother to Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son, to whom he teaches folk stories and both boys enjoy the company of each other. In fact, Okonkwo is “inwardly pleased at his son’s development, and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna” (42). The command from the Oracle raises the question of obedience, enjoining us to judge whether it is appropriate for Okonkwo to abide by the dictate of the Oracle or not. Whereas it is possible to welcome Abraham’s obedience of God’s order in the sense that it did not result in the death of Isaac, it is also possible to question the wisdom of Okonkwo’s obedience to the Oracle. However, Achebe seems not to take a position on this issue as to whether Okonkwo’s behaviour is right or wrong, or to validate the superiority of one religion over the other.

On the one hand, the incident involving the killing of Ikemefuna shows Okonkwo as bold despite objections from people like Obierika and Ezeudu that, because this child considers him his father, it would be morally wrong for Okonkwo to take part in his killing. Okonkwo’s friend, Obierika, envisions a sinister consequence to Okonkwo’s

killing of Ikemefuna: “If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (53). On the other, Okonkwo overlooks the fact that it would be morally offensive to the earth goddess if he were party to the death of Ikemefuna. Ikemefuna is selected to be killed by the people of Mbaino, who then hand him over to Umuofia. He is judged according to the merit of his father, who took part in the killing of an Umuofia woman. In selecting Ikemefuna for death, the people of Mbaino appear to ignore the traditional Igbo precept of judging a person according to his or her worth and not that of other people. Nevertheless, within this same society, a person is also judged in terms of his or her parentage. This explains why Okonkwo, for example, is determined to distinguish himself from the ‘underachieving’ lifestyle of Unoka, and Ikemefuna is sacrificed because of the misdeed of his father.

According to J.Z. Kronenfeld, the conflict in *Things Fall Apart* is not only limited to the one between the individual and society, or human forces and divine, but also embraces “conflict within the divine realm as well, that is, to some extent, a conflict between the dominant ethos of masculinity and the necessary balancing virtues of femininity” (221). In other words, as the Oracle attempts to assert manly qualities of courage and power, for example, the Earth goddess slowly reacts, insisting on love and gentleness to be primordial. These two contending drives compete in Okonkwo’s mind, and the Oracle appears to dominate over the voice of the Earth goddess represented in Ezeudu. Although Obierika’s and Ezeudu’s objections to Okonkwo’s involvement in the murder of Ikemefuna may indicate moral repulsion at his conduct, Achebe uses this

episode primarily to dramatize the predicament of Okonkwo, highlighting the hero's masculinity and impulsiveness.

Handed over to Umuofia as compensation for the killing of one of theirs by a neighbouring village, Ikemefuna is entrusted to Okonkwo by the elders of the clan till a time when a decision on the lad's fate would be taken. It is said that this child progressively overcomes his fears and begins to socialize with the family of Okonkwo, addressing him as father. Ezeudu, an Umuofia elder, forewarns Okonkwo not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna, decreed by the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves because he is like a father to the boy. Okonkwo overlooks this advice mainly because of his fear of being thought weak, or resembling his father in cowardice. Thus, Okonkwo can be seen as primarily responsible for his downfall and not external forces, which are metaphorically used by Achebe to comment on the protagonist.

However, immediately after killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo is overcome by fear: "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor" (50). Okonkwo's earlier display of fearlessness begins to wane when the morality of his killing of Ikemefuna weighs on his mind. Okonkwo is worried; he is unable to eat and sleep and he embraces drinking as a way to assuage the pangs of his conscience, or the psychological torture that he experiences because of this killing. Paradoxically, Ikemefuna's murder emasculates Okonkwo, indicating that he is not void of sentiments which he strives to root out in his

children such as Nwoye. It is as if the spirit of the departed Ikemefuna takes him hostage, tormenting his mind and depriving him of peace.

Moreover, Okonkwo cannot walk properly; he feels like a drunken giant walking on mosquito legs; and occasionally, “a cold shiver descended on his head and spread down his body” (50). In his sleepless nights, he wakes up in bed, haunted by the killing of this child. Even the tiny mosquito wailing near his right ear appears to be a reminder to Okonkwo of imminent misfortune awaiting him. Soon, Okonkwo is greeted with the news of the failing health of his beloved daughter, Ezinma. At this juncture, Achebe either tends to conflate human and supernatural factors as working against Okonkwo, or uses external forces to mirror the fate of the tragic hero.

In fact, the explosion of Okonkwo’s gun during Ezeudu’s funeral and the subsequent killing of the deceased’s son have generated interesting arguments among critics about these happenings. The thrust of criticism has centred on why Okonkwo’s gun blows up in this ceremony and takes away the life of Ezeudu’s son and not that of any other person. Moreover, why does Ezeudu die immediately after he warns Okonkwo to refrain from killing Ikemefuna? According to Damian Opata in “Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom,” Ezeudu’s misfortunes may be linked to his decision to dissuade Okonkwo from partaking of the killing of Ikemefuna. In other words, the Oracle may be revenging on Ezeudu for attempting to stand in the way of justice. Opata, however, admits that it may be difficult to state categorically reasons behind these happenings because “we are confronted with causation at a supernatural level” (92). I would think that Ezeudu’s death is the result of old age, without supernatural explanation

about it. He has not offended the Oracle by attempting to stop Okonkwo from being party to Ikemefuna's death. Ezeudu's passing away seems honourable, without sickness or pain, and he might have peacefully connected with the ancestral world. It is for this reason that his country people accord him elaborate funeral rites, which are described in detail by Achebe thus:

It was a great funeral, such as befitted a noble warrior. As the evening drew near, the shouting and firing of guns, the beating of drums and the brandishing and clanging of machetes increased.

Ezeudu had taken three titles in his life. It was a rare achievement. There were only four titles in the clan, and only one or two men [sic] in any generation ever achieved the fourth and highest . . . Because he had taken titles, Ezeudu was to be buried after dark with only a glowing brand to light the sacred ceremony. (98)

Furthermore, Opatá continues, if Okonkwo is to be blamed for the death of Ikemefuna, it is because of his "taking an uncanny pride in his action" (93). Listen to Okonkwo's self-analysis on the death of Ikemefuna:

'When did you become a shivering old woman,' Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.' (51)

Put differently, Okonkwo's pride in his valour appears to be out of tune with the sacredness of the act of killing Ikemefuna, although it can be argued that he is engaged in self-meditation. He may be internalizing his emotions, but this does not exonerate him from the charge of exaltation. Indeed, Okonkwo's increasingly masculine view of life and disdain for feminine qualities might have angered the earth goddess. This is noted when he rebukes a man without a title, calling him a woman; his predilection for masculinity is

again noted in his admission that he would have preferred Ezinma to be a boy rather than a girl; and he despises his father's soft attitude towards life for embracing what, according to Okonkwo, are feminine qualities like leisure, gentility and music. While his disregard for feminine traits may be considered personal, it is fair to admit that Okonkwo's attitude can be seen as a reflection of his society's love for "manly" qualities. In fact, his public attitude and ideas on women, customs, children and others have been considerably modulated by traditional Igbo norms, as well as his ambition and impulsiveness. Okonkwo's chauvinism can be seen in his attempted killing of his wife, for talking back to him and taunting his hunting skills, during the sacred week in honour of the earth goddess. Because of his beating of his wife during this special period, some people in Umuofia believe that Okonkwo does not respect the gods [sic] of the land (25). Thus, even though Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna is in consonance with the request of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, by so acting, he also displeases the earth goddess, according to Ezeudu.

In explaining the fall of Okonkwo, it is also important to understand the metaphysical construction of misfortune within the traditional Igbo society. Although the death of Ikemefuna is sanctioned by the Oracle, Okonkwo's part in this death also, according to Ezeudu, displeases the earth goddess. Achebe appraises these conflicting perceptions of Okonkwo's role in the killing of Ikemefuna or duality of thought in traditional Igbo cosmos in his remark, in *Arrow of God*, about the impermanence of things: "But the elders were not foolish when they said that a man [sic] might have *Ngwu* and still be killed by *Ojukwu*" (39). Stated differently, a person may worship one god and

yet be destroyed by another god. Therefore, Okonkwo's downfall cannot be fully explained without taking note of the metaphysical nature of traditional Igbo society. While human reason may be used to seek a cause for a happening, within the metaphysics of a traditional Igbo person not everything can be explained through human reason. For example, the sudden death of Okoli immediately after boasting of having killed the sacred python appears to defy logic and empiricism. In this light, Jude Chudi Okpala argues that Igbo metaphysics "cannot be explained with a theory of causality that is limited to sensory perception . . . because within Igbo cosmology there is a reality of things happening without a verifiable cause" (565).

Concerning the situation of Ikemefuna, the Oracle did not decree that Okonkwo should bear a hand in his death; Okonkwo could have let his comrades fulfil this mission because they do not have a somehow filial attachment to Ikemefuna. In this connection, Patrick C. Nnoromele argues that Igbo cultural practice obliges that when a human life is requested by gods or goddesses, the family of the victim is often excluded from the mission because of the belief that "the emotional attachment the family might have for that individual would interfere with the process or obligation to execute the demands of the Oracle" (153). Unfortunately, the fear of being thought by Umuofia to resemble his father in terms of cowardice or weakness blinds Okonkwo from (re)evaluating the morality of his action.

Analyzing the role of Okonkwo in the murder of Ikemefuna, Solomon Iyasere states that Okonkwo

is faced with a paradoxical situation in participating in Ikemefuna's death. On the one hand, his relationship with the boy has evolved into a strong

paternal/filial relationship; on the other hand, the gods have decreed that the boy must die--a decree which has to be obeyed without question. (133-34)

As a result, Okonkwo's killing of this boy, Iyasere continues, is not in obedience to the gods or fear of them, but because of Okonkwo's impulsiveness and violent nature as can be seen in episodes such as the beating of his wife during the week of peace.

Consequently, Okonkwo is perceived, Iyasere insists, as being in competition with the gods/goddesses, showing bravery because of his pathological fear of being associated with weakness. After all, Okonkwo's whole life is dominated by the fear of failure. I would add that far from attempting to rival the gods/goddesses in terms of prestige, as Iyasere argues, Okonkwo's leitmotif is his resolve to avoid the rather uneventful life and deplorable death of his father, Unoka. To argue that Okonkwo is in rivalry with the gods/goddesses in distinction is an overstatement because Okonkwo is shown as too obedient, even to a fault, to the latter as evidenced in the killing of Ikemefuna and his willingness to pay the penalty for beating his wife during the sacred week.

Iyasere further argues that, throughout *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is presented as a person of ignoble decisiveness, someone who acts strongly, but is mentally deficient. He is portrayed as a man who embraces action without pausing to meditate on the morality of his behaviour, or allowing himself to be moderated by the bonds of interpersonal relationships, the pricking of the conscience or the customs and values of his society (135). Iyasere's appraisal of Okonkwo's character, though persuasive, is somehow unfair to the hero. Granted that Okonkwo is driven by the impulse of self aggrandizement, this desire does not completely deaden his conscience or prevent him

from reflecting on his actions. I see his remorse when, after killing Ikemefuna, a feeling of sadness overwhelms him and he seems to lose his peace of mind as he drinks heavily in order to overcome his fear. In my mind, Okonkwo is conceived as a person that internalizes emotions of love and compassion as exemplified in his relationship with his daughter, Ezinma, or when he quickly sits down immediately after he stands up upon watching a thrilling wrestling match. Put differently, as Iyasere rightly asserts, Okonkwo allows “his buried humanity to surface only in private, unguarded moments” (139).

Moreover, Okonkwo’s behaviour is considerably moderated by the customs and values of his society. He seems, in my mind, to be too passionate about the ethos of his society, even transgressing them when they stand in the way of his manliness and desire for greatness, attributes which are upheld by his kinspeople. A case in point is the killing of the head messenger sent by the colonial administrator to disrupt the Umuofia meeting about the attitude of the colonial administration towards indigenous practices. While it would seem that Okonkwo’s manifestation of violence in this particular incident is in consonance with the norms of an earlier Umuofia society from which he has been severed for several years, he fails to acknowledge the fact that the new society to which he now returns has transformed to the extent of embracing Christianity and denouncing violence. His new society has learned to accommodate divergent views on religion and culture even when they conflict with traditional values, something that Okonkwo does not understand partly because of his exile.

