Personified Goddesses: An archetypal pattern of female protagonists in the works of two black women writers

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ABSTRACT

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PERSONIFIED GODDESSES: AN ARCHETYPAL PATTERN OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN THE WORKS OF TWO BLACK WOMEN WRITERS

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This dissertation investigates the works of two Black female writers: Flora Nwapa (African and Nigerian) and Zora Neale Hurston (African American). Although they come from different geographical regions, both writers use the same archetypal patterns to create strong female protagonists. By characterizing protagonists in their novels from an African religious cultural perspective, both authors dismantle the stereotypical images of how black women are typically portrayed in fiction. Using Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious and archetypal criticism the study finds that both authors create black female protagonists who are wise, resilient, decisive, courageous, independent, and risk-taking; the women who, through their self-discovery journeys, are neither defined by nor in oppositional relationships with the males in their lives.
The study compares how the qualities of two archetypal goddesses, Uhamiri of the Igbo cosmology and Oya of the Yoruba cosmology, are personified through the personalities of the two female protagonists in Nwapa's *Efuru* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, respectively. Using strong mythical females as templates, this research explores the ways in which the authors have defined their female characters, thus providing an alternative strategy for defining and analyzing black female characters in fiction.

The study asserts that literary interpretation of Africana women should include the cultural realities associated with the African religious framework in order to capture the full essence of their humanity. In addition, African feminist thought, unlike Western feminist theory, provides a more realistic model of discourse on Africana women’s self-identity. Examining Africana women from these perspectives, as opposed to analyzing them based on European standards, is an effective method of discrediting stereotypical images that continue to plague the portrayal of black women in fiction. When black women in fiction are explored from this vantage point, the literary work sends a message of cultural authenticity and preservation that elevates Africana women, expanding their functions and positions in society beyond traditional roles.
PERSONIFIED GODDESSES: AN ARCHETYPAL PATTERN OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN THE WORKS OF TWO BLACK WOMEN WRITERS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF ARTS IN HUMANITIES

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Black women in fiction are generally portrayed as either emasculating, tongue-lashing matriarchs or as docile, oppressed, and submissive women. These stereotypical images are inextricably tied to female oppositional identities entrenched in a dichotomy with the male gender. In this oppositional context, black women are characterized from the vantage point of either their helplessness or their power-rending ability to weaken men in patriarchal settings. Some black women writers, however, are dismantling these stereotypes by constructing the heroines of their novels with more positive, multidimensional qualities.

Flora Nwapa and Zora Neale Hurston, for example, construct the protagonists of their novels based on an African religious cultural perspective. Against this backdrop, they portray their protagonists as being wise, resilient, decisive, and independent; through their self-discovery journeys, the female characters develop non-oppositional relationships with the males in their lives. Although Nwapa (Nigerian) and Hurston (African American) represent different literary periods and come from different geographical locations, both adopt an archetypal pattern of personified African goddesses to characterize their protagonists as strong Africana women. In Efuru, Nwapa personifies Uhamiri, a goddess of the Igbo cosmology, through the novel’s eponymous protagonist, Efuru. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston personifies Oya of the Yoruba cosmology to create a feisty female protagonist in Janie.
The purpose of this study is to show that Nwapa and Hurston use the same archetypal pattern to create strong Africana female protagonists who, through their self-discovery journeys, evolve into strong women who are neither defined by nor in oppositional relationships with the males in their lives. Although both writers come from different parts of the world, they show interesting similarities that clearly relate to their African heritage.

That two writers from different geographical regions use the same archetypal pattern to develop the heroines of their novels suggests that they have something else in common besides their common human experience. Along this line of thought, nineteenth-century diffusionist scholars who research the history of culture and who have had some influence on the study of African oral literature believe that if tales from two societies show similar elements and common patterns, then such similarities occur only because the two societies had contact with one another in the distant past, which resulted in the borrowing of cultural ideas. Borrowing cultural ideas might be true for some societies, but this theory does not hold for Africans and African Americans because both had the same culture before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Therefore, although both writers were historically forced to detach themselves from their ancestral culture, their distinctive use of African female goddesses as literary archetypes suggests that they had an awareness of African cultural and religious paradigms.

Using Swiss psychologist Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, this study suggests that the African religious culture was initially in the authors’ unconscious before manifesting itself in the conscious. This study acknowledges the theory of the collective unconscious residing in all human beings. Bound only by historical
connections, two authors from different literary periods accessed knowledge of the same African religious culture from their collective unconscious to create fictional characters. By characterizing their protagonists as personified goddesses, both authors provide evidence of the manifestation of the collective unconscious to the conscious. The study employs archetypal criticism as the primary literary device to compare the personified goddesses, Efuru and Janie, the two female protagonists, with their corresponding figurative mother archetypes—Oya and Uhamiri, respectively. Archetypal criticism determines both the form and the function of the text and adds greater depth and understanding to the literary works.

Nwapa and Hurston create their protagonists based on the mythos of the African goddesses, Uhamiri of the Igbo cosmology and Oya of the Yoruba cosmology, similar to the Jungian mother archetype. To validate this claim, the personality qualities of the goddesses are compared with the corresponding traits expressed through Efuru and Janie. The literary interpretation of selected works is based on the researched works of authors who have written on mythological stories of the goddesses, particularly Sabine Jell-Bahlsen’s *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Oguide of Oguta Lake* (Uhamiri) and Judith Gleason’s *Oya: In Praise of an African Goddess* (Oya).

The secondary source used to support this study includes African feminist theory, which posits a connection between the supernatural and the physical world. In addition, the study builds on the research of the Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, critic, and theorist, whose work *Myth, Literature and the African World* lays the foundation for the use of African deities in the construction of literary characters. The research work of Henry Gates, the African American critic and theorist, also
provides a framework for understanding the historical and cultural connections between Africans and African Americans. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates uncovers a unique system of literary interpretation, which discloses a vernacular tradition that enslaved Africans brought to the New World.

**Chapter Organization**

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. Each of the first five chapters ends with a summary. This first chapter discusses the historical and literary context that contributes to Nwapa’s and Hurston’s personification of African goddesses and presents an overview of the theoretical and critical perspectives that frame this study. The chapter provides research supporting the position that the two writers’ belief systems stem from the same African religious tradition. In addition, the chapter explains why some theories and critical perspectives, although relevant to this study, are only minimally discussed.

Further, Chapter One introduces Africana (African and African American) philosophy by reviewing the works of Africana critics. These works contribute to understanding the connection between literature and religious beliefs, and religious connections between African and African Americans. The Africana critics and their works include: Wole Soyinka (*Myth, Literature and the African World*), Henry Gates (*The Signifying Monkey*) and Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*).

Chapter Two provides a literature review of archetypal criticism, beginning with a universal perspective and tapering down to cultural specifics. The chapter discusses Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious within the context of figurative mother archetypes and related universal ideologies. For example, Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with
*a Thousand Faces* frames the journey of the two protagonists of this study. In addition, the culturally modified archetypes are explained through the works of Wole Soyinka and Henry Gates, including Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*), Karla F. C. Holloway (*Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women’s Literature*), and Teresa Washington (*Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Aje in Africana Literature*). Chapter Two also presents a description of the specific goddesses, Uhamiri and Oya of the African cosmology and explores African feminist thought as defined by Filomina Steady, and its connection to the spiritual and physical dimensions.

Chapter Three includes biographical information about Flora Nwapa to draw parallels between her life’s story and the life stages of the protagonist in her novel, *Efuru*. This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the goddess Uhamiri as personified through Efuru. The analysis is supported with Jell-Bahlsen’s twenty-year study of the goddess Uhamiri presented in *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Oguide of Oguta Lake*, and the collective unconscious theory of Carl Jung.