On his part, Ezeudu is more rational and tolerant than Okonkwo. As an old man, Ezeudu can be seen as an intermediary between the living and the dead and also the

collective conscience of Umuofia. It is possible that Ezeudu's advice to Okonkwo not to kill Ikemefuna continuously rings in Okonkwo's mind: he keeps to the rear while this lad is led in a murderous procession; when he witnesses the savage blow on the child from one of the other assailants, Okonkwo is dazed and he seems to act impulsively when he cuts down Ikemefuna with his machete. While it can be argued that Okonkwo's behaviour during this murder scene is an echo of his conscience, it is plausible to state that, considering Achebe's presentation of traditional Igbo society in this novel, a society that draws an interconnection between human and supernatural forces, Okonkwo is perhaps being punished for defying the earth goddess because of his behaviour. Have we asked ourselves why only Okonkwo's gun explodes in Ezeudu's funeral? I could imagine him and his two murderous comrades firing guns during Ezeudu's funeral and it is only his that misfires. Clearly, then, Okonkwo had somehow offended the earth goddess in killing a child that considers him his father. Even Obierika, Okonkwo's closest friend, critiques his behaviour during the killing of Ikemefuna. This partly explains the fact that despite the considerable influence of the supernatural in the action, Okonkwo is the architect of his downfall.

However, unlike Ezeudu whose interaction with supernatural forces appears controversial, Okonkwo seems to flout their authority. First, he is punished by Ezeani, priest of the earth goddess, for violating the week of peace. This week is considered sacred and the entire clan is expected to radiate joy, kindness, warmth and peace. Okonkwo is provoked by the negligence of Ojiugo, his third wife, who instead of

preparing a meal for her husband, goes to plait her hair. This earns her a beating from Okonkwo. Okonkwo's crime is emphatically stated by Ezeani:

We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil . . . your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your *obi* and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her . . . The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish. (22)

In the face of this abomination, Umuofia believes that disaster could be averted only when Okonkwo heeds the priest's instruction of bringing to the shrine of *Ani* a she-goat, a hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. The ethical codes of this society embrace not only domestic concerns, but also issues that are considered sacrosanct.

It is unimaginable, within Umuofia, for a person to unmask an *egwugwu* or ancestral spirit in public, or blaspheme its unblemished reputation. In traditional Igbo society, there is no division between humans and ancestors because the latter stage is thought of as the sequence to the former. Unfortunately, the overzealous Christian, Enoch, stretches his hand too far by exposing one of the *egwugwu* to the full glare of women and children, an act that sows confusion in Umuofia. Enoch's behaviour is premised on the fact that, as a Christian, he does not believe in traditional religion. Because of this abomination, the Mother Spirit, in the company of other spirits among whom is Okonkwo, is restless, walking throughout the night and mourning for her murdered son. Achebe says that it "was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man [sic] in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound . . . it seemed as if the very soul

of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming- its own death” (132). In the light of the outrage of Enoch, the *egwugwu*

came from all the quarters of the clan . . . The dreaded *Otakagu* came from Imo, and *Ekwensu*, dangling a white cock, arrived from Uli. It was a terrible gathering. The eerie voices of countless spirits . . . sent tremors of fear into every heart. For the first time in living memory the sacred bull-roarer was heard in broad daylight. (132)

The fiery band of spirits, with Okonkwo as one, heads for Enoch’s compound. Even the white priest, Smith, is cowed. In a split second, Enoch’s compound is reduced to rubble, and the church to ashes.

Besides the contribution of forces such as gods/goddesses and colonialism to the downfall of Okonkwo, he is perceived, throughout the novel, to be driven by impulse. This tendency is manifest, for example, in his sudden outbursts when his hunting skills are questioned by his wife. Moreover, the suggestion that his emotions often take precedence over his reason is best exemplified in his slaying of the court messenger and his suicide thereafter. In this regard, Harold Scheub aptly sums up Okonkwo’s behaviour as one of a man attempting to impose his will on his society; as one who is always “peripheral, opportunistically grasping those elements in his society that will guarantee his prestige and assure his ascendancy” (96). Achebe describes him as always trembling with the desire to conquer and subdue, like the desire for woman (34). His desire to always refute any challenge to his opinion is clearly seen when he encourages the people of Mbanta to fight against the missionaries: “If a man [sic] comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his [sic] head. That is what a man [sic] does” (127). Okonkwo’s inflexible will makes him

fail to appreciate Obierika's advice on the case of Ikemefuna, losing the opportunity to know that his friend is "a nexus of significations which allows us considerable purchase on a perception of culture as a necessary but expendable medium through which identity is negotiated between the self and others" (Jeyifo 58). As one who does not slavishly pursue culture, but is able to critique some of its excesses, Obierika is used by Achebe as a foil to Okonkwo, exposing the hero's susceptibility to action and lack of dialectical approach to issues. Obierika's words appear to forebode misfortune to Okonkwo even though he defends his action on grounds that he is merely a messenger of the god: "A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm" (53).

However, Okonkwo is perceived, in the words of Scheub, as "a giant of individualism, drawn a shade bigger than life, buoyed by a dream, and shattered by his *chi*" (121). In a sense, Okonkwo epitomizes the multiperspectivist view associated with the traditional Igbo society: the normative and the marginal and the positive and the negative expected from human beings (Nnaemeka 140). In other words, Okonkwo represents qualities like hard work and determination which would be admired by many Igbos, as well as he symbolizes weaknesses such as violence and rashness which would be frowned upon by his society. His rigid mindset apparently makes him intransigent towards contrary ideas of tolerance and flexibility, as embraced by his friend, Obierika, that could shape his thinking.

Indeed, Okonkwo's downfall can be attributed to the increasing fragmentation of the traditional society to which he belongs by the twin forces of Christianity and colonial

administration. In fact, as a bastion of the traditional Igbo society, Okonkwo cannot be indifferent to the ruthlessness and trampling on native customs and traditions by the District Commissioner and his agents such as Reverend Smith and the converts to Christianity. Elizabeth Isichei in her essay, "Ibo and Christian Beliefs: Some Aspects of a Theological Encounter," argues that the adoption of Christianity by some people in Umuofia meant a breach not only with the past, but also a rejection of relatives and other compatriots as is the case of Nwoye. Moreover, it "implied a rejection of many aspects of Ibo society and forms of authority, which could produce nothing but disunion" (132). According to Okika, an Umuofia elder, these individuals "have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland" (162).

Initially, the influence of Christianity on Igbo traditional religion is minimized within Umuofia as Christian followers are considered *efulefu* or worthless as these people are regarded as those that cannot attract a huge following. The idea that the Christian religion even considers blacks and whites, natives and *osus* as brothers and sisters provokes ridicule towards this religion from the indigenes who regard solidarity as an affinity to the clan, to its norms and values rather than to individuals. On its part, Christianity counters the suspicious attitude of some natives towards it by demonizing traditional religion as the worship of false gods/goddesses, gods/goddesses of wood and stone. With the introduction of an "iron-horse" in Umuofia, Christianity appears to present itself as a superior force to traditional religion as some natives are fascinated upon seeing a bicycle. Increasingly, some indigenes, including even Nwoye, Okonkwo's

son, are captivated by Christian songs, a fascination that makes him abandon traditional religion in favour of Christianity without overlooking his disgust at the murder of Ikemefuna, whom he looked upon as an older brother and a mentor. This is how Achebe describes the relationship between Ikemefuna and Nwoye: “He was like an elder brother to Nwoye, and from the very first seemed to have kindled a new fire in the younger boy” (42). In embracing Christianity to the detriment of traditional religion, Nwoye re-imagines his relationship with his traditional Igbo society by interrogating its “masculine code of behaviour, the exposure of twins, the sacrifice of his beloved friend, Ikemefuna, and a dry hunger in his soul” (Searle 52).

Okonkwo is particularly vexed at Nwoye’s acceptance of the Christian religion because as his first son, right hand man or *okpara*, Nwoye is supposed to offer “family sacrifices to the gods [sic] and ancestral spirits. By joining the Christians, Nwoye renounces his priesthood, duties and privileges in his family” (Okoye 176). Nwoye’s pursuit of Christian values challenges Okonkwo to fight back against Western culture. It is probably the threat posed by Christianity to traditional religion that accounts for Okonkwo’s action to kill the colonizers’ messenger, an act that culminates in his suicide as he seeks to avoid humiliation at the hands of the colonial administration. According to Joseph McLaren, Nwoye’s conversion to Christianity is, in the eyes of Okonkwo, an attempt to promote “thoughts of a total betrayal of his male children, resulting in the potentially cataclysmic disjuncture with the ancestors” (108). Thus, Okonkwo envisions, through Nwoye’s behaviour, the possible destruction of traditional religion, hence his dislike of Christianity and its values. According to Okonkwo, Nwoye and the new

converts would bring disunity and disgrace to Umuofia, its institution and values. In this regard, when Obierika points at the body of Okonkwo hanging from a tree, he directly accuses Western colonial forces, including Christianity, of plotting the death of the hero: “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog” (165).

Okonkwo, therefore, takes the affront of Christianity to traditional religion personal; he and a few others “realize that the challenge to the local gods [sic] is after all a challenge to the local culture” in their perception of the gods/goddesses and ancestors as an essential part of traditional Igbo cultural identity (Galvan and Galvan 112). Consequently, Okonkwo’s tragedy can partly be seen, according to Enrique Galvan and Fernando Galvan, as Achebe’s presentation of European domination and disempowering of a people through the introduction of mainly religious ideas that openly challenge their traditional beliefs from a foreign perspective (115). According to Lloyd Brown, Okonkwo’s death exposes the dominant impulses of his life—self destructive pride and the demoralizing effects of the new order (28), which are subverting the old order to which he belongs. However, in as much as colonial influence could be blamed for the downfall of Okonkwo, his inability to fit “within the boundaries of any social order” (Begam 400) partly contributes to his demise. He is constantly preoccupied with asserting his identity within his society and, in due process, exposes his shortcomings like irrationality and impatience that accelerate his tragedy. Okonkwo’s ultimate death, under unenviable circumstances, recalls that of his father, Unoka, both of whom are buried like a dog.

In fact, Okonkwo's misfortunes, to a certain extent, reflect those of his grandson, Obi, in the sequel to *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* presents an interesting situation of justice involving the supernatural in the case of Obi. When both Obi and Clara agree to abort her pregnancy, they have difficulties securing a doctor to effect this. Misfortune after misfortune appears to trail them. When a doctor is eventually found, Obi cannot provide the fee of thirty pounds requested for this operation. Moreover, he has just been robbed of fifty pounds that Clara handed to him. When his mother, who earlier opposed his relationship with Clara, dies, Obi does not attend her funeral because of the lack of money. Some of his kinspeople in Lagos consider him spoilt and ungrateful in not giving a befitting farewell to his mother, establishing a link between his behaviour and his relationship to the tabooed Clara: "Do you know what medicine that *osu* woman may have put into his soup to turn his eyes and ears away from his people?" (145). Nevertheless, Achebe's use of the supernatural in this particular instance is to enable us to probe the character of Obi, as one whose independence of mind makes him intransigent to the norms of his society.

Although Obi's financial woes probably account for his involvement in bribery, his misfortune stems, from the traditional Igbo perspective, from his dogged determination to wed Clara despite opposition from his family and friends. This perception of Obi's tragedy indicates how the supernatural is ingrained in traditional Igbo social code. It would seem that going against traditional Igbo social ethics is synonymous with invoking misfortune on a violator. As a result, Clara's social status is seen, within Umuofia, as a catalyst for Obi's multiple misfortunes, vindicating his societal belief that

she is an agent of destruction, an instrument of darkness. While there is evidence to the fact that Obi's desire to refund the money that he got from Clara tempts him into accepting bribes, it is plausible, at least in the eyes of some of his kinspeople, that his downfall is believed to have been partly triggered by his romance with an outcast.

From another perspective, some Umuofia people attribute Obi's nemesis to past misdeeds within his family: "I say that his father did the same thing . . . When this boy's father—you all know him, Isaac Okonkwo—when Isaac Okonkwo heard of the death of his father he said that those who kill with the machete must die by the machete" (145). Whatever conclusions may be arrived at about the fate of Obi, Achebe uses the supernatural to complicate meaning, intriguing the reader to explain Obi's tragedy in the way most compelling to him or her, although it is most apparent that Obi is the architect of his downfall because of his moral paucity and lack of resolve.

However, in the case of Achebe's latest novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, the author appears to re-imagine some aspects of the supernatural such as *Idemili's* royal python in *Arrow of God* or Chielo in *Things Fall Apart*. In his most recent novel, Achebe seems to use the myth of *Idemili* as a way to emphasize the need for moral redemption in his society that is embroiled in vices like abuse of power, corruption and others. *Anthills of the Savannah* depicts Beatrice, otherwise known as Nwanyibuife (a female is also something), essentially as a custodian of morality. Thus, in this novel, Achebe revisits the myth of *Idemili*, a goddess of morality charged with ensuring that peace and modesty reign in the world (93), using Beatrice as a medium of effecting change in his society through social justice. Within traditional Igbo society, this goddess is presented as being

concerned that people are not afflicted with thirst, as evidenced when she sends running streams to areas affected by drought. As a result, she has several followers, especially wealthy farmers, who ascribe their rich agricultural yield to her blessing. It is believed, in this society, that because of *Idemili*, prosperous farmers acquire the *ozo* title, seen as indicative of assiduity and prosperity. However, if a distinguished person taints *Idemili's* honour in one form or another, it is believed that he or she would be smitten by her.

As a symbol of morality, Beatrice encourages Chris to resign from the corrupt and brutal government of Sam. According to Ali Erritouni, Achebe's conception of Beatrice as priestess and her identification with *Idemili* confer on her the status of a leader (68). Following the death of Ikem, Beatrice takes care of his girl friend, Elewa. Beatrice exercises only a symbolic influence in the novel, lacking in the supernatural might enjoyed by her prototype, Chielo, in *Things Fall Apart*. A possible reason for this change in characterization could be the waning belief in effecting meaningful change in modern Nigeria through the supernatural. However, Beatrice's fearlessness is unmistakable when she encourages the grief-stricken Elewa to transmute sorrow over the loss of Chris into something meaningful: "The only thing we fit do now is to be strong so that when the fight come we fit fight am proper. Wipe your eye. No worry. God dey" (160). Beatrice's advice is also timely because of her anxiety about the safety of the baby that Elewa is carrying. Even though Beatrice is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, she tends to treat people primarily as human beings regardless of social status. Little wonder then that Chris considers her a Maiden Spirit (184).

Beatrice can be perceived by us, as earlier pointed out, as a recreation of earlier female characters like Chielo and *Ani* in *Things Fall Apart*, associated with the supernatural. While *Ani* acts as a check on human excesses by punishing humankind for transgressions, Chielo ensures that the will of the gods/goddesses is respected. On her part, Beatrice, though not necessarily having a shrine for her goddess like her counterparts in Achebe's other novels, critiques the political highhandedness of the regime of Sam while envisioning a society where injustice would be minimized. In fact, her relationship with the goddess, *Idemili*, is even suggested in the etymology of her name, which is associated with beauty and sanctity. Her function in *Anthills of the Savannah* reflects "the two faces of the goddess, nurturing and punishing in her relationships with other characters" (Bicknell 131). For example, she inspires love and creativity in Chris and Ikem, and castigates the abuse of power by the government of Sam.

Disgusted with the general state of affairs in Kangan and the tragic death of Chris, Beatrice shuns the state funeral in his honour. This refusal can be seen as a repudiation of the moral decadence in her society. However, she enkindles hope as can be seen in the name which she christens Elewa's baby. Amaechina, the name she chooses for the baby, means May-the-path-never-close (206). According to Robin Ikegami, the name Amaechina symbolizes "open access to knowledge, communication between past and present, and once again unification of apparent opposites" (504). In other words, this name indicates contact between the worlds of the living and that of the departed and also appeals for harmony among people of different political ideologies or sexes. Another

critical dimension of this naming ceremony is seen in Beatrice's attempt at social equality between men and women and between the poor and the rich. In this regard, the naming of Elewa's baby provides a forum for ecumenical solidarity in the sense that the participants at this occasion represent various religions: Aina would stand for Islam; Beatrice would represent traditional religion while Agatha would symbolize Christianity (Opara 121-22). It is a subtle device by Achebe to weld these various religions and, by so doing, he probably suggests that all these forms of spirituality are in the service of humankind and should not be discriminated against. In choosing Beatrice as vehicle for this ecumenical service, Catherine Bicknell argues that Achebe envisions her as a symbol of hope and for the possibility that a national society would incorporate and rework Christian and traditional values in a way that embraces all religions, classes and ethnic groups (134).

Furthermore, the prayer which is made by an old man during this naming ceremony: "What happened to her father, may it not happen again" (211) can be viewed as an attempt by Achebe to bridge different spatial/cosmic and temporal spheres. By invoking the memory of Ikem, the baby's father, the old man is seeking for the protection of the living by the departed, or instantiating the idea of communication between human and spiritual realms. At the same time, Beatrice emphasizes the need for people to be truthful because, according to her, truth is beautiful. In other words, if truth were supreme, the numerous political assassinations in Kangan might have been avoided. In fact, Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice as a goddess could represent his thinking that only recourse to traditional ethics, as symbolized by *Idemili*, could rid his society of the corruption, greed and moral bankruptcy that are entrenched in it.

Generally, Achebe's use of the supernatural in his writings is essentially to explore human nature. In doing so, he predicates the supernatural on certain traditional Igbo beliefs: humans need intermediaries in the forms of gods/goddesses or traditional priests/priestesses between them and the spirit world; ancestral worships have to be done in order for communication to be effected between the living and the living dead; rituals are necessary for the propitiation of angry gods/goddesses, or for the cleansing of individuals who have violated cosmic harmony; and diviners have to be sought when one is struck by mysterious illnesses. This awareness is born out of the sense of community within the traditional Igbo context, nurtured by the understanding that life continues even after death and that the physical and spiritual worlds are interwoven. There is also the belief that the lives of the living are influenced by what obtains in the spiritual realm. Ezeulu, in *Arrow of God*, emphasizes this point when he states that "the dead fathers of Umuaro looking at the world from *Ani-Mmo* must be utterly bewildered by the ways of the new age" (14). In addition, total condemnation and bedevilling of indigenous customs by the missionaries and the dogmatic claim of Christianity as the only genuine religion constitute the ideological frame in some of Achebe's novels (Okoye 266). In a sense, Christianity, to a certain extent, also accounts for the downfall of Achebe's heroes. Perhaps competing with this consideration is the use of the supernatural which, in Achebe's novels, amplifies character, compounds meaning, prognosticates action and rationalizes behaviour. Achebe, like Shakespeare, uses supernatural devices as an artistic frame for delineating character. Both writers, through their art, demonstrate how the human mind could be explored through the supernatural.

CHAPTER FIVE

SHAKESPEARE'S AND ACHEBE'S USE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to discuss the influence of the supernatural on character in the tragedies of Shakespeare and Achebe. My intention has been to underscore its impact on the actions of the protagonists and how it enhances the tragic dimensions of the works. Throughout this study, the supernatural has also been examined in the works of these authors as premonitory and also moralistic. At the same time, I argue that Shakespeare and Achebe have different perceptions of the supernatural, given the fact that they write about societies with different cultural perspectives. Chapter One brought to light the norms that bound the Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo societies. Although Shakespeare examines the supernatural as a theatrical device, Achebe tends to present it as inherent in the cosmos of the traditional Igbo society. However, Shakespeare's and Achebe's societies are portrayed as, to a certain extent, influenced by supernatural forces; while some Elizabethans and Jacobean viewed strange happenings as having a supernatural coloration, some traditional Igbos even have gods and goddesses that are thought of as custodians of specific roles, such as *Ani*, for example, that is believed to be the watchdog of morality. The Elizabethan, Jacobean and traditional Igbo societies are portrayed as having beliefs with roots in witchcraft, animism or popular cults, Christianity and traditional religion.

Essentially, the supernatural refers to dreams, divinations, omens, gods and goddesses, signs or rituals, issues that are believed to influence human beings and events through an external and impersonal mystical force apparently beyond the human sphere. Shakespeare saw it as a topical issue and it is well known that King James I of England was deeply interested in various kinds of supernatural phenomena and witch-lore, and it seems reasonable enough to assume that Shakespeare deliberately analyzed a theme that fascinated his monarch and audience. About the novels of Achebe, there is hardly any important area of human experience which is not linked to the supernatural and the people's sense of religion. Achebe shows how these things are part and parcel of the ideological interpretation of experience in the traditional social context of Igboland (Obiechina 205).

A review of literature on the subject of the supernatural was also the concern of the Chapter One. It is as a result of the paucity of critical material about the influence of the supernatural on the protagonists of Shakespeare and Achebe that necessitated my decision to focus the discussion on both these writers. However, I acknowledge that critics such as Cumberland Clark, Irving Ribner and Robert Ornstein have respectively traced Elizabethan and Jacobean folklore and mythology in Shakespeare, explored how evil affects the human mind, and how there is a restoration of order in Shakespeare's plays through a destruction of evil forces. On their part, Kalu Ogbaa and Damian Opata, for example, have examined Achebe's novels and indicated how the supernatural affects human judgement, as well as how Achebe's protagonists seem to be obligated in their actions by supernatural forces. Despite these critical insights on Shakespeare and Achebe,

it would seem that there is hardly a comparative study of how both these writers use the supernatural to explore the human mind and create, in due process, compelling protagonists. Throughout this study, it is argued that, however overwhelming the effect of the supernatural on the heroes, humans still exercise free will in their actions.

Chapter Two of the dissertation theorized the supernatural. Even though belief in it may be dismissed by some as unreal, a figment of the imagination, or associated with particular races or religions, I have demonstrated how it seems to permeate Western and African societies and various religions. In fact, it is perceived as something lying hidden in the inward part of humankind (Weisinger vii). Consider the Western obsession with psychic phenomena, its fascination with exorcism that is even performed by priests, bishops and archbishops (Chinweizu et al. 21). Also, the Nigerian film industry, through such household titles as *Sakobi*, *the Snake Girl*; *Blood Money*; *Festival of Fire*; *Suicide Mission* and *Sins of the Fathers*, has vulgarized witchcraft, for instance, indicating how human beings use supernatural devices in their endeavours. These bewitching films have made witchcraft extremely blood-curdling. After all, not every aspect of life can be proven scientifically or understood rationally.

The supernatural, as a dramatic technique used to portray character in Shakespeare, is the subject of Chapter Three. I have demonstrated that Shakespeare, in his tragedies, incorporates devices like witches, ghosts, dreams, comets and others to indicate the crises confronting his heroes, as well as to foreshadow action and use the supernatural as an instrument of poetic justice. *Macbeth*, *Caesar*, *Lear* and others are

good examples of tragic heroes whose downfall appears to be mirrored by supernatural forces.

In Chapter Four, I have argued that Achebe's protagonists vindicate the possibility of some link between character and supernatural forces; the actions of some of these characters like Okonkwo and Ezeulu sometimes appear to be conditioned by external forces. A person may become a victim of this kind of the supernatural when he or she is threatened or promised evil. The victim may take these threats seriously and this may result in a worried mind. As a result, the psyche is shaken and the individual made wary. Okonkwo, Ezeulu and Obi are, to a certain extent, good examples of how external sources may affect human behaviour. Now, I wish to discuss similarities and differences in Shakespeare and Achebe as they use the supernatural to study character.

Whereas Shakespeare tends to present the supernatural from a rather detached or philosophical perspective, using supernatural figures to essentially represent the states of mind of his characters, Achebe seems to go beyond this type of representation of the supernatural. There is the impression that he configures it as the ethical foundation of his society as attested to by the moral structure of traditional Igbos, whose cosmogony is prominently recreated in his novels. In due process, Achebe seems to create new visions out of traditions which may have been in doubt in the eyes of some Western critics like Conrad and Roscoe, who considered Africans mindless. In his novels, Achebe, using essentially traditional Igbos as a case study, argues that Africans have their own culture and sense of religion, with nothing to envy the West. Achebe further states in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that his past and that of his counterparts "was not one long night of

savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (45). As a result, according to Isidore Okpewho in an introduction to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents aspects of Igbo traditional belief system credibly, as having internal logic, and as serving the metaphysical needs of the people. For example, the recurrent cycle of death and rebirth (26).

For his part, Shakespeare appears to critically explore established conventions. In other words, while Achebe uses gods and goddesses from Igbo traditional society like *Ani*, *Ulu* and others to indicate their apparent impact on human endeavours, magical practice and enquiry in England provided Shakespeare with a source from which he "could draw characters, ethical challenges, and visions of a fantastic world in which angels, devils, and mercurial spirits operated" (Friesen 4). Put differently, whereas Shakespeare's heroes tend to debate their actions and the impact of supernatural forces on their thoughts, the protagonists of Achebe appear to manifest little doubt about the influence of external forces on their actions. This chapter, as earlier stated, attempts a comparative study of the use of the supernatural in character portrayal by both Shakespeare and Achebe, indicating how this device is embedded in the art of both writers as a way of exploring human nature. Whatever conclusions that are arrived at concerning both writers, I argue that Shakespeare and Achebe are credited with metaphorical representations of the supernatural, employing various mythologies and folklore to create compelling protagonists. Because of the ongoing debate on the supernatural and given the focus of this study on Shakespeare and Achebe, it might be interesting for further research to explore in detail reasons behind the tendency among

some Elizabethans, Jacobeans and traditional Igbos to draw relationships between the supernatural and human actions.