Chapter Four examines Zora Neale Hurston’s biography, which is essential to discovering why she chose to portray the heroine of her novel as a personified goddess which is crucial to understanding how her life’s story parallels the self-discovery journey of her protagonist. This chapter gives an analysis of the personified goddess archetype in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Judith Gleason’s extensive research of the Yoruba goddess in *Oya: In Praise of an African Goddess* supports this analysis. As in chapter Three, the Jungian collective unconscious theory is used as the tool to access Janie’s goddess persona in the subconscious.
Chapter Five uses biographical data from written works such as an autobiography of Hurston and interviews by Nwapa to compare the life stories of the two writers with the major events, themes, and literary devices they used to develop their novels.

Chapter six, the conclusion, provides evidence supporting the claim that the two writers, although situated in different geographic locations, used the same archetypal pattern of personified goddesses to create the female protagonists of their novels. The chapter further suggests implications for future research dealing with the use of archetypal criticism in examining Africana women’s self-identity.

**Historical and Cultural Background**

Two gigantic historical events lay the foundation for this study: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the European colonization of Africa. The Slave Trade which started in the seventeenth century forcefully transported some Africans to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, separating the thread of commonalities that bound them to their homeland—historically, spiritually, and culturally. As a result, enslaved Africans in the New World suffered cultural displacement; in particular, the loss of African traditional religion impacted their identity in the New World.

**Enslavement of Africans in the New World**

Although enslaved Africans were not allowed to express or give voice to their African religious beliefs, they retained memories of their cultural heritage, which became the foundation for their African-based culture in the New World:

Though transported from Africa to the New World in shackles and chains, Americans of African descent retained memories of their African cultural heritage. To survive in humane attempts to strip them of all basic dignities
and fundamental human rights, they created an African-based culture in the New World, a multipurpose and unique culture that not only reaffirmed their humanness but also allowed them to construct pathways of ethereal and temporal escape. (Hill et al., 2)

Because of their enslaved status, Africans were not permitted to learn how to read and write. Therefore, retained memories of their culture were initially expressed only through poetry, prose, songs, storytelling, and folktales in the oral tradition. Yet, through this communal African consciousness they were able—under the most dehumanizing circumstances—to shape the primary aesthetic on which their written literature would be later based.

Although the enslaved Africans came from various parts of Africa, writers such as Placide Frans Tempels, in *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), Alexis Kagame, in *The Bantu-Rwandese Philosophy of Being* (1956), and Marcel Griaule in *Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (1948) expound on and synthesize the philosophy of the Bantu, the Ruandese, and the Dogon ethnic groups of Africa and their impact in the New World. These writers all agree on the basic principles that show philosophical communalities that exist among Africans. For example, in *Muntu*, Janheinz Jahn uses archetypal forms to demonstrate a set of integrated principles that influence black African culture:

For all its obvious diversity, traditional African cultures all participate in and derive from a set of philosophical principles which find expression in individual cultures which may differ greatly in terms of emphasis, ritual
and cultural detail, through which these principles find expression. Yet the adherence to the principles is clearly present. (Benoit 2)

Therefore, regardless of the region from which African slaves originated, they all shared a basic African philosophy: namely, God is in every aspect of life.

The largest number of enslaved Africans came from ethnic groups in West Africa. From this ethnic demographic came the Yoruba culture of Western Nigeria and the Ewe culture of Republic of Benin, West Africa—the major sources of African religions that survived the vicissitudes of the Atlantic Trade (Thompson xv). Destabilized by the downfall of their great Oyo Empire, the Yorubas were sold into slavery in multitudes. Research evidence shows that “between 1820 and 1840, the majority of slaves shipped from the ports of the Bight of Benin were Yoruba: victims of fratricide, Dahomean expansion, the Fulani jihad and most of all, the insatiable demands of the planters of the New World” (Murphy 22). The Ewes of Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) were also victims:

The reason why it was the religious conceptions of Dahomey in particular that came to prevail in Haiti is apparent from a London report of 1789 which tells us that ten to twelve thousand slaves were exported yearly from the kingdom of Dahomey…..more than six to eight thousand a year who were shipped to the French Antilles, above all to Saint-Dominique, as the principal French colony of Haiti was then called. (Jahn 30)

African Religion in the New World

In their forced move to the New World, both the enslaved Yoruba and the Ewe peoples brought their religions with them. Their traditions were ingrained in their
memories as a result of their African religious practice of consulting God twenty-four hours a day. The Yoruba religious belief system has a supreme God, Olodumare, owner of all destinies who is approached through intermediaries (minor gods and goddesses) called Orishas, who have priests and priestesses. The Ewes’ system is similar but their deities are called loas.

In the New World, the religions of these two ethnic groups evolved into Santeria and Voodoo. Under the harsh *Code Noir* the ethnic groups were forbidden to participate in their traditional religion; therefore they assimilated their beliefs into the Catholic Christian religion. This blending of the Christian concept with that of Africans gave birth to syncretism:

In the New World, the Yoruba were forced into a new religious system of pervasive power. This new tradition shaped their lives, and their native vision of the world was gradually adapted to complement and reflect the Catholic worldview. A new bilingual tradition emerged, at once a resistance to Catholic oppression and an accommodation to Catholic values. (Murphy 32)

In the New World, Cuba is the birthplace of Santeria, the place where the African slaves were imported from the late 1700’s until roughly 1870 (Holloway 122). Santeria, (the way of the saints) was the compromise the Africans made when they were forced to become Catholics in their new environment. Santeria practice is concentrated in the Caribbean and parts of the United States. The orishas, the minor gods and goddesses, were now disguised beneath the images of the Catholic saints. Using the organization of the Yoruba religion as a template, Santeria is divided into three parts: 1) reincarnation
and values through honoring ancestors; 2) order through divination; and (3) power through spiritual beings (Murphy 8).

Voodoo belief (genius protective spirit), which the Ewe people brought to the New World, identifies with one Supreme Being who created the world. Voodoo is also practiced mainly in the Caribbean, particularly in Haiti and Louisiana (United States). As in Santeria, the voodoo followers must access the Supreme Being through loas or deities. After following the Code Noir in the New World, each loa became a represented Catholic saint. Santeria and Voodoo practitioners worship some of the same deities who answer to different names. The deities that they have in common are: Èshù/Legba, Shango/Zaka, Yemoja/Yemaya, Oya/Yansa, and Oshun/Erzulie. This further illustrates the similarities that exist among religions from different parts of Africa.

During slavery, efforts of white owners to eradicate "heathen" African practices forced these beliefs to go underground or to be masked. Even today, the negativity surrounding African traditional religion has made it one of the most covertly observed practices in the western hemisphere. This surreptitious worship of African gods and goddesses provides the link to the implicit manner in which Hurston presents her protagonist as Oya, an African goddess. Hurston's research on African traditional religion came particularly from Haiti and New Orleans. The knowledge she acquired from this research informs her works, especially as reflected in Their Eyes Were Watching God (Hemenway 57).

Colonization of Africa

Colonization of Africans on the continent started in the nineteenth century when European countries partitioned Africa into colonies. In the Berlin conference of 1884,
European powers divided the African continent among themselves. The continent was divided into about fifty-five colonies with the majority going to Britain and France. Colonized Africans on this continent also suffered cultural displacement. Although some African traditions were lost, others were either consciously or subconsciously retained.