Impact of the Supernatural on the Protagonists

While Shakespeare uses ghosts or witches, for example, to accentuate the crises confronting his heroes, Achebe more often associates the dilemma of his protagonists with the dictates of gods/goddesses or oracles. The difference in these supernatural representations of heroes by both Shakespeare and Achebe can be partly explained by the fact that whereas Elizabethan and Jacobean England were essentially concerned with identifying spirits as good or bad depending on circumstances, Achebe's society perceives spirits as the extension of human beings in the form of ancestors, hence the absence of ghosts in his artistic cosmos. Stated differently, within traditional Igbo society, what the Elizabethans and Jacobeans would have described as ghosts could be qualified as ancestors because of the apparent interaction between the living and the departed. In this regard, Achebe states in *Things Fall Apart* that:

The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man's [sic] life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his [sic] ancestors. (97)

Interestingly, both Shakespeare and Achebe make considerable use of dreams, signs and other supernatural devices to qualify their characters. However, while Achebe's world is permeated by several deities assumed to keep watch over human actions, Shakespeare's dramaturgy, with the exception of some pagan gods like *Janus* and *Jupiter*

in *King Lear*, appears lacking in this kind of representation. One explanation for the paucity of gods/goddesses in Shakespeare could be the influence of Christianity, which considered belief in these gods/goddesses pagan, without ignoring the different timelines between both writers. Shakespeare wrote in the 16th and 17th centuries whereas Achebe is writing in the 20th and 21st centuries. The human mind has considerably evolved towards the supernatural, polarizing the debate on this phenomenon as some of Achebe's novels indicate how the natural and the supernatural have become subsumed into each other. Nevertheless, the presence of supernatural features in Shakespeare's tragedies problematizes character and interrogates meaning, making it challenging, for example, to dissociate Macbeth's demise from the prophecy of the witches. Similarly, Caesar's assassination appears as a *fait accompli* in the minds of the audience, who would have known the history, and also considered the omens and portents prefiguring Caesar's murder as sources of revelation. Despite these observations, the heroes are primarily responsible for their fate because of their tragic flaws which help to bring about their misfortunes. For example, while the downfall of Macbeth, Lear and Caesar can be ascribed to their vaulting ambition, wrath and pride respectively, the fall of Okonkwo and Ezeulu is considerably caused by irrationality, vengefulness and the effects of colonialism. Also, despite the belief among traditional Igbos about the fundamental role of *chi* in human fate, Achebe, through the example of Unoka, Okonkwo's father, emphasizes that humans can still influence their destinies. It should be recalled that Unoka's farms, unlike those of his compatriots, do not grow healthy crops. Upon consulting the oracle to find out why he has this misfortune, he is advised thus:

You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your matchet and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms; you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man. (14)

Furthermore, both writers make considerable use of societal or communal beliefs like witchcraft, augury or magic, in Shakespeare, and the sacred python, rituals and taboos, in Achebe, to compound characterization and meaning. Macbeth, Caesar, Othello, Ezeulu, Okonkwo and Obi are characters that exemplify this kind of configuration. Another significant distinction in the use of signs between Shakespeare and Achebe is that while the former tends to incorporate more of what may be described as naturalist symbolizations like earthquakes, comets or storms to illustrate the woes of his protagonists, the latter often embeds societal or ethical codes in his symbolism. One possible justification for these seemingly different representations may be the dissimilar supernatural agencies active in these different societies. Shakespeare's England appeared to have relished more the enquiry about unnatural phenomena like ghosts, establishing some relationship between them and human actions, while in traditional Igbo society, daily misfortunes may have symbolic signification. For example, the explosion of Okonkwo's gun, Oduche's imprisonment of the sacred python and Obi's romance with the controversial Clara, besides dramatizing the troubled consciences, fears and worries of Achebe's heroes, also anticipate their misfortunes, at least in the eyes of some traditional Igbos.

As previously stated, Shakespeare and Achebe, in their works, clearly illustrate the impact of the supernatural on character; the behaviour, actions and thinking of their

characters appear, to a certain extent, to be influenced by external forces. In fact, the supernatural seems to be inherent in Shakespearean tragedy; there is a feeling that the action is being played out and in some cases provoked by forces or powers that come from beyond the pale of human activity, and are greater in their power and influence than humanity (Stephen and Franks 44). As a result, Shakespeare's hero, like Macbeth or Othello, appears to be confronted by a situation with which the organisation of his being is unable to cope. A good example is the coincidence between the witches' prophecy of Thane of Cawdor and Macbeth's immediate elevation to this title, or the timeliness between the loss of the handkerchief and suspicion of cuckoldry from Othello's perspective. Under the apparent pressure of the supernatural, the hero tends to lose his composure and reason.

However, the influence of the supernatural is hardly compulsive. It constitutes an element of the problem confronting the hero and does not completely circumscribe his capacity to deal with it. In the words of Bradley, although the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedy contributes to the action and appears indispensable in the plot, it is "always placed in the closest relation with character. It gives a confirmation and a distinct form to inward movements already present and exerting an influence" (8). Therefore, the tragic heroes are responsible for their actions.

In this regard, Caesar, for example, has the choice of heeding the signs and warnings preceding his murder, or allowing his pride to influence his judgement. On his part, King Lear has the option of reigning till he naturally relinquishes power, through death or mental incapacity, to his successor as prescribed by his society. Unfortunately,

his whimsicality coupled with the flattery of his vicious daughters blind his reason. Macbeth, like Lear, is, to a certain extent, a victim of much dependence on loved ones. Agreed that he is ambitious, there is grave doubt whether, on his own, he could have murdered the king without the prompting of the witches and the overriding contribution of Lady Macbeth: "From this time/ Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard/ To be the same in thine own act and valor/ As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that/ Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,/ And live a coward in thine own esteem" (1.7.38-43). By challenging the "manliness" or resolve of Macbeth to kill Duncan and by questioning his love for her, Lady Macbeth pushes her husband to the wall, obliging him to murder Duncan if he expects love and peace in his home. However, Macbeth is also deeply conscious that his ambition lacks "the sterner stuff," as evident in his hesitation before killing the king. While his downfall may be said to have been considerably influenced by supernatural elements, forces of darkness and Lady Macbeth, it is questionable whether Lear could legitimately apportion blame to other characters like Goneril or Regan considering the extent of his wrath and impulsiveness.

Between the emotionally charged Lear and the superstitiously-inclined Macbeth stands Hamlet, who is confronted with the discordant voices of intellectualism and the supernatural. As a scholar, he is attuned to philosophizing on issues and, as a son, the Elizabethan precept dictates that he must listen to his father, apparently represented in the ghost. It is this bewildering attempt to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting positions that overwhelms Hamlet, rendering him vulnerable to their dominating influence. He eventually becomes like a tossed yo-yo at the mercy of these bipolar forces. His plight is

relatively comparable to that of Caesar who, as earlier mentioned, is enjoined to make a choice between his obsession with his invincibility and the strident message from supernatural forces, represented by the soothsayer and other portents, that counsel that he stay indoors.

On his part, Othello presents an interesting scenario in that while his sexual jealousy and gullibility play to Iago's advantage as he poisons Othello's mind with suspicions of Desdemona's infidelity, her inability to provide the handkerchief when it is requested by Othello signals, according to Othello, misfortune for them. In fact, Othello is so obsessed by the loss of this handkerchief that it appears to haunt his actions and can convincingly be perceived as influential in his downfall, without overlooking his gullibility and impulsiveness and the machinations of Iago. The handkerchief seems to trail him like a vulture would a carrion.

Indeed, while Shakespeare's tragic heroes, like Hamlet, Lear and Othello, manifest several infirmities as typified by their subjection to some of the humours of the Elizabethan epoch, namely, melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler, Shakespeare uses the belief in humour theory to explore the downfall of his heroes. Consequently, a comprehensive appraisal of the demise of these tragic heroes must, in addition to these considerations, identify their flaws, weaknesses which Shakespeare dramatizes with the help of the supernatural. This method of characterization against a supernatural mould is also taken up by Achebe in explaining the downfall of his protagonists.

Traditional Igbos exhibit their belief in the supernatural by having deities, spirits and oracles to which they seem to have given power over their daily activities and even

future life. They appear fatalistic in the belief that they seem not to be in control of their own destiny because each individual is believed to have a *chi* or personal god that preordains the course of events (Kambaji 38), although humans are still believed, within this society, to be capable of influencing their fate. According to Ogbaa, Achebe's use of *chi* is

very crucial in characterization for it points to the Igbo belief in the notion of predestination and man's [sic] apparent helplessness in the face of his [sic] being denied gifts such as children, wealth and good health by intransigent *chi* during the process of man's [sic] creation in the spirit world. (16)

As a result, Ezeulu disregards the advice given him by his friends and elders of Umuaro and fails in the end not only because he seems fated to be destroyed, but fundamentally because of his tragic flaws. He appears to be preoccupied with seeking personal glory, which earns him the wrath of *Ulu*. On his part, Okonkwo is partly a victim of his undoing and his society that attaches much importance to status and greatness. He is, therefore, driven into ruthlessness in his bid to be an accomplished man in his traditional Igbo society. His death can be seen as the result of cumulative events. Okonkwo's public attitude and ideas on women, customs, children or wealth have been considerably modulated by traditional Igbo norms, as well as by his personal idiosyncrasies such as impulsiveness, hot temper and nervousness.

In addition, the traditional Igbo respect for rank and prestige, bravery and success in war and wrestling, reverence for courage, and pride in material acquisition and social prosperity are all shared by Okonkwo. He is guided by his strong belief that the law of the land must be obeyed, and his actions appear predicated on this conviction. Thus,

when he violates the week of peace, he humbly accepts his punishment, admitting that he broke the law. Unlike Obierika who questions some of the exigencies of his society such as the ban on titled men climbing palm trees or the law authorizing twins to be thrown in an evil forest or the exile of men for accidentally killing a compatriot, Okonkwo rigorously submits himself to traditional Igbo norms. Thus, he has a vibrant knowledge of his societal ethics. In fact, Okonkwo's recognition as representative of his society is seen in the fact that he is chosen as emissary to Mbaino, and the guardian of Ikemefuna. He is also one of the nine *egwugwu* of Umuofia. In a sense, his downfall can also be explained in terms of his strict adherence to his societal code of ethics.

Indeed, it can be stated that Okonkwo's overindulgence in manly activities and ridicule for feminine ones has been, to a certain extent, conditioned by traditional Igbo society. For instance, at the betrothal of Obierika's daughter, when much palm wine is brought by the suitor's family, the host says that they are now behaving like men; it is strongly upheld in this society that if one were unable to rule one's women and children, one was not really a man; as Ikemefuna is about to be killed, men of Umuofia say that the men that did not accompany them in this mission are effeminate; yams are considered a kingly and manly crop while cocoyams, beans and cassava are reserved for women; boys are encouraged to listen to war stories. Examples abound to illustrate the point that, within the traditional Igbo society, manliness appears to override womanliness, an idea that considerably shapes Okonkwo's mindset.

Nevertheless, Okonkwo is enveloped in fear and worry on the eve of and the aftermath of the killing of Ikemefuna. He accompanies the latter's murderous delegation

with much reluctance as Ezeudu's word that he should have no hand in the killing of this child continuously haunts him. This clearly shows that Okonkwo is human and, all things considered, he would not have been part of this bloody delegation. Unfortunately, the overwhelming traditional Igbo code appears to dictate his action: abhorrence of cowardice and a paroxysm of manliness. Although Eustace Palmer in "Character and Society in *Things Fall Apart*" opines that Okonkwo is what his society has made him, and that there is very little support in the text for the view that he is what he is because of a radical misunderstanding of the subtle shades of his society's codes (154), Okonkwo's dogged determination to distinguish himself from his late father should not be downplayed in explaining his downfall.

Moreover, Okonkwo presents an interesting case in that he may not completely accept all of the beliefs of traditional Igbo. He believes in hard work and this is why he does not sympathize with lazy men and, therefore, may not fully subscribe to the belief that "one's palm nuts are cracked by a benevolent spirit" (21). Proof of this is his constant dissociation from the indolent and sensual life of his father. As Okonkwo combats the merry lifestyle of Unoka and as a traditional Igbo person, he still needs some dose of the supernatural to guard against the unforeseen. He has to walk the delicate rope between hard work and the supernatural, ensuring a fine combination of both aspects to build a solid, full man. Okonkwo is also viewed as a man who responds in a very particular way to the gender codes that are prevalent in his patriarchal society as evidenced in his relationship with Nwoye and Ezinma. Though he greatly loves the latter because he sees her as his alter ego, he would have loved that Nwoye, the male child,

incarnate manly qualities. He, therefore, has no patience for the feminine traits exhibited by Nwoye and, worst of all, adult men.