The European method of governance and form of religious worship were different from those of Africans. These dramatic changes alienated Africans from their cultural traditions so that they had little or no participation in their own affairs. In most cases, the Western system of governance undermined the traditional institutional system. In his trailblazing fiction *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe takes the readers through a sample of cultural displacement. The novel was published in 1958, just two years before Nigeria attained its independence from Britain in 1960. The village of Umuofia, the setting of the story, becomes an example of the clash between European and African cultures in the later part of the nineteenth century. Apart from this representation in fiction, other attempts at the restoration of Africans’ cultural self are encapsulated in identity overtures such as the Negritude movement in France and Africa.

Furthermore, many scholars believe that the Negritude movement played an important role in the struggle for independence of African countries from European rule. This movement is labeled as the formative movement for African literature. African American Harlem Renaissance writers influenced French-speaking Africans studying in France. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, many writers from the movement, such as Alain Locke, Walter White, and others, spent some time in Paris. These African-American writers met with Francophone African and Caribbean writers such as Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, and Leon Gontran Damas among others, who believed that
Claude McKay's *Banjo* led them "to discover the cultural unity of the oppressed black diaspora" (Fabre 4).

The meeting of these two groups marks the connection between Africans and African Americans who compared notes. The Africans were impressed with how black writers from America unapologetically expressed their black identity and how they used Africa as their framework for race and cultural identity. In turn, they began to use Africa aesthetically in their works. However, both the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movements have had complaints levied against their ideologies. The former was accused of elitism while the latter was chastised for over-simplification. Despite those problems, both movements are credited with preserving the dignity of the people of African descent.

**African Traditional Religious Belief**

In the African traditional religious belief, the totality of the supreme God is that of a constructive and destructive God as depicted in the Old Testament. This is a sovereign God who must be appeased when wronged by the humans he created. The medium for his placation is through the deities he created for this purpose:

Africans strongly believe in an all-powerful deity who is the source of all things and the creator of the whole universe. Because of his infinite greatness and power...consequently, he does not directly intervene in human affairs but delegates his authority to specialized divinities who serve him as aids and intermediaries. Thus, one divinity would have authority over rain, another over fertility, another over medicinal herbs and so on. (Owomoyela 2)
As specified in their mythological stories, the deities are endowed with different functions. Accordingly, God is worshiped through consultation with deities and ancestral spirits, the media to God. The believers seek the will of God through divination by a priest or priestess who finds out what needs to be done from a deity assigned to a particular function. The deities and spirits are honored through libations and sacrifice. In addition, those living represent a link between their ancestors and those yet to be born. In many African traditional religions, people believe in a cyclical nature of reality, and like various other religions, African Traditional religions embrace natural phenomena.

While some believe that the religion is shrouded in secrecy, in reality the main aspects of belief are the following commonalities:

- Belief in a Supreme Being, or Creator, often referred to by a myriad of names in various languages
- No written scripture (holy texts are oral)
- Correspondence with the higher being through intermediaries (minor gods and goddesses that have priests and priestesses)
- A devout connection with their ancestors

From all indications, African philosophy is grounded in African religious belief. Sixteenth-century African philosopher Ethiopian Zara Yacob states that reason itself is incomplete without God’s guidance. In agreement with Yacob, African scholar K.A. Opoku states:

Religion therefore becomes the root of the African culture and it is the determining principle of the African life. ... It is no exaggeration, therefore to say that in traditional Africa, religion is life and life, religion.
Africans are engaged in religion in whatever they do—whether it be farming, fishing or hunting; or simply eating, drinking or traveling, religion gives meaning and significance to their lives, both in this world and the next. (1)

For Africans, religion is fundamental. In his groundbreaking book *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), John S. Mbiti, a leading Kenyan scholar, writes, “Religion for Africans is an ontological phenomenon; it pertains to the question of existence or being” (19). Mbiti further asserts that religion for the African is part of everything, the philosophical framework that guides the existence of the African. Therefore, African philosophy refers to the understanding, attitude of mind, logic, and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life (2). The African belief is that God is in every aspect of life twenty-four hours a day. Spirituality is equivalent to existence; it is engrained in every aspect of life. Mbiti maintains that spirituality is how the African defines him or herself, which cannot be separated from his or her being:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life.... Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being.... What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then,
belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole. (2)

For the African, everything revolves around religion; and African philosophy is grounded in African traditional religion. Thus, Western missionaries who demonized African traditional religion created identity problems for African people whose response was either to detach from or mask their form of religious practice. In the midst of assimilation, resistance lurked for some in Africa. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the author, Ayi Kwei Armah responds:

> We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of making up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any ultimate way. We are not stunted in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not Christians that we should invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach them daylight and night as truth. We are not warped in soul, we are not Arabs, we are not Muslims to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness, and call our creature creator. That is not our way. (4)

Still, conflicts of religious ideologies create superior versus inferior scenarios that can be alleviated with the knowledge of mythologies and the archetypes that reside in them. Further, the universality of this idea alludes to exploration through Jung’s collective unconscious. In the politics of superiority, however, universality has been redefined by some to mean European, which forces those of non-European descent to move from the collective unconscious to the personal before they move to the conscious
in order to exist. This strategy allows Africans to focus on their own cultural experiences rather than on the utopian human experience.

For the African and African American, the residual religious culture which was subverted in the face of slavery and colonialism resurfaces in literary works. This is true for both Nwapa and Hurston, who use a literary canon closer to their own African perception to write their novels.

Africana Theoretical Perspective

In Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka presents an analysis of the interrelating worlds of myth, ritual, and literature in Africa. This analysis speaks to the way the African world perceives itself as a cultural entity. Soyinka lays the foundation for the African world’s use of deities in constructing characters in literary work. Soyinka, through this illumination, explains that myths give birth to religion and that the religious roots of a group serve as venues for understanding the culture of the group. Thus, the understanding of a culture comes from an appreciation of its mythos. Although Soyinka’s book deals primarily with drama, he also addresses ways in which his subject matter connects with fiction and poetry. His insight stresses the importance of using an African cultural perspective to interpret African literature.

In his work The Signifying Monkey, African American theorist and critic Henry Gates discusses the link between the African and African American oral traditions and shows how this link relates to Africana literature in a scholarly manifestation of cultural connections. He discusses a new critical style located within the origins of African tradition that allows the Africana voice to speak for itself. Examining the Yoruba trickster figure of Èṣù-Èlègbára and transferring some of its functions to the African
American signifying figure, the Signifying Monkey, Gates reveals a unique system of interpretation based on the oral tradition that the enslaved Africans brought with them to the New World. In the introduction of the book, Gates reveals:

Because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of a coherent system of order must be reassembled. These fragments embody aspects of a theory of critical principles around which the texts of the tradition configure, in the critic’s reading of the textual past. To reassemble fragments, of course, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration. It is to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part. (xxiv)

Following this line of thought, it is plausible that the continental African and the Diaspora African writers used the same spiritual and cultural images to create their characters. This can be demonstrated in a careful analysis of the works in conjunction with African cultural beliefs. The use of African culture to analyze text, however, has not been part of the norm primarily because of the politics of superiority that Western scholars employ when they discuss literature from other cultures.

The use of other avenues of interpretation besides the European literary canons should add to, not deduct from, the integrity of literary criticism. In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary Imagination, Toni Morrison writes, “I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate of conquest” (3). Morrison wants the space for
discovery in literary interpretation to be larger, less restrictive and for the exploration not to turn into a competition.