In fact, Okonkwo's personal contribution to his demise can be attributed to his uncontrollable temper. It seems as though there is an overwhelming irrationality driving him into sudden fits of anger that often result in unpleasant consequences. He is also perceived as a man who often succumbs to the enthusiasm of passion, making him view things from one perspective, and making him privilege action over rhetoric. For example, his rebuke on an untitled man for talking when the man's superiors are speaking, his severe taunts on Ikemefuna for refusing to eat, and even his involuntary killing of Ezeudu's son is the culmination of his somewhat senseless acts, spurred on by impulsiveness. Thus, Okonkwo's fall is the composite result of his restlessness, impatience with less successful men and his unwavering love and faith in Umuofia. Even when he does something objectionable such as violating the week of peace or showing contempt towards a compatriot, he always regrets his actions. Therefore, he cannot be seen as a complete deviant of his society. Again, in the words of Palmer in his aforementioned essay, "Character and Society in *Things Fall Apart*," Okonkwo is a man with admirable qualities reflecting those of his society; his tragedy resides partly in the fact that the society which he has championed for so long is forced to change while he finds that he cannot (156).

On his part, Ezeulu is a study of a complex intellectual, reminiscent of Hamlet, whose superstitious bent of mind can, in part, be explained in terms of his extraordinary function of chief priest, a role that is seemingly larger than life in the sense that he is

believed to commune with gods that may not be comprehensible to the uninitiated, and he, therefore, needs this distinctive quality in appropriating respect to his authority and awe in his detractors. In this regard, Chima Anyadike points out that an Igbo traditional priest or priestess was thought to be capable of functioning “within a conceptual frame of negotiating a healthy and sustainable balance within a historical identity believed to be half-human and half-spirit” (51), an issue that Ezeulu apparently fails to reconcile. He is unable sometimes to distinguish his voice from that of the supernatural, thereby muffling his personality. A glaring illustration is his argument that the gods refused him from eating the remaining yams and, consequently, the gods should be blamed for the break up of Umuaro. Viewed closely, there is the lingering doubt noted in him as to whether he had not been secretly nursing revenge on his people: “The more he suffered now the greater would be the joy of revenge. His mind sought out new grievances to pile upon all the others” (182).

From a different perspective, some similarities between the art of Achebe and that of Shakespeare are quite noticeable, particularly in the former’s conception of Okonkwo, for example. First, the respective Scottish and traditional Igbo societies from where spring *Macbeth* and *Things Fall Apart*, both fighters are already titled men, and are in search of more distinction. On the one hand, Macbeth comfortably enjoys two titles, namely, Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor. On the other, Okonkwo is distinguished through two titles. Coincidentally, both heroes want a third title in order to command more respect and satisfy their ambition for glory. Macbeth desperately yearns for the crown of Scotland

just as Okonkwo sees Nwakibie, who “had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan” (18-19), as his ultimate distinction. Interestingly, both Macbeth and Okonkwo are blinded by their strong desire for glory, a drive that catapults them towards a tragic end—the one decapitated in a war and the other committing suicide. In a sense, their destruction is the combined result of their striving for personal aggrandizement and the great respect for power exhibited by their societies.

More similarities between Shakespeare and Achebe can be seen in that Okonkwo’s outrageous killing of Ikemefuna calls to mind Macbeth’s atrocious murder of Banquo; Okonkwo’s restlessness results from this callous murder in the same way as Macbeth is plunged into a crisis of insecurity and anguish because of his killing of innocent Duncan; the child’s spirit or Okonkwo’s conscience harasses him, reducing him to a puny thing just as Banquo’s ghost haunts Macbeth. Indeed, Okonkwo and Macbeth are conceived as great soldiers who, at critical moments, cannot overcome their fear. Initially, both command respect within their respective communities, but they die in an ignoble way, triggered by their overbearing ambition and other forces that are dramatized through the supernatural.

Furthermore, Achebe’s other protagonists appear to share certain drives with Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. Ezeulu’s visit to the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, for example, to enquire whether to convene the yam festival or not reminds us of Macbeth’s visit to the witches to know about his future. Ezeulu says that the Oracle is against celebrating the festival; an interpretation that is disputable just as the witches’ metaphorical explanation to Macbeth that he can only be destroyed when Birnam wood

moves to Dunsinane and that none of woman born can harm him. Ezeulu's divination of *Ulu* appears confounding as his mind is assailed by the discordant voices of traditional religion and Christianity: "As Ezeulu cast his string of cowries the bell of Oduche's people began to ring. For one brief moment he was distracted by its sad, measured monotone and he thought how strange it was that it should sound so near—much nearer than it did in his compound" (210). Obika's death appears to signal doom for Ezeulu in the same way as Lady Macbeth's to Macbeth; both Obika and Lady Macbeth can be seen as the alter egos of the heroes. However, while Obika's demise seems to represent a social structure with which Ezeulu is confronted, the misinterpretation of the prophecy of the witches by Macbeth indicates a semantic problem. Nevertheless, both Macbeth and Ezeulu lose their pillars of support, and are now saddled by events.

Shakespeare, like Achebe, at times engages in equivocal exploration of the supernatural with regard to human behaviour, raising the question whether the characters are hallucinating, or are influenced by external forces that are apparently beyond their control. In *Macbeth*, it is debatable whether Macbeth hears a voice reminding him about how he will be deprived of sleep as he proceeds to murder Duncan, or his mind is troubled because of his murderous action. Does Gertrude see the ghost of Old Hamlet reprimanding her because of her amorous relationship with Claudius, or is her agitated state of mind a reflection of her conscience? Is Brabantio told in a dream about his daughter's elopement with Othello, or is his suspicion of a relationship between her and Othello based on observation? Is Obika's death in *Arrow of God* brought about by fever considering that he is hesitant to run as a masquerade because of his illness, or is *Ulu*,

through his death, punishing its priest, Ezeulu, for intransigence? About the death of Akukalia, which can convincingly be traced to his fiery temper that leads to his desecration of Ebo's shrine, Achebe adds to the controversy by attributing Akukalia's behaviour to the making of a god: "What happened next was the work of *Ekwensu*, the bringer of evil" (23). Furthermore, after stating, through the oracle, that Unoka's inability to be prosperous is due to his indolence, Achebe still says that Unoka is an ill-fated man, born with a bad *chi* or personal god that causes his 'bad' death and his being thrown in an evil forest. Shakespeare's and Achebe's equivocal depiction of the supernatural makes their art sophisticated as the observer is compelled to rethink the reasons behind the downfall of their protagonists.

Truly, Achebe's protagonists, like Shakespeare's, are depicted as men with dignity and respect who are caught up in a web of fate that their character, whether in its inflexibility of will, set purpose or ambition, hurries on (Peters 128). Stated differently, humans have always been conscious of the fact that sometimes they are not masters of their fate in every respect—that there are, according to John Hospers, many things which human beings cannot do and that nature appears more powerful than they are (132). In the same vein, Damian Opata argues in "Chinua Achebe: The Writer and a Sense of History" that Okonkwo seems to have been everywhere in the novel trailed by capricious fate and larger than life forces. This explains why the attribution of personal and moral responsibility to his actions may not be critically sustained. Looking closely at the fates of Macbeth and Caesar, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, there is the impression that their destinies, like that of Oedipus, had been fixed *ab initio*; no amount of personal striving would save

such individuals. Such individuals are like the proverbial snake which said that it knew why it decided to hide its legs and hands in its stomach because if the hands did not bring it trouble, the legs would. Such characters then become like a sport in the hands of the gods (65-66), although the protagonists are primarily responsible for their downfall with the supernatural used as symbolic representations of their states of mind.

The Supernatural as Prolepsis and Moral Implications

Both Shakespeare and Achebe, through signs, beliefs, dreams, deities and other devices, appear to predict the future of their protagonists. Whereas Shakespeare explores more of natural happenings like earth tremors, storms, dreams, or ghosts in his illustration of the supernatural, Achebe uses traditional Igbo societal beliefs and practices, as well as divination and gods/goddesses to illustrate how the supernatural seems to shape the destiny of his tragic heroes. Both writers, however, in their writings, indicate how humankind, at different times, has grappled with external factors that seem to impress on the human mind, externalizing traits like wrath, sexual jealousy, pride, procrastination and ambition in due process. Despite their artistic examination of two different cultures and races, both Shakespeare and Achebe seem to arrive at the understanding that humankind could be stimulated by the belief in supernatural agents in a seemingly predictable way. Worries, anxieties and fears are fundamental to the human mind and, given the impulse of the supernatural, humans are susceptible to revealing their hidden traits.

With Shakespeare, the whole action of his tragedy appears enveloped in the mystery of unleashed actions that constantly surprise us. Beyond these happenings hovers the shadow of the supernatural in the forms of omens, signs and ghosts. For example, the ghost of Caesar haunts Caesar's assassins; the ghost of Old Hamlet entreats Hamlet to revenge his murder; or Banquo's ghost inflicts psychological torture on Macbeth, and is apparently visible only to the protagonist.

The use of signs, omens and other supernatural devices in Shakespeare is generally intended to anticipate action while also amplifying the states of mind of the characters. Examples include the prophecy of kingship in *Macbeth* which echoes the hero's yearning for it; the missing handkerchief associated with the distraught mind of Othello; or the violent storm that highlights Lear's agitation. However, in Achebe, the supernatural appears to assume a more aetiological role with gods/goddesses assigned specific roles in traditional Igbo society such as *Ani*, goddess of morality, *Amadiora*, god of thunder and others, or indicating consequences of particular actions or behaviours. For instance, Ezeudu's warning to Okonkwo about taking part in the killing of Ikemefuna and the hero's concomitant misfortunes; the hint that if Ezeulu's spite prevents him from convening the yam festival, he should expect dire consequences; or the suggestion that Obi's romance with Clara would result in his downfall. In other words, the gods/goddesses in Achebe's traditional Igbo society appear more institutionalized than is the case of Shakespeare's England.

Another common denominator between these two artists is their use of dreams and astrology in prefiguring events or deciphering character. To this end, whereas

Achebe, for example, in the case of the moon in *Arrow of God*, uses astrology to determine the convening of the yam festival or to divine the future, although the presence of eclipses in some of Shakespeare's plays seems to suggest murder or disaster, Shakespeare appears to employ astrology essentially in character portrayal. For instance, the misfortunes of Lear and Gloucester appear to them to be foreshadowed by eclipses; the assassination of Caesar, according to Calphurnia, the soothsayer and others, is apparently envisioned in the comets; and the eclipse of the moon seems to forebode misfortune to Othello: "O insupportable! O heavy hour!/ Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse" (5.2.100-101).

From a different perspective, in the novels of Achebe, local deities such as *Ulu*, *Idemili* and *Ani* tend to be assigned guardianship over specific local life interests and concerns such as security, fertility and morality. Myriads of nameless spirits in Achebe's novels are thought to besiege the earth and human life is believed to be caught up with the activities of these dynamic and ferocious entities. Because of this, meaning at times becomes ambiguous due to the complexity of issues that tend to subvert it. To this end, Ezeulu's downfall appears to be entrenched in his controversial relationship with *Ulu* while Okonkwo's demise is likely intertwined with his problematic relationship with the earth goddess, represented in the person of Ezeudu. After all, the network of sacred figures, images, beliefs and ideas which form the traditional vision of the cosmos help Achebean characters in the compelling quest of being able to explain, predict and control events (Ejizu 118-20).

Moreover, within the artistic universe of Achebe, the affairs of humans and the will of the gods/goddesses seem to be reflected in the physical world; realms of signs and societal practices appear to bind individuals to social structures, compelling some of them to consider societal laws and beliefs sacrosanct. Stressing the harmonious relationship between the physical world and the supernatural one, which is foregrounded in Achebe's fiction, Harold Turner states that the

diviner may cast stones, sticks or bones and examine the way they lie, or he may look for the patterns in the markings on the liver or the shape of the entrails of an animal that has been killed for the purpose, or just watch the particular way it falls when it dies. The belief lying behind all these methods is that the whole universe is interconnected and has a common pattern running through it, so that if the skilled person looks carefully at any one part of it he [sic] will be able to read off what is happening in other parts. (35)

With Shakespeare, there is the tendency that most of his plays show varying degrees of engagement with the supernatural. It seems that the playwright was increasingly critical of the preponderance of the belief in it by his society. In his last play, *The Tempest*, Shakespeare goes to great pains to show how the magical is humanly controlled. Again, according to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, Shakespeare's varied attitude towards the supernatural appeared to have begun on a light-hearted note, then shifted to amused tolerance, serious meditation, pessimism and apprehension and, finally, renewed faith and believe in good in the sense that man [sic] is capable of dominating evil (14).

Both Shakespeare and Achebe are satisfied with portraying the beliefs of their respective societies, without expressing their opinions. In this way, they allow the observer to draw his or her conclusions about this phenomenon and its possible impact on

the human mind. It seems immaterial to know whether Shakespeare believed in witches, ghosts, prophecies and other supernatural devices or not. What appears certain is his dramatic representations of these elements, as he did of the anthropophagi and centaurs in *Othello*, Caliban and Ariel in *The Tempest* and many other things, constitutes a call to us to rethink about these phenomena (Muir 240) and re-evaluate their psychological effects on the human mind. The overarching argument is that Shakespeare's tragic heroes—Macbeth, Julius Caesar, Othello, Hamlet and King Lear—are dramatized through the superstitious beliefs of the Elizabethans and Jacobean. In other words, through their linguistic characterization and essentially different belief systems, these characters appear bound to their societies, obliging some of them to regard societal beliefs as sources of revelation. More importantly, Shakespeare uses the supernatural for dramatic purposes. It constitutes an element of the problem confronting the hero and Shakespeare uses this device to explore the inner workings of complex characters. According to Vivienne Hughes, Shakespeare employs the supernatural to stimulate a wide range of emotions in the audience, “to create tension or mitigate it, to entertain or repel within the compass of the dramatic sphere” (152). Whether the supernatural is real or imaginary, it would seem, as Peter Stallybrass suggests, that belief in it is less a reflection of the potential for evil than a social construction from which we are informed about the social institutions of a people (190). Shakespeare used his audience's belief in the supernatural to develop complex characters on stage, to reveal the inner workings of their states of mind and to heighten the tragic effect of his plays. His ultimate purpose was to teach us lessons about

human nature—we may not believe in witches and other supernatural practices today, but we still overreach sometimes because of blind ambition.

On his part, Achebe appears to demonstrate decreasing concern with the supernatural in his stories. His early novels are steeped in Igbo folklore and mythology whereas the later ones indicate less emphasis on the supernatural. Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*, for example, is more of a symbolic character who embraces the supernatural unlike her earlier prototype, Chielo, in *Things Fall Apart*, who is powerful and able to crisscross the worlds of humans and spirits. Although a diminished portrait of Chielo, Beatrice's organisation of an ecumenical service representing various religions such as Christianity, Islam and traditional religion can be a pointer to how the supernatural now permeates several cultures, be they Western or African. It is no longer the question of associating it with particular races or ethnicities as the world is increasingly interconnected. In other words, the various explanations, by traditional Igbos and Christians alike, about the failure of Obi Okonkwo in life represent various perceptions of the supernatural nowadays and different contentions about what is supernatural or natural. In this regard, while Gloucester in *King Lear*, for example, envisions his rescue from suicide to be the work of spirits, Edgar humanizes this perception in staging Gloucester's attempted suicide.

Furthermore, the paucity of the supernatural in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, for instance, can be regarded as an indirect indication of the difficulty of separating the supernatural from the natural, or how both spaces have become fused into each other, or shifting perspectives about this phenomenon. Put differently, what one party may regard

as supernatural can be seen as natural by the other and vice versa. A good example of the controversy about the supernatural is the feast of *Akwu Nro* in *Arrow of God* that is celebrated by widows in homage to their departed husbands. Achebe says that: “Every widow in Umuachala prepared foofoo and palm nut soup on the night of *Akwu Nro* and put outside her hut. In the morning the bowls were empty because her husband had come up from Ani-Mmo and eaten the food” (194). Moreover, in *Things Fall Apart*, when the elderly Ogbuefi Ndulue dies, his wife, upon learning about his death, kneels by his side and calls out his name. She proceeds to lie by him and then dies peacefully.

As earlier pointed out, Achebe’s later novels—*No Longer At Ease* and *A Man of the People*—seem to manifest a diminishing preoccupation with the supernatural because they are increasingly concerned with contemporary issues like the abuse of power and moral decadence. But this shift in perspective does not nullify the fact that his novels demonstrate, as earlier observed, that there is scarcely any sphere of human experience that is not linked to the supernatural and the people’s sense of religion and religious piety.

In the experiences of Okonkwo, Ezeulu and even Obi, Achebe indicates how the downfall of his heroes is plotted by Christianity. In their attempts to reconcile some of their beliefs such as polytheism, respect for the royal python or discrimination against *osus* that are rooted in traditional religion with Christian beliefs, the heroes are sometimes caught in a *cul de sac*, making them vulnerable to pressure from both opposing camps. For example, Ezeulu’s flirtation with Christianity, through Oduche, alienates the chief priest from some members of his society who are determined to ensure his downfall,

without ignoring the role of missionaries in denouncing traditional Igbo religion that Ezeulu represents.

Granted that both Shakespeare and Achebe are engaged in metaphorical representations of the supernatural to symbolize different states of mind of their protagonists, there are noticeable differences in the attitudes of the characters towards this phenomenon. Precisely, whereas Gloucester, Macbeth and Hamlet, for example, are engaged in what can be described as critical enquiries about the supernatural, most of Achebe's heroes such as Ezeulu, Beatrice or Okonkwo do not embark on interrogating it. Even Obi Okonkwo, who expresses his concern about certain traditional Igbo practices such as the caste system only does so to critique what, according to him, is repugnant. His criticism appears to spring from love for someone dear to him rather than a complete dissociation of himself from his societal values. In other words, Obi, like other protagonists of Achebe, seems to be more concerned about how to appease or contend the exigencies of the supernatural when they collide with his personal objectives. Similarly, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Beatrice's identification, by her friends, as a recreation of Chielo is more out of respect for the positive values of love and kindness which she incarnates rather than an investigation into her supernatural symbolism. Likewise, the failure of Odili in *A Man of the People* to bring about meaningful change in his society seems to lie in his disconnect from the supernatural, an issue that might have dissuaded morally bankrupt politicians like Nanga from embracing evil.

Achebe's exploration of the supernatural is generally tailored towards preventing characters from practising evil or dissuading them from instituting destruction in society.

This artistic perspective, at least within the context of the novels and plays under study, appears different from that of Shakespeare which seems to induce characters towards evil or mirror destruction or evil. However, towards the end of Shakespeare's career, as evidenced in Prospero in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare tends to reaffirm the primacy of goodness. This change in perspective does not necessarily invalidate Shakespeare's early or other tragedies of their moral bearing. Concerning the protagonists of Achebe, Okonkwo keeps in his house wooden symbols of his personal god and ancestral spirits; he also worships them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine, and offers prayers of prosperity and good health on behalf of himself and his family (12). The Christian missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* are preoccupied with teaching love and equality, without overlooking their denigration of certain practices of Igbo traditional religion. According to Mr. Goodcountry in *Arrow of God*, "You address the python as Father. It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it do not count yourself a Christian" (47). However, Akuebue seems to counter this opinion about traditional religion when he presides over the tying of a blood-knot between Edogo and John Nwodika not only to indicate that Igbo traditional practices can bring about love and peace, but also to forestall any ill feeling between the families of Ezeulu and Nwodika. Moreover, it is possible that if Obi, in *No Longer At Ease*, had accorded his mother traditional funeral rites, fortune might have smiled on his face. Beatrice, as representative of a priestess in *Anthills of the Savannah*, is entrusted the task of condemning the evil practices of the regime of Sam. These different examples buttress

the argument that Achebe's use of the supernatural is also predicated on the need for decency in society.

In Shakespeare, the perspective of the supernatural is generally evil and destructive. Edmund, for example, prays to the Nature goddess to aid his mischief of supplanting his older brother as heir; the ghost of Old Hamlet seeks Hamlet to embrace violence by encouraging him to kill Claudius; the weird sisters in *Macbeth* appear to entice the hero towards evil; the images of storms and winds in *Julius Caesar* reflect the evil embroiled in Rome; and the violent storm that destroys the Turkish invasion of Cyprus is symptomatic of the domestic tragedy of Othello. It is, therefore, evident that Shakespeare's recreation of the supernatural appears to reflect more of evil, violence and disorder than is the case of Achebe. However, this appraisal is more of an interpretation of their artistic frameworks rather than a value judgement on Shakespeare's plays.

Generally speaking, Shakespeare and Achebe, in their writings, are concerned with the issue of morality as their works are couched in societies under the influence of the supernatural. Shakespeare, particularly in *King Lear*, may be said to use this medium to strengthen virtue through an inducement of honourable actions and ideas. He is a writer of immense intellect. His art form involves the vivid stage impersonation of human beings challenging sympathy and commanding varied participation. In his plays, a wide range of characters are opposed or contrasted; and the action displays their antagonisms and attractions, provoking a gamut of reactions in the audience. Shakespeare's world is one in which men and women reveal their minds, sustain our sympathy or disgust and hold our anxiety at what innocent and subtle minds are able to do. Indeed, the essential

business of his political plays, according to John Palmer, is to show how the private person comes to terms with his political duties, offices or ambitions (54).

Shakespeare and Achebe also, in their works, portray different perceptions of women in Elizabethan and Jacobean England and traditional Igbo society. Within the context of the plays that I am studying, while the women in Shakespeare's tragedies are generally associated with evil or negation with some of the female characters perceived as symbolic representations of certain vices, Achebe's women are mostly depicted in a positive light as they strive to rescue goodness from the taint of evil. For instance, concerning Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth presents herself as a reflection of the witches enticing Macbeth to embrace evil; she may even be seen as symbolic of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Gertrude is somehow similar to Lady Macbeth in terms of evil as the ghost of Old Hamlet argues that the heavens and her conscience would judge her for her complicity in Claudius' crime (1.5.86-88). Portia, in *Julius Caesar*, is particularly anxious about the prospects of her husband exercising political power, even though she is apparently aware that he is an accomplice in the killing of Caesar. Goneril and Regan are presented by Shakespeare as incarnations of intrigues, jealousy and diabolical ambition. As a result, Phyllis Rackin states that in Shakespeare, "female power is repeatedly characterized as threatening or even demonic" (48). Indeed, Shakespeare's portrayal of women in this rather negative perspective is, in part, a recreation of some Elizabethan and Jacobean stereotypes about women and witchcraft. This view of women reflected, to a certain extent, that of the church at this time which envisioned them as "daughters of Eve,

temptresses who would lead men down the primrose path to fornication. Their women's bodies proclaimed that they were the living symbols of Man's First Disgrace" (Pitt 15).

For his part, Achebe's rather positive portrayal of women in his novels, according to Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, characterizes traditional Igbo women in the joys of their motherhood by recreating specific moments of their lives to represent their cultural and historical significance within Igboland (155). In this regard, when Okonkwo is exiled from the clan, he seeks refuge in his motherland, Mbanta. Chielo and Beatrice are representations of the earth goddess charged with ensuring peace and morality in society. Obi's mother pleads with him to listen to his parents in order to avoid being cursed. These different perceptions of women in rather glorious terms translate into an ideological shift from Shakespeare's; this revision in the role of women in society also marks a reconsideration of the negative frame of early dramatic representations of female characters as noted in Shakespeare.

In sum, Achebe, in his writings, makes tremendous use of the supernatural in his characterization. The fates of his protagonists such as Okonkwo, Ezeulu or Obi appear to be remotely guided by external forces. And these foreign elements in the forms of oracles, gods or goddesses constantly step in the action, apparently to sanction vice and reward virtue. In fact, within traditional Igbo cosmos, problems are sometimes perceived as the result of the unstable relationships between the community and the supernatural order. After all, when an individual suffers setbacks in life, he or she could abandon his/her *ikenga* (seen as defining one's physical and moral strength) and create a new one. Therefore, there is the impression that external forces and humankind seem to be

inextricably linked. For instance, a traditional Igbo person begins his or her day with ritual incantations in which he or she acknowledges the presence of dead-living ancestors through ritual items like kola nut, white chalk and palm wine. With the wine, he or she pours libation on the ground which symbolically opens the way for the ancestors to enter the physical world from the spirit land. With the chalk, he or she draws lines on the floor to pray for and symbolize the safe cyclic passage of the ancestors to and from the spirit land. The kola nut is eaten and the wine drunk as a sign of the spiritual communion and unity that is intended to bring life and prosperity to the people (Ogbaa 107). These ritualistic activities punctuate such traditional events like marriages, political meetings, naming ceremonies and cults.