**African and African American Religious and Cultural Connections**

This study asserts that Nwapa and Hurston have focused on and interpreted female experiences based on female-centered mythological stories from their collective unconscious. Both authors use the Jungian figurative mother archetype, the goddess in the mythical context, to create their female protagonists. The personified goddesses in Nwapa's and Hurston's novels have decision-making abilities that embody strength, wisdom, and independence; yet, the goddesses have both positive and negative sides to their personalities. These traits are recognized in Efuru and Janie, the protagonists—and—respectively, in their self-actualizing journeys.

Through the examination of these two novels, this study builds on prior works that explore the use of African culture for literary interpretation. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates uncovers a unique system for literary interpretation, which discloses a powerful vernacular tradition that the enslaved Africans brought with them to the New World. Accordingly, Gates uses the Èṣù (Yoruba) and the signifying monkey (African American) to attest to the fragmented unity of black cultures in the African diaspora. Èṣù of the Yoruba mythology travelled intact to the New World: “It is called Èṣù–Élēgbārá in Nigeria, and Legba among the Fon in Benin. His New World figurations include Exu in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba in the pantheon of the loa of Vaudou of Haiti, and Papa La Bas in the loa of Hoodoo in the United States” (5).

Gates maintains that the Signifying Monkey of the African-American tradition emerges from African culture as Èṣù’s first cousin. Their connectivity rests upon the
examination of myths of Èšù’s origin. Èšù is the god of the crossroads and the interpreter of signs, a good orator. His equivalent in African-American mythic discourse is the Signifying Monkey. The oral tradition, which Gates calls the “talking book,” is a central trope in early slave narratives that defines the tradition of African-American letters. He uses this critical framework to examine several major works of African-American literature, including one of the two texts chosen for this dissertation, Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale Hurston. This study adds to Gates’ findings in showing another linkage of African and African American culture through the archetypal creation of female protagonists as represented in African religious culture.

In exploring African religious culture, this study accepts the existence of the universal goddess archetypes in the collective unconscious. Manifestations of the collective unconscious to the conscious are made concrete through the mythical stories of African goddesses, Uhamiri and Oya. An Africana framework is more appropriate than a Eurocentric perspective for analyzing the two literary works. This study deals with personified African goddesses in literary works of Black female writers—works that Eurocentric literary criticism cannot adequately address.

Further, the exploration of this topic is undergirded by the union of perceived opposites such as the spiritual and physical worlds, which is not academically accepted in the current European critical canon. In the Western world, the merging of the physical with the spiritual realms has become an occurrence of the distant past. Soyinka explains:

The multiple deities have become for the European a thing of distant memory, and heroes who once dared the divine monopoly of the chthonic realm fade into dubious legend. The ultimate consequence of this—in
terms of man’s cosmic condition—is that the cosmos recedes further and
further until, while retaining something of the grandeur of the infinite, it
loses the essence of the tangible, the immediate, the appeasable. (Soyinka
4)

The use of multiple deities as a literary device is no longer an accepted
approach within the Western literary canon. From an African perspective, however, the
union of the spiritual and physical realms is very much an accepted phenomenon.
Therefore, the use of multiple deities in literary works is still an integral part of African
literary interpretation.

Summary

This dissertation asserts that Nwapa and Hurston in their fictional works use the
same archetypal pattern to create strong Africana female protagonists who, through their
self-discovery journeys, evolve into strong women who are neither defined, nor
circumscribed by oppositional relationships with the males in their lives. This study
builds on prior works that explore the use of African religious culture for literary
interpretation: Henry Gates’ The Signifying Monkey and Wole Soyinka’s Myth, Literature
and the African World.

This study suggests that when two writers from different sides of the Atlantic
Ocean use the same archetypal pattern in constructing the heroines of their novels, then
the writers have similarities that go beyond their common human experience. Based on
Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, this study further argues that knowledge
of the African religious culture initially resided in the authors’ collective unconscious
before emerging on a conscious level through the writers’ lives and fictional works. By
characterizing their protagonists as personified goddesses, this study suggests that both authors demonstrate a manifestation of the collective unconscious to the conscious state.

The study utilizes archetypal criticism as the primary interpretive device to explore the mythical life of the goddesses, Uhamiri and Oya with that of Efuru and Janie, respectively. This analysis is based on research concerning the mythological stories of Uhamiri and Oya presented in Sabine Jell-Bahlsen’s *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Oguide of Oguta Lake* (Uhamiri) and Judith Gleason’s *Oya: In Praise of an African Goddess* (Oya), as well as literary interpretation of the selected novels.

Other secondary sources used to further support this study include African feminist theory which advances the exploration of female roles through a connection between the supernatural and the physical world. Assuming this linkage is a fundamental difference between African feminist thought and Eurocentric feminist ideology. Further, Africana philosophy advanced by Africana critics contribute to understanding why a literary approach other than a Eurocentric perspective is necessary in examining black literature. Utilizing the African culture to analyze a text has not been part of the conventional literary canon—primarily because of the superior posture that Western scholars assume when interpreting literature from other cultures. This study argues that the use of alternative interpretive avenues other than the European literary canon should add to, not deduct from the integrity of literary criticism.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical perspective of this study is based on archetypal criticism which derives from Swiss psychologist Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious. Archetypal criticism is a literary approach that identifies those mystic elements that give a literary work deeper meaning. Archetypal features help in understanding the text and in defining its form and function. These features also demonstrate that the meaning of a text does not reside only on the page nor can it be interpreted only as an independent entity.

Universal Archetype

Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious provides the impetus for exploring archetypes represented in literary works. The theory identifies two types of unconsciousness in the human experience: the collective unconscious and the personal unconscious. The collective unconscious is the psychic inheritance or the unlearned knowledge that we are born with. This unlearned knowledge influences all our experiences and behaviors as human beings and it manifests itself through images in the personal unconscious as dictated by culture. Some experiences show the effects of the collective unconscious more clearly than others.

On the psychoanalytical level, this theory recognizes a number of innate thoughts, instincts, and memories residing in the unconscious of all people. Archetypes form the content of this collective: persistent images, figures and story patterns shared by
people across diverse cultures. Identical in all individuals, archetypes are universal in nature:

The collective unconscious is anything but an encapsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wild as the world. There I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly one with the world, so much a part of it that I forget all too easily who I am.

(qtd. in Hull 22)

This would be the ideal situation for the human race to be in touch with self to the point of being selfless because “Lost in oneself is a good way of describing this state. But this self is the world, if only a consciousness could see it. This is why we must know who we are” (22). Who we are as human beings begins in the collective unconscious but is manifested through images in the conscious state through first the recognition of self, and then through how this self fits into the total human experience.

Archetypal criticism in literature is based on the premise that archetypes are motifs that arrange the psychic elements into recognizable images characterized as archetypes. These manifestations are personally and culturally conditioned without losing the basic archetypal pattern. They are the incomprehensible basic forms embodied in recurring images, symbols, or patterns. These archetypes are patterns of behavior from the beginning of human existence and Jung refers to them as primordial images. He says, “So far as collective unconsciousness is concerned we are dealing with archaic or—I would say—primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (Hull 4-5). It is through primordial images that universal archetypes are
experienced, and more importantly, that the unconscious is revealed. Jung stresses that this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal, “in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (qtd. in Hull 3-4). For example, the god-image in man can be said to be the premier archetype, a prototype that has existed since the remotest times. This premier archetype builds the foundation from which a universal understanding of archetypes begins.

One of the main archetypes that Jung explores is the mother archetype, which is associated with the goddess archetype of fertility and fruitfulness. Fertility and fruitfulness refer not only to the ability to reproduce children but also to the reproduction of anything that enhances a community. Jung also attributes the following qualities to the goddesses: maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. In addition, the goddesses balance these positive attributes with some negative ones: “secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (82). This is the universal aspect of the mother archetype (goddess).

Universal structures have been further endorsed in literary works as evidenced by Amy Maud Bodkin, British critic and scholar of mythology. Her book *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (1934) is a major work that applies theories of Jung to literature. Northrop Frye’s archetypal criticism was established criticism as an intelligible field of study which trains the imagination as the
sciences train the reason. He felt that literary archetypes provide the platform for articulating essential human needs and concerns. In a utopian world, the universality of archetypes would be perfect in the recognition of the commonalities rather than the differences of humanity; but the connotative meaning the post-modernist attaches to the word poses a problem.

The word universal has been redefined to mean European with the European standard of interpretation becoming the criteria for literary analysis. Therefore, literary works of people of African descent is evaluated by European cultural beliefs that may be dramatically different from African cultural beliefs. This reductive interpretive format only recognizes the European culture. This explains why Henry Louis Gates argues that black people have been theory-resistant. Gates further argues that, this resistance may also relate to Michel Foucault’s contention that discursive formations are systems of power (European) that restrict the way people see and talk about things.

Edward Said makes a similar point in his book Orientalism (1979). He argues that Europeans define themselves as superior compared with the Orientals and use this concept to justify colonization of the Orientals—whom they saw as part of the uncivilized world. This became an important text in the field of postcolonial studies and Said’s explanation illuminates European ideas about other non-Europeans.

In The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (1989), Bill Ashcroft among others identify the criteria that govern the field of postcolonial studies. Accordingly, the text discusses three concepts of postcolonial theory: the center-periphery opposition, the displacement experienced by colonized people and the hybrid character of postcolonial writing. The authors submit that people on the
periphery of a dominant imperial culture either submit, rebel, or openly challenge the limits. An example of a challenge is in language form. The colonized people transform the colonizer’s language to one that suits them. The second concept of the postcolonial discourse is that of displacement. The three types of displacements identified are location, language, and culture. Enslaved Africans brought to America suffered all three types of displacements. The colonized Africans, on the other hand, suffered two—language and culture—because the colonizer came to them in their location. The third concept is hybridity, which gives a positive spin to the negativity of displacement. This concept feeds into the depth of Gates’ theory. African American culture with some roots originating from Africa along with an intermingling with the Euro-American culture produces a rich ground for intertexture in the black literary experience. However, this study concentrates on the African influences.

**Culturally Modified Archetypes**

Archetypes exist first in the subconscious and then they are projected into the conscious through specific objects. Modified in a special way, these projections fit a cultural expectation now existing on the conscious level. Jung says, “They are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching” (4).

On the other hand, the personal unconscious owes its existence to personal everyday life experiences that are either repressed or temporarily forgotten but that can be recalled to the conscious. These recalled memories then exist in the physical reality as concrete images still started in the subconscious as archetypes that have been influenced by the cultural environment that surrounds it.
Some universal themes in Africana literature can be explained using the Western critical technique. However, considering Africana people’s history and culture, the African system of knowing—which gives a more accurate interpretation—should supersede the Western. A universal theme presented in fiction is still within a specific cultural setting and belief system, although in most cases the setting is assumed to be European. Chinweizu and others, in the introduction of *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, state:

> But African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. (4)

These authors recognize that the argument that speaks to universalism in literary criticism means that others should succumb to the European standard only. They speak to the avoidance of being conned into pseudo-universalism—a way of excluding all other forms of analysis that some Western critics want to advance. Nigerian playwright and critic Wole Soyinka argues that while there is universality in the general architecture of the human existence, there are cultural “bubbles” that add depth to a specific experience at a certain place in the universe.

Soyinka cautions Africans against falling prey to the concept of universality stating:
We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonization—this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems” (Soyinka x).

Soyinka recognizes that in many instances, “universal” is the code word for “European”. To attempt to rectify this and to give the original literal meaning back to the word universal, the knowledge and understanding of other cultures can help. In order to understand other cultures, knowledge of the mythologies of the cultures is essential.

In the African cultural perspective, archetypal patterns have the continuum of connecting the physical with the spiritual world as an essential aspect. Nwapa and Hurston illustrate this method through their works that utilize African Igbo and Yoruba cosmologies respectively to achieve their archetypal pattern for their female protagonists. In agreement with this pattern and the traditions that give it depth, Toni Morrison in her comments about her book Songs of Solomon states:

I could blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world. We are practical people... but within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. (Morrison 15)

Literary critic Teresa Washington concurs when she proposes, “What I sought was a definitive, holistic African-based model to elaborate the profusion of Africana
cultural and spiritual properties in Africana texts" (2). Using Zora Neale Hurston’s literary work as a guide, Washington continues:

Hurston’s works became artistic and critical roots that moved stones of Western ideology out of my path. She also lent me her shoes with the sky-blue bottoms so I could fly to Nigeria and better understand the power inherent in Africana women that makes it for-gone conclusion that they will create and recreate texture, color, and enliven nearly everything they touch no matter where they are. (5)

Thus the freedom to seek the cultural self that resides deep within her collective unconscious releases psychological obstacles that had prevented Africans of Diaspora to connect with Africa. Washington argues further that the only way Hurston achieved her journey to self was by not concerning herself with the “theoretical flavor or aesthetic edict of the month” (5). Others have unapologetically followed her lead. In contemporary writing, Morrison in most of her novels particularly, Songs of Solomon, uses the African cultural concept to enlighten her characters. She weaves into her stories African cultural continuity in America. Of this emerging pattern Gay Wilentz argues:

Informed by a consciousness of what must be passed on to future generations, the telling of the tale is paramount to the survival of the culture. Like their African sister-storytellers, these writers create oral literature in their written Works. They (re)assemble the fragmented sounds of their foremothers’ voices, rendering explicit the implicit memory of African nature. (qtd. in Washington 3)
Washington acknowledges that Africa is in the subconscious and through the cultural representation in written and orally told fiction, the implicit can be made explicit, therefore ensuring generational transfer.

Morrison's work is deeply rooted in Africana roots. In the complexities of *Songs of Solomon*, like Hurston her predecessor, she creates a sense of place that is conducive to her African heritage. She uses the oral tradition and the supernatural aspects among others. Morrison says of the oral skills:

> If you have friends you can speak to in your own language, you keep the vocabulary alive, the nuances, the complexity, the places where the language had its original power; but in order to get there, I have to rewrite, discard, and remove the print-quality of the language to put back the oral quality, where intonation, volume and gesture are all there. (Morrison, 140)

Morrison's comments suggest a conscious effort to recapture that which could be lost if not for representation in fiction. Of the supernatural, her female character Pilate in *Songs of Solomon* is referred to as "primal mother goddess." Her presence in the story ensures the passing on of cultural knowledge to the family. Pilate becomes the embodiment of both male and female deities depending on the situation. Morrison continues: "Some of those things were "discredited knowledge" that Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was discredited" (15). The story is seen from within the context of an African continuum. The natural world informs situations in the story. She shows how African Americans, when necessary, can bring to the surface underlying African cosmologies.
In brief successions, other African American female writers use the African cultural perspective to advance their plot for each story. For example, the loud pronouncements of words have a strong spiritual effect positively or negatively as dictated by the African belief system of *nomm*, the power of the tongue (Jahn 65). Alice Walker in the *Color Purple* employs the use of the power of the tongue to free Celie. Celie tells Master that until he does right by her nothing he touches will prosper. Tina Ansa in *Baby of the Family* reconnects with African cultural traditions. The novel is about the baby of the family, Lena McPherson, born with a caul over her face. This makes her a special child connected with the spirit world. Ansa’s use of descriptive language and ritual although mainly written in Standard English embodies many aspects of the African tradition. These African concepts embedded in Africana fiction beg for an alternative analytical methodology.