Concerning Shakespeare, Dieter Mehl rightly comments in relation to Macbeth, Claudius, Iago and Edmund that their well-deserved exposure and punishment are not a central aspect of the tragic impact, but the confirmation of moral order and poetic justice (105). Shakespeare's tragedies give us a sense of relief at the purgation of evil. Although evil appears dominant in his plays, what he seems to suggest, according to Ornstein in *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, is that "whatever ultimate destiny awaits the race of man [sic], the life greatly lived has a timeless meaning" (276). In Shakespearean drama, the voice of morality appears muffled and comes to life more through supernatural forces in the forms of ghosts and ancient gods and goddesses such as *Apollo*, *Janus* and *Hecate*. In Achebean novels, morality is overtly stated in the actions of gods or goddesses through their custodians that bring to order erring people, or inflict harm on them to deter others. Human beings, according to Turner in *Living Tribal Religions*,

recognize the fact that the gods/goddesses have a will of their own and cannot be merely manipulated by humans, who must be submissive and humble before them (8). Thus, in Shakespeare and Achebe, the supernatural provides an incredible insight into character, as well serving as a catalyst for action and a medium for moralizing.

The incorporation of the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedy gives a feeling that the action is being played out and in some cases provoked by forces, or powers that come from beyond the scope of human activity. The male hero is usually confronted by a situation with which the organisation of his being appears unable to cope. At times, he loses his moral bearings; he may be at a loss; his whole personality seems to disintegrate more and more wilfully towards destruction (Sewell 75). According to Clark in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, Shakespeare's inclusion of the supernatural in his plays was intended to persuade even the most sceptical of the actual existence of ghosts, and the dramatist presented his proofs with such assurance that most readers [of *Hamlet*] cannot escape the feeling that the poet was himself a firm believer in the visits of these eerie creatures to our earth. And these supernatural creatures were believed to appear before some great crisis in human affairs, to exact justice, to revenge a foul deed, to give a warning, to reveal hidden treasure, or otherwise perform the commands of the supernatural powers (65-66). However, Clark's assertion seems lacking in substantive evidence in the texts to illustrate the argument that Shakespeare was a believer in the supernatural.

In fact, the supernatural adds artistic complexity to the works of Shakespeare; it gives his art depth and appeal by making it look beyond time, place or even particularity.

It also enhances his readability and sets him apart from other writers as a quintessential artist. Above all, it accentuates the tragic flaws of the heroes such as vaulting ambition in Macbeth, pride in Caesar, deferment in Hamlet and sexual jealousy in Othello.

Unlike the Elizabethans and the Jacobean who used familiars such as cats or dogs in witchcraft, twenty-first century humans are most likely to use mascots or imps to represent their superstition. In fact, today's religious rites, miraculous treatments, belief in pets, or telepathy fall within the realm of the supernatural. It seems that neither rationalism nor religion would kill the attractiveness of magic or superstitious beliefs in the world. As Behringer aptly puts it, science and the church cannot destroy these beliefs, but push them to exist in different spheres (248). And James George Frazer maintains that humans would continuously explain their difficulties to the great invisible beings behind the veil of nature (649). In this regard, Shakespeare's tragedies represent the struggles of extraordinary individuals to reconcile a complex, uncertain reality with basic assumptions about life. The emphasis is not the problems, but the solutions; not the result of the struggle, but the struggle itself (McElroy 243).

In fact, supernatural forces are a social and cultural phenomenon found in several places and at several periods, with varying degrees of importance. They constitute one of the mainsprings of human behaviour, enlivening hopes of success and instilling despondency in humankind. No one can remain indifferent to this profoundly fascinating concept of the supernatural; whether it is dismissed or accepted by some, its recognition by Shakespeare and Achebe as a fundamental element in exposing human behaviour cannot be contested. Interestingly, while Western culture, represented by Shakespeare,

interrogates the supernatural, sometimes considering it a figment of the imagination, Shakespeare makes great dramatic usage of it. On his part, Achebe's artistic exploration of this concept not only shows its influence within his traditional Igbo society, but primarily, how it fathoms drives such as ambition, power and fear that cloud the human mind.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. Garden City: Anchor Press, 1987; 1989.

----- . *Arrow of God*. New York: Anchor Books, 1969.

----- . *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann, 1966.

----- . *No Longer At Ease*. London: Heinemann, 1960.

----- . *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958; 2008.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003.

----- . *Julius Caesar*. Ed. Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006.

----- . *King Lear*. Ed. Grace Ippolo. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

----- . *Macbeth*. Ed. Robert S. Miola. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

----- . *Othello*. Ed. Michael Neil. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Secondary Sources

Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.

Afigbo, Adiele. *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs: The Collected Essays of Adiele*

Afigbo. Ed. Toyin Falola. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005.

Africanus, Leo. *A Geographical Historie of Africa*. Trans. John Pory. London: George

Bishop, 1600.

Agbaw, Stephen Ekema. "Africanizing *Macbeth*: "Down-Fall'n Birthdom."” *Research in*

African Literatures 27.1 (Spring 1996): 102-109.

- Alumona Victor S. "Portrayal and Criticism of Culture and Societal Institutions in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Journal of African Philosophy* 3. 2003. Print.
- Anyadike, Chima. "Duality and Resilience in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Philosophia Africana* 10.1 (March 2007): 49-58.
- Aronson, Alex. *Psyche and Symbol in Shakespeare*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972.
- Arthos, John. *Shakespeare's Use of Dream & Vision*. London: Bowes & Bowes, 1977.
- Ayitteh, George B.N. *Indigenous African Institutions*. New York: Transnational Publishers, 1991.
- Bacon, Francis. *The New Organon*. Eds. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Bartels, Emily C. "Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (January 1997): 45-64.
- Basten, G.T. *Niger Ibos*. London: Cass, 1966.
- Begam, Richard. "Achebe's Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in *Things Fall Apart*." *Studies in the Novel* 29.3 (1997): 396-411.
- Behringer, Wolfgang. *Witches and Witch-Hunts*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.
- Bergeron, David M. "Richard II and Carnival Politics." *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II*. Ed. Kirby Farrell. New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1999. 81-92.
- Bevington, David. *Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

- Bicknell, Catherine. "Achebe's Women: Mothers, Priestesses, and Young Urban Professionals." *Challenging Hierarchies: Issues and Themes in Colonial and Postcolonial African Literature*. Eds. Leonard A. Podis and Yakubu Saaka. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. 125-136.
- Bradbrook, Muriel C. *Themes and Conventions in Elizabethan Tragedy*. London: Cambridge UP, 1960.
- Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Macmillan, 1904.
- Brannigan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Brown, Lloyd W. "Cultural Norms and Modes of Perception in Achebe's Fiction." *Research in African Literatures* 3.1 (Spring 1972): 21-35.
- Brustein, Robert Sanford. *The Tainted Muse*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.
- Campbell, Lily B. *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*. London: Methuen, 1961.
- Carroll, David. *Chinua Achebe*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970.
- Champion, Larry S. *Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective*. Athens: U Georgia P, 1976.
- Charlton, H.B. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961.
- Chinweizu et al. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Vol. I. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980.
- Clark, Cumberland. *Shakespeare and Science*. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970.

- . *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1931.
- Coleman, James S. *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Nicolas Tredell. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- Cooley, Ronald W. "Kent and Primogeniture in *King Lear*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48.2 (Spring 2008): 327-348.
- Copernicus, Nicholaus. "The Heliocentric Theory." *The Tests of Time: Readings in the Development of Physical Theory*. Eds. Lisa M. Dolling et al. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. 42-66.
- Coursen, Herbert R. *Christian Ritual and the World of Shakespeare's Tragedies*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1976.
- Curry, Walter Clyde. *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1959.
- Daly, James. "The Idea of Absolute Monarchy in Seventeenth-Century England." *Historical Journal* 21 (1978): 227-250.
- Danby, John F. "Edmund and the Two Natures." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of King Lear*. Ed. Janet Adelman. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978. 50-55.
- . *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*. London: Faber and Faber, 1948.

- Davies, Stevie. *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986.
- Doak, H.M. ““Supernatural Soliciting” in Shakespeare.” *The Sewanee Review* 15.3 (July 1907): 321-331.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Dyer, T.F. Thiselton. *Folk-Lore of Shakespeare*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884.
- Egan, Maurice Francis. *The Ghost in Hamlet and Other Essays in Comparative Literature*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1906.
- Egblewogbe, E.Y. *Folklore in the Novels of Chinua Achebe: An Ethnolinguistic Approach*. Bloomington, IN: Folklore Publication Group, 1979.
- Ejizu, Christopher. *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986.
- Elton, William. *King Lear and the Gods*. Lexington, KY: The UP of Kentucky, 1988.
- Erritouni, Ali. “Contradictions and Alternatives in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.2 (Winter 2006): 50-74.
- Ewen, C. L’Estrange. Ed. *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*. London: Kegan Paul, 1929.

- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. "Patriots and Parasites: The Metaphor of Power in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Critical Approaches to Anthills of the Savannah*. Ed. Holger G. Ehling. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991. 23-34.
- Falola, Toyin. *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- , Ed. *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005.
- Favila, Marina. "'Mortal Thoughts' and Magical Thinking in *Macbeth*." *Modern Philology* 99.1 (August 2001): 1-25.
- Figgis, John Neville. *The Divine Right of Kings*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965.
- Flatter, Richard. *Hamlet's Father*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1949.
- Forde, Daryll. "Introduction." *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*. Ed. Daryll Forde. London: Oxford UP, 1954. vii-xvii.
- Frazer, James George. *The New Golden Bough*. New York: Criterion Books, 1959.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. A.A. Brill. New York: Carlton House, 1931.
- Friesen, Ryan Curtis. *Supernatural Fiction in Early Modern Drama and Culture*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.
- Frye, Roland Mushat. *The Renaissance Hamlet*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984.
- Galilei, Galileo. "Telescopic Observations in Support of Copernicus." *The Tests of Time: Readings in the Development of Physical Theory*. 81-99.

- Galvan, Enrique and Fernando Galvan. "God(s) Fall(s) Apart: Christianity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Journal of English Studies* 5-6 (2005-2008): 105-117.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Dream in Shakespeare*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1974.
- ". "Dream and Interpretation: *Julius Caesar*." *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*. Ed. Mark Rose. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995. 222-229.
- George, Olakunle. "The Narrative of Conversion in Achebe's *Arrow of God*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.4 (2005): 344-362.
- Grace, William J. "The Cosmic Sense in Shakespearean Tragedy." *The Sewanee Review* 50. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1942): 433-445.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Hamlet in Purgatory." *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*. Eds. Joao Biehl, Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman. Berkeley: U of California P, 2007. 128-154.
- ". "Shakespeare Bewitched." *Shakespeare's Tragedies*. Ed. Susan Zimmerman. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 109-139.
- Green, André. "*Othello*: A Tragedy of Conversion: Black Magic and White Magic." *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Ed. John Drakakis. London: Longman, 1992. 316-353.
- Green, Robert. "The Clashing Old and New." *Nation* 201.11 (1965): 224-225.
- Hahn, Frances Hickson. "Performing the Sacred: Prayers and Hymns." *A Companion to Roman Religion*. Ed. Jorg Rupke. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. 235-248.

- Hawkins, Harriet. "Dramatic Judgement in *King Lear*." *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*. Ed. Robert B. Heilman. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984. 163-174.
- Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1936.
- Herndl, George C. *The High Design: English Renaissance Tragedy and Natural Law*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 1970.
- Hoegberg, David. "Principle and Practice: The Logic of Cultural Violence in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *College Literature* 26.1 (1999): 69-79.
- Hole, Christina. *Witchcraft in England*. New York: Collier Books, 1966.
- Hooker, Richard. *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Ed. W. Speed Hill. Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1993.
- Hoopes, James. "Introduction." *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*. Ed. James Hoopes. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1991. 1-13.
- Horton, Robin. "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 37.2 (1967): 155-187.
- Horton, Rod W and Vincent F. Hopper. *Backgrounds of European Literature*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954.
- Hospers, John. "Free-Will and Psychoanalysis." *Philosophy: The Basic Issues*. Eds. E.D. Klemke, A. David Kline and Robert Hollinger. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. 129-142.

- Hughes, Vivienne. "Witchcraft and the Supernatural in Shakespeare." *Entomo a Shakespeare: Homenaje a T.J.B. Spencer*. Valencia: Universida de Valencia, 1980. 115-157.
- Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Ed. Norman Kemp Smith. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947.
- . *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*. Ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1898.
- Hunter, Robert G. *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments*. Athens: The U of Georgia P, 1976.
- Ikegami, Robin. "Knowledge and Power, the Story and the Storyteller: Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 37.3 (1991): 493-507.
- Ilogu, Edmund. *Christianity and Ibo Culture*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974.
- . "The Religious Situation in Nigeria Today: A Sociological Analysis." *Présence Africaine* 96 (1975): 504-524.
- Irele, F. Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the Black Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. "Ibo and Christian Beliefs: Some Aspects of a Theological Encounter." *African Affairs* 68. 271 (1969): 121-134.
- . "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3.3 (1970): 209-227.