Therefore, although Nwapa and Hurston start off with the universal archetypal pattern for character creation, they use myths and rituals that quickly place them in an African culture. Mythological goddesses in the African religious concept embody the archetype with which to explore female protagonists in the selected fictional works for this study. There are many male and female deities throughout the nations of Africa, but this study focuses only on goddesses from the Igbo and Yoruba cosmologies: Uhamiri, a goddess from the Igbo religious tradition; and Oya from the Yoruba religious tradition. Their mythical beginnings and functions make them relevant to this study. To this end, it is important to understand the role of mythology in the development of archetypes.
Mythology

The mythologies of cultures address the origin, history, deities, ancestors, and heroes of the cultures. Myths are peopled with recurring character types and relationships which are archetypes through which groups of people learn about their human identity as part of the total human experience. The culture of any given group is governed by their mythological stories from the distant past. In Robert Ackerman's *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. and the Cambridge Ritualists*, a pioneering work in myth criticism, Ackerman explains that the ritualists believed that collectively they could explain the origins of Greek religion and culture through several avenues. The avenue most important to this study is the portion of their work that deals with the origins of drama in which the "myth-and-ritual" approach was first worked out. They contend that myth and ritual are inextricably tied. Through this concept, it becomes obvious that each needs the other in order to manifest in any particular religion. Though the theory has never been demonstrated, recently scholars have shown myth and ritual share common models. These models provide some of the archetypal features that are universal which are stored in the collective unconscious of all human beings.

These archetypal models, however, can also be culture specific as they manifest. The rituals in a myth are characteristics of the particular peoples whom they represent. Through the representative collectives of the collective unconscious, the realities of how humans lead their lives in the physical dimension are shown even as they connect with the universal mythological culture. In other words, even though all cultures are included in the universality of archetypes, the images of the collective unconscious are represented in the conscious according to different cultural artifacts.
Joseph Campbell, also influenced by Jung, asserts that important global myths that have survived for thousands of years share a basic configuration called monomyth, a term he borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. In *Wake*, Joyce's protagonist Ulysses influenced Campbell's structuring of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell states, in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (31).

The map of this hero's journey includes a number of stages. The journey starts in the physical world and progresses to another realm where he or she faces great challenge alone without much assistance. If the hero survives the challenge then he is rewarded at the end of his or her journey when he returns to the ordinary world. Campbell also uses some of the ideas embedded in the work of early twentieth-century literary theorists of structural criticism to develop his model of the hero.

Structuralist criticism relates literary texts to a larger structure—arguing that there must be a structure in every text, an idea that explains why it is easier for experienced readers to interpret a text. Structuralism can pave the way to a different type of reductive thinking which collapses all differences. This can be the simplicity that exposes the negative part of universality. Very few myths contain all the stages that Campbell advocates in his work; some may focus on one stage or arrange the stages in a different progression. The stages can also be divided into three events: departure, initiation, and return. This monomyth pattern has being tested against the mythical stories of Osiris, Prometheus, Buddha, Moses, and Jesus Christ.
Argument for Culturally Modified Archetypes

Building on Jungian theory, Carol Pearson argues that archetypes associated with specific cultures lose their values. She suggests that the universality of archetypes be maintained without cultural attachments. She says archetypal patterns are “deep and abiding patterns in the human psyche that remain present over time” (xi). From these patterns, Pearson developed six archetypes to interpret the universality of human behavior in some circumstances. The six archetypes are the innocent, orphan, wanderer, warrior, altruist, and magician, and they are not specific to any particular culture.

In contrast to Pearson, this study argues that using culture to inform archetypes enriches the vastness of universality of archetypes that conjure vagueness. Further, a culturally informed archetype gives a more accurate and valid analysis of the novels used for this study. The traditions of each culture further provide contents (on the conscious level) to archetypes which are themselves contents of the collective unconscious. Jung acknowledges, “The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (qtd. in Hull 5). Following this line of thought, Jung, although embracing all aspects of the universality of his theory, admits, “Although the figure of the mother as it appears in folklore is more or less universal, this image changes markedly when it appears in the individual psyche” (qtd. in Hull 82). These changes that appear in the individual psyche are related to cultural attachments. In addition, he calls this personal conscious level the superficial because it concentrates on self.
However, identification of self is how the social constructs have covertly set up knowledge. Not to identify first with self means that one is invisible and gives permission to others to project their identification on one. Therefore, to self-identify, one must transfer archetypes that reside in the collective unconscious to the personal conscious through images that are culturally modified. The post-modernist critical practice attests to this viewpoint because in the deconstruction of modernist literature and critical practice, it became acceptable to associate the subconscious with the conscious. In reality, the collective unconscious cannot be recognized without functioning images that populate these universal patterns. Jung says the term archetype as he defined it in connection with collective unconscious only applies indirectly to transmission from unconscious to conscious called “representations collectives” (Hull 5).

**African Goddesses Used for Critical Analysis**

**Uhamiri of Igbo Cosmology**

Uhamiri (Mami-wata), also referred to as Ogbuide by the Igbos, is a motherly deity of water. She is an amalgamation of many different African water goddesses. Sabine Jell-Bahlsen’s *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Oguide of Oguta Lake* is an intense study of more than twenty years of how the mythological goddess, Uhamiri, also known by several other names, informs the lives of the Igbo people in Oguta. As a goddess, she is multifaceted because she has many contradicting sides. Jell-Bahlsen explains:

This awesome goddess embodies the forces of nature that dominate life and death …existed before, until, and beyond the event of Europeans, Christianity, and Islam. Recognizing the mother water goddess and her
powers is altering our perception of and dealing with nature, power, and
gender.... The ever present lake goddess...reflected in the people’s daily
conduct, their cosmology, spirituality, aesthetics, and perception of the
universe. (2-3)

Jell- Bahlsen’s research finds that the goddess Uhamiri is embedded in the myth, history,
and custom of the Oguta people. Uhamiri is not only strong, wise, and independent but
also a symbol of beauty and elegance. She is caring, loving, benevolent and creative.
One of her most revered physical attributes is her long twisted dreadlocks. For a woman
to have this hair style signals to others that she has a spiritual calling. Bell-Bahlsen found
out that when Uhamiri appears locally, she covers her hair with a scarf in order to blend
in with the dress culture of the other females in the village thereby hiding her dreadlocks,
which is one her mystic qualities:

When appearing as a woman, the lake goddess ties her hair like a human
hiding her supernatural qualities. Madame Nwammetu Okoroafa of Oguta,
thus recounted Uhammiri’s appearance in the marketplace: “Uhammiri
goes to the market .... Before she comes to the market she ties her hair,
after that she will go, but you won’t know who she really is.” A
supernatural being, the lake goddess does not look like an ordinary
woman. But when she decides to appear and mingle with humans, the
goddess may temporarily assume human looks and “tie her hair” and “you
will not know.” (227)

That Uhamiri frequently humanizes her physical looks in order to mingle with
humans in the marketplace makes it conceivable for Nwapa to use an existing behavior
pattern to humanize the goddess as a major character in her novel. Efuru is portrayed with long, flowing hair; and in African traditional culture, a woman’s hair in association with water is an essential motif that represents fertility, rain and magic. Therefore, Uhamiri, with her dreadlocks, has the power to grant children and other forms of fertility which could also be material wealth. Uhamiri’s beauty is said to devastate men. Uhamiri is said to have tempted men, and she even married two river gods, Urashi and Njaba.

Uhamiri balances both good and bad; she gives as well as takes. In addition, she plays a role in preserving people’s custom and sanity but also causes turmoil, illness of body and mind, and even death (Jell-Bahlsen 3). Though Uhamiri may grant children and wealth to humans, she may also cause doom. This goddess is the focus of the Oguta people when they seek answers in the event of childbirth, life and death, and connects with her worshippers or future worshippers in dreams. Jell-Bahlsen comes to this summation:

Make no mistake: _Uhammiri_ who gives children may _also_ take children away. That is her nature. She protects health, yet she may cause an individual to become insane. The volatile goddess is known to be slippery, evasive, and beyond the control of humans. She is after all, deity associated with the water, an ephemeral element beyond human control, who may either enhance fertility, give and sustain life, or bring flooding and foreign invaders, drown people, cause destruction of crops, illness and death. (132)

Uhamiri is also referred to as the marketplace goddess of Oguta that grants economic wealth to women. Jell-Bahlsen’s research shows that, “Oguta women in
particular have a reputation as successful traders” (244). In an interview with the Igbo scholar, Catherine Acholonu, Jell-Bahlsen found that wealthy Oguta women are part of the life story of Olaudah Equiano. This is noted in tracing the steps of the enslaved African from his Igbo origins, kidnapping, and journeying into slavery in the New World in the early eighteenth century.

In his autobiography, Equiano did not identify Oguta by name but through linguistic evidence, he described it as a culture that venerates the python and the wealthy women traders. After being kidnapped from his village, he was discovered by a rich widow, and he became her slave: “Her house and premises were situated close to one of those rivulets I have mentioned and were the finest I ever saw in Africa” (Hill et al. 132). He confirms the fact that there were women of wealth in this town situated along the riverine lands leading to the coast. It is the physical appearance and the economic wealth blessing from Uhamiri to Efuru, the female protagonist, that will best describe Nwapa’s Efuru as the personified goddess.

According to Jell-Bahlsen, the mythological story of Uhamiri and her connection to the physical world where she is worshipped shows that,

the divine woman in Igbo cosmology validates female power. This concept, together with obscure or flexible gender roles, contradicts patrilineal ideology, colonial conquest and its religion, and other superimpositions and male biases promoted by foreign value and belief systems. In the precolonial equilibrium of cosmological forces, achieving and maintaining balance through ritual activities both male and female
were equally important. Their ritual substance empowered both men and women. (165)

Such female power validated in the understanding of the mother archetype and which manifests through the Igbo goddess Uhamiri, is what Nwapa uses to create a female protagonist who is strong, wise, decisive, and independent.

**Oya of Yoruba Cosmology**

In the Yoruba cosmology, legend has the beginnings of the goddess Oya tied to Yemoja, the offspring of the union between Heaven (Obatala) and Earth (Odudua). Obatala and Odudua are said to represent Land and Water. Yemoja is the goddess of brooks and streams, and presides over ordeals by water and has several human characteristics: patience, endurance, sternness, observation, meditation, appreciation for history, future visions, and royalty personified. The deity’s characteristics are found and displayed in the depths of the ocean. The deity also signifies unfathomable wisdom. She governs material wealth, psychic abilities, dreaming, meditation, mental health and water-based healing. Yemoja is also known to help women that desire children. She is considered the patron of the descendants of Africans that were carried away during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Oya is one of the many offspring of Yemoja. She represents female power: strong, assertive, courageous and independent, and always willing to take risks. She is a great witch and the guardian of the gates of death. She is invoked when there are serious illnesses or when transformation is necessary. When she is enraged, she can create tornadoes and hurricanes, but these also happened when she is ready to make changes. Oya is also the goddess of women’s righteous anger. She can impart genius, restore
memory, or slap one with insanity. As daughter of a primordial mother, Oya takes on the superhuman form associated with the natural forces. Oya has come to earth to awaken and refine within particular female humans the qualities of strength, wisdom and independence. In her research, Judith Gleason states: “Oya is a conundrum. She is a double goddess: not here but there, not there but here; on the side of death, on the side of life. As a river, the seemingly integral Oya is actually composed of two streams, each with a radically different origin, flowing together now” (51).

In her mythological story, Oya is married three times. First, she marries the older Ogun, the god of iron; secondly, Shango, the god of lightning, and thirdly, Olukosi Epe, the hunter. While in heaven she marries her first husband, Ogun who hates her independent nature, and when they get to earth, she leaves this much older husband, and marries a younger one, Shango. Again, this second marriage fails because Shango also does not like her independent ways, so Oya leaves this second husband and marries a third, Olukosi Epe, who seems more tolerant of her personality. Unfortunately, this third marriage similarly ends when he betrays Oya by revealing a secret they shared. Oya is also endowed with many features and the natural elements are important in her feminine empowerment. She is endowed with power and passion, and these qualities she passes on to those that seek her. The name Oya, in the Yoruba language means “to tear.” This metaphorically speaks to her ability to tear apart and destroy things in her path as a tornado in the physical realm.

Another feature Oya possesses is the cycles of nine, and legend explains that the goddess makes a sacrifice of the sacred cloth of many colors and then she gives birth to nine children which earn her the name Iyansan, mother of nine. Oya is a goddess that is
introspective; this helps her to retrieve herself when she seems to be losing her sense of self. Oya’s Irukere (horsetail) is a symbol of her sexual passion. While she has earthly functions, she is the goddess that greets the about-to-be deceased in the entrance to the ancestor’s realm in the life and death cycle. This power is revealed in the secret societies of the Egungun. Judith Gleason, in her book *Oya: In Praise of the Goddess* retells an important myth of Oya's relationship to Egungun. In the tale, again the importance of the scared cloth is revealed as the acquisition of the said cloth represents the gaining of the power of perspective. Oya as part of her empowerment is also a witch endowed with wisdom. Oya also transforms into a buffalo. Gleason explains that the head of the buffalo represents a womb. These major features and functions of Oya ensure her empowerment.

Uhamiri and Oya are, among others, the deities that the enslaved Africans brought to the New World through their memories. In the New World, Uhamiri and Oya became Yansa. However, their mythological beginnings and functions remained just as they were when situated in Africa. They are worshiped in Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti among other countries in the Caribbean. Due to the Spanish law in Cuba, the enslaved Africans had to become Catholics: royal decrees repeatedly emphasized the necessity of baptizing and catechizing the enslaved. The laws stated in specific terms the duties of the church and state toward the spiritual welfare of the enslaved Africans:

We order and command to all persons who have slaves, Negroes and Mulattos, that they send them to Church or Monastery at the hour which the Prelate has designated, and there the Christian Doctrine be taught to them; and the Archbishops and Bishops of our Indies have very particular
care for their conversion and Endoctrination, in order that they live
Christianly, and they give to it the same order and care that is prepared
and entrusted by the laws of this Book for the Conversion and
Endoctrination of the Indians; so that they be instructed in our Holy
Catholic faith, living in the service of God our Master. (Murphy 27)

As a result of forced adherence to conversion the enslaved hid their Orishas under the
Catholic saints: Yemoja/Yemaja became St. Regla, the saint associated with maternity;
Oya and Uhamiri/Yansa became St. Candelaria, the saint associated with death. The
enslaved Africans in the New World were determined to keep some of their identity. The
method they devised to do so was to syncretize the African gods with the Roman
Catholic saints.