- . *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004.
- Iyasere, Solomon O. "Okonkwo and the Execution of Ikemefuna in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: A Study of Ignoble Decisiveness." *English Studies in Africa* 33.2 (1990): 131-140.
- James I. *Basilicon Doron* (1599). Menston: The Solar Press, 1969.
- . *Daemonologie* (1597). London: Curwen Press, 1924.
- . *The Political Works of James I*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1616; 1918.
- Jefferess, David. "Violence, Culture, and Politics." *Peace Review* 13.2 (2001): 195-200.
- Jeyifo, Biodun. "For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika." *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*. Eds. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. Oxford: Heinemann, 1990. 51-70.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Plays of William Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: C. and A. Conrad & Co, 1809.
- Jones, Eldred. *Othello's Countrymen*. London: Oxford UP, 1965.
- Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1949.
- Kalu, Anthonia C. "Achebe and Duality in Igbo Thought." *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe 2*. Eds. Ernest N. Emenyonu and Iniobong I. Uko. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004. 137-150.
- . "The Priest/Artist Tradition in Achebe's *Arrow of God*." *Africa Today* 41.2 (1994): 51-62.

- Kambaji, Christophe Tshikala. *Chinua Achebe: A Novelist and a Portraitist of his Society*. New York: Vantage Press, 1994.
- Kane, Cheikh Hamidou. *Ambiguous Adventure*. Trans. Katherine Woods. New York: Collier Books, 1969.
- Killam, G.D. *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann, 1972.
- Knight, G. Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire*. New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1957.
- Kortenaar, Neil ten. "Beyond Authenticity and Creolization: Reading Achebe Writing Culture." *PMLA* 110.1 (Jan. 1995): 30-42.
- Kronenfeld, J.Z. "The "Communalistic" African and the "Individualistic" Westerner: Some Comments on Misleading Generalizations in Western Criticism of Soyinka and Achebe." *Research in African Literatures* 6.2 (Autumn 1975): 199-225.
- Levin, Richard. "Shakespeare or the Ideas of His Time." *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*. Ed. Robert B. Heilman. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall International, 1984. 11-27.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Trans. John Russell. New York: Criterion Books, 1961.
- Lindfors, Bernth. "The Palm-Oil with Which Words are Eaten." *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. Ed. C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978. 47-66.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.

- Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1936; 1970.
- Mackenzie, Clayton G. "The Metamorphosis of Piety in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literatures* 27.2 (Summer 1996): 128-138.
- Maduka, Chidi T. "African Religious Beliefs in Literary Imagination: *Ogbanje* and *Abiku* in Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 22 (1987): 17-30.
- Mafe, Diana Adesola. "From Ogun to "Othello": (Re)Acquainting Yoruba Myth and Shakespeare's Moor." *Research in African Literatures* 35.3 (Autumn 2004): 46-61.
- Malgwi, Grace J. "The Changing Faces of the African Woman: A Look at Achebe's Novels." *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* 2. 365-373.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1926.
- Mandel, Jerome. "Dream and Imagination in Shakespeare." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24.1 (Winter 1973): 61-68.
- Mangum, Anne B. *Reflection of Africa in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama and Poetry*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *On Religion*. New York: Schocken Books, 1964.
- Mathuray, Mark. *On the Sacred in African Literature*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions & Philosophy*. New York: Praeger, 1969.
- . "African Religion and World Order." *Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions*. Eds. Patricia M. Mische and Melissa Merklung. New York: Peter Lang, 2001. 361-370.
- . *Introduction to African Religion*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1975.
- McAlindon, T. *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- McDaniel, Richard Bryan. "The Python Episodes in Achebe's Novels." *The International Fiction Review* 3 (1976): 100-106.
- McElroy, Bernard. *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.
- McLaren, Joseph. "Missionaries and Converts: Religion and Colonial Intrusion in *Things Fall Apart*." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea, 2002. 103-112.
- Mehl, Dieter. *Shakespeare's Tragedies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Metuh, Emefie Ikenga. *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981.
- Mezu, Rose Ure. *Chinua Achebe: The Man and His Works*. London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers, 2006.
- Moore, Gerald. "Chinua Achebe: A Retrospective." *Research in African Literatures* 32.3 (Autumn 2001): 29-32.

- Muir, Kenneth. "Folklore and Shakespeare." *Folklore* 92.2 (1981): 163-196.
- Murry, J.M. *Shakespeare*. London: J. Cape, 1948.
- Ndeba, Mildred A. J. "The Nomiya Luo Church: A Gender Analysis of the Dynamics of an African Independent Church Among the Luo of Siaya District." *Gender, Literature and Religion in Africa* 4. Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005. 49-77.
- Nicolson, Harold. *Kings, Courts and Monarchy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962.
- Niven, Alastair. "Chinua Achebe and the Possibility of Modern Tragedy." *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*. Eds. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. 41-50.
- Njaka, Mazi Elechukwu Nnadibuagha. *Igbo Political Culture*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974.
- Njoku, Benedict Chiaka. *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe*. New York: Peter Lang, 1984.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. "Gender Relations and Critical Mediation: From *Things Fall Apart* to *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Challenging Hierarchies: Issues and Themes in Colonial and Postcolonial African Literature*. 137-160.
- Nnoromele, Patrick C. "The Plight of a Hero in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *College Literature* 27.2 (Spring 2000): 146-156.
- Notestein, Wallace. *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718*. Washington: The American Historical Association, 1911.
- Nwabueze, Emeka. "Theoretical Construction and Constructive Theorizing on the Execution of Ikemefuna in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: A Study in Critical Dualism." *Research in African Literatures* 31.2 (Summer 2000): 163-173.

- Nwoga, D. Ibe. "The Igbo of Achebe's *Arrow of God*." *Research in African Literatures* 12.1 (Spring 1981): 14-42.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.
- Ogbaa, Kalu. *Gods, Oracles and Divinations*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1992.
- Ogunbesan, Kolawole. "Politics and the African Writer." *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. 37-46.
- Oha, Anthony. "Superstition in African Literature and Culture: An Ethical Appraisal." *Kpim of Morality: Ethics: General, Special and Professional* (2005): 200-207.
- Ojaide, Tanure. "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity." *African Studies Review* 35.3 (December 1992): 43-57.
- Ojinmah, Umelo. *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1991.
- Okafor, Clement. "Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishment in *Things Fall Apart*." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. Ed. Isidore Okpewho. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. 67-81.
- Okoye, Emmanuel Meziemadu. *The Traditional Religion and its Encounter with Christianity in Achebe's Novels*. New York: Peter Lang, 1987.
- Okpala, Jude Chudi. "Igbo Metaphysics in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Callaloo* 25.2 (Spring 2002): 559-566.

- Okpewho, Isidore. Ed. "Introduction." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. 3-53.
- . *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Omiege, Odirin. "Chinua Achebe and Igbo (African) Traditional Religion." *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* 2. 187-205.
- Onwuejeogwu, M. Angulu. *The Social Anthropology of Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- Opara, Chioma. "From Stereotype to Individuality: Womanhood in Chinua Achebe's Novels." *Challenging Hierarchies: Issues and Themes in Colonial and Postcolonial African Literature*. 113-123.
- Opata, Damian A. "Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. 83-94.
- . "Chinua Achebe: The Writer and a Sense of History." *Eagle on Iroko*. Ed. Edith Ihekweazu. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1996. 56-69.
- Ornstein, Robert. "Shakespeare's Moral Vision: *Othello* and *Macbeth*." *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*. Ed. Clifford Leech. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1965. 214-225.
- . *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*. Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1960.
- Osei-Nyame, Kwadwo. "Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and Tradition in *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literatures* 30.2 (Summer 1999): 148-164.
- Palmer, Eustace. *An Introduction to the African Novel*. London: Heinemann, 1972.

- , "Character and Society in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. Ed. Harold Bloom. 145-156.
- Palmer, John. *Political and Comic Characters of Shakespeare*. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- Parker, Kelly A. *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1998.
- Peirce, Charles S. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics*. Ed. James Hoopes. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991.
- Peterson, Douglas L. "'Wisdom Consumed in Confidence': An Examination of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16.1 (Winter 1965): 19-28.
- Peters, Jonathan A. *A Dance of Masks Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978.
- Pilkington, Ace. "The Good Ghost and the Bad Witches: Supernatural Ambiguities in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*." *Encyclia: The Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 65 (1988): 79-88.
- Pitt, Angela. *Shakespeare's Women*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981.
- Plank, Steven E. "'And Now about the Cauldron Sing': Music and the Supernatural on the Restoration Stage." *Early Music* 18.3 (August 1990): 393-407.
- Ptolemy, Claudius. "The Case for Geocentricism." *The Tests of Time: Readings in the Development of Physical Theory*. 29-38.
- Rabkin, Norman. "On *Macbeth*." *Shakespeare the Tragedies*. Ed. Robert B. Heilman. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall International, 1984. 122-134.

- Rackin, Phyllis. *Shakespeare and Women*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Rex, Richard. *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Ribner, Irving. *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Methuen, 1960.
- Rieber, Calvin. "Traditional Christianity as an African Religion." *African Religions: A Symposium*. Ed. Newell S. Booth, Jr. New York: Nok Publishers, 1977. 255-274.
- Rogers, L.W. *Dreams and Premonitions*. Wheaton: The Theosophical Press, 1948.
- . *The Ghosts in Shakespeare*. Chicago: Theo Book Company, 1925; 1972.
- Roscoe, Adrian A. *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971.
- Rosen, Barbara. Ed. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*. Amherst: The U of Massachusetts P, 1969.
- Rose, Mark. "Conjuring Caesar: Ceremony, History, and Authority in 1599." *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*. Ed. Mark Rose. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995. 230-240.
- Ryan, Kiernan. *Shakespeare*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.
- Sadowski, Piotr. *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2003.

Saint Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1958.

Scheid, John. "Sacrifices for Gods and Ancestors." *A Companion to Roman Religion*. 263-271.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Ed. David Lindley. Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 2002.

Shelton, Austin J. *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1971.

----- . "The Offended *Chi* in Achebe's Novels." *Transition* 13 (March-April 1964): 36-37.

Scheub, Harold. "'When a Man Fails Alone': A Man and His *Chi* in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. 95-122.

Scot, Reginald. *The Discovery of Witchcraft*. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973.

Searle, Alison. "The Role of Missions in *Things Fall Apart* and Nervous Conditions." *Literature & Theology* 21.1 (March 2007): 49-65.

Sewell, Arthur. *Character and Society in Shakespeare*. London: Oxford UP, 1951.

Smidt, Kristian. *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays*. London: Macmillan, 1982.

Smith, Daniel Jordan. "'The Arrow of God': Pentecostalism, Inequality, and the Supernatural in South-Eastern Nigeria." *Journal of the International African Institute* 71.4 (2001): 587-613.

- Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex*. Ed. R.D. Dawe. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.
- Spalding, Thomas Alfred. *Elizabethan Demonology*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1880.
- Spencer, Herbert. *Elements of Sociology*. London: William and Norgate, 1893.
- Stallybrass, Peter. "Macbeth and Witchcraft." *Focus on Macbeth*. Ed. John Russell Brown. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. 189-209.
- Stephen, Martin and Philip Franks. *Studying Shakespeare*. Essex: Longman, 1984.
- Stock, A.G. "Yeasts and Achebe." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 5 (1970): 105-111.
- Stoll, Elmer Edgar. *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare: A Study in Dramatic Contrast and Illusion*. New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1962.
- Taiwo, Oladele. *An Introduction to West African Literature*. London: Trinity Press, 1967.
- . *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1944.
- Traversi, D.A. *An Approach to Shakespeare*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956.
- Trussler, Simon. *Shakespearean Concepts*. London: Methuen, 1989.
- Turner, Harold. *Living Tribal Religions*. London: Ward Lock Educational, 1971.
- Turner, Margaret E. "Achebe, Hegel, and the New Colonialism." *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*. Eds. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. 31-40.

- Verdzekov, Paul. *Pastoral Letter on Superstition* of 1-10-1980.
- Weisinger, Alois. *Occult Phenomena*. London: Burns & Oates, 1965.
- Whittaker, David and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska. *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*.
New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Wilkinson, Andrew M. "A Psychological Approach to *Julius Caesar*." *A Review of English Literature* 7.4 (October 1966): 65-78.
- Williamson, Elizabeth. *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama*.
Surrey: Ashgate, 2009.
- Wilson, John Dover. *What Happens in Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935; 1974.
- Wittreich, Joseph. "*Image of that Horror*": *History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in King Lear*. San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1984.