This African religious osmosis is an integral part of the unconscious and
conscious of people of African descent. The “cryptic teaching” that Jung refers to is
usually in the sphere of religion. The religion, in this case, African Traditional Religion
in the distinctiveness of its female deities, is the mystery that needs to be demystified in
order to understand how the female protagonists in Efuru and Their Eyes Were Watching
God are personified. Both authors in the creation of these characters, not in a dichotomy
with the male, explore the magical feminine being manifested through the goddess
persona. Goddesses are a group of supernatural female beings in some religions,
worshiped as the personification or controller of some aspects of the universe.

Humanizing their goddess protagonists at the beginning of their novels, Nwapa
and Hurston create characters who undertake adventures which can be compared to the
self-actualization journey of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. First, Jesus was made
human and dwelt among mankind; he then fulfilled his mission on earth by going through tribulations before he ascended into his proper position as God, seated at the right hand of his heavenly father. Through fictional personification, the protagonists are despiritualized but as their self-actualization journeys come to a close, their elevation back to their spiritual placement is inescapable.

The African link between Africans and African Americans has been the impetus for many researchers in the attempt to affirm that there are other ways of seeing, particularly when it comes to the interpretation of Africana literature. The conversation about linkage to spirituality in the creation of characters in archetypal patterns is documented in the Gates' *The Signifying Monkey* and Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*. The foundations of the Africana thoughts that Gates and Soyinka promote, respectively, bring a scholarly value to a conversation which otherwise could have been seen as intuitive. They have explored ways to use the African ways of knowing to create models for interpretation of Africana literature.

Approximately four hundred years of separation have created enormous differences between Africans and African Americans. However, critic John Cullen Grusser acknowledges the fact that though the experiences and cultural productions of Africans and African Americans differ profoundly, identifiable points of correspondence can be used to build bridges (2). Some motifs in the literary works provide avenues through which points of correspondence can be made. The literary ancestors of these two groups have attempted to bridge gaps and devise new ways to explore and understand associations, and these efforts have been inherited and continuous, going into subsequent generations.
Gates brings a different dimension into the black literary tradition. He uses the
trickster figure of Signifying Monkey from the African American literary tradition to
forge a counter-discourse in the literary world. This Signifying Monkey is derived from
the Yoruba trickster orisha, Èṣù-Élégbárá. When Gates was in Cambridge, England, he
met Wole Soyinka (1986 Nobel Prize winner in literature) who became his mentor.
Soyinka instructed him on Yoruba mythology. This is a point of intersection for
postcolonial and Africana studies. Through Signifyin' Gates makes the argument that
approaches should be combined rather than each being rigidly separate in its definition.
In the introduction of The Signifying Monkey, he explains the relationship between Èṣù-
Élégbárá (Yoruba Orisha) and the Signifying Monkey. They are two trickster figures that
are historically and culturally linked:

At first glance, these two tricksters would seem to have little in common.
Èṣù both a trickster and a messenger of the gods, figures prominently in
the mythologies of Yoruba cultures found in Nigeria, Benin, Brazil, Cuba,
and Haiti, among others....Èṣù serves as a figure for the nature and
function of interpretation and double-voiced utterance, the signifying
monkey serves as the figure-of-figures, as the trope in which are encoded
several other peculiarly black rhetorical tropes....Finally, I attempt to
show through their functional equivalency that the two figures are related
historically and are distinct aspects of a larger, unified phenomenon. (xxi)

The scholarship conducted by literary critics such as Gates shows that inquiry into
African cultural connections should contribute to in-depth analysis and interpretation of
some literary works by African Americans. Gates, in his criticism in The Jungle,
suggests that "a text is a coded structure which must be decoded; its structures of signification can never be what it appears to be…. (5). Intertextuality is the intent of this theory. In Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self (1989) the companion text to The Signifying Monkey (1988), Gate relates African American literature to three literary cultures, the Euro-American, the black literary tradition, and the African. The seeming completeness of this theory in the relationship of blacks to African and to Euro-America informs an interpretive activity of a black work in full.

In the vein of intertextuality, in Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka parallels the Greek and Roman mythology with that of Africans and comes to the conclusion that because:

The multitude epiphanous deities have become for the Europeans a thing of distant memory, and heroes who once dared the divine monopoly of the chthonic realm fade into dubious legend. The ultimate consequences of this—in terms of man’s cosmic condition—is that the cosmos recedes further and further until, while retaining something of the grandeur of the infinite, it loses the essences of the tangible, the immediate, the appeasable. It moves from that which can be tangibly metaphorphosed into realms of the fantasied; commencing somewhere else, where formerly it began, co-existed with, and was completed within the reality of man’s physical being and environment. (4)

While mythology occupies a subliminal position for people of European descent, this is not the case with the African world. Its interaction with its mythological realm is still very much integrated into its concrete world experience. Everyday existence does
not depend on just a vision of heaven after death or tampered with fantasy. There are, as Soyinka puts it “birth and re-birth” and the “rites of regress and entry” (4). Soyinka continues to make a case for the use of African mythological stories as archetypal literary patterns. Soyinka wants it to be recognized that Africans exist within cosmic totality in which their earthly being is inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon. He advocates the fact that myths that connect human beings to the cosmic are man’s creation, an attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions. Again the collective unconscious comes to play as the vehicle for storage and for later articulation through outward projections.

Soyinka is the first person of African descent to articulate the creation of protagonists based on mythological figures. His emphasis, however, is on male protagonists. He brings to the forefront the fact that just like Roman and Greek mythology, African mythology is important in the structuring of characters in fiction. The difference is, while the mythological gods and goddesses are distant for the Europeans, they are still an integral part of the lives of the Africans. Soyinka explains that to understand the African world-view, there are some aspects of African thinking that are important to this assessment. For example, the concept of time in the traditional settings is cyclical in the African thought. Therefore the deities are also an expression of cyclical nature. These African gods and goddesses interact with the humans in the physical realm as well as in the spiritual realm. Their existence is not understood in sequential time. Characteristics such as the weaknesses of the gods and goddesses, are also exhibited by humans, but the deities’ essences of purity represents the spirituality that humans strive to attain.
While there are commonalities that speak to universality in the archetypes that house the mythologies of all cultures, prevailing themes do express cultural differences. Using the Greek and Yoruba mythology for illustration, parallels can be drawn between the two using the Delphic Oracle and the Ifa Corpus, respectively. On the other hand, there are differences that cannot be ignored such as the moral bias of two world-views:

The penalties which societies exact from their deities in reparation for real or symbolic injuries are an index of the extent to which the principles of natural restitution for social disharmony may be said to govern the moral structure of that society and influence its social laws—a natural restitution, because the relationship between man and god (embodiment of nature and cosmic principles) cannot be seen in any other terms but that those of naturalness. This relationship represents the deductions and applications of cosmic and natural ordering, and it is not only ethical but technical norms which they provide for such a society. (14-15)

Naturalness here is the instinctive moral feeling that does not include man-made changes of moral values. Therefore, there is a dependence on natural laws for the resolution of problems with the African view of the human experience.

Mythological stories of a culture tend to structure the thinking of the holders of the culture. While culture is not biological, the unconscious manifestations tied to those belief systems forged from mythologies run deep. This is true of all groups:

In Asian and European antiquity, therefore, man did, like the African, exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his
own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon” (3).

In her critical text, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Aje in Africana Literature*, Teresa Washington—using the Yoruba supernatural belief system—speaks to the Africana woman’s power. She uses various fictional works written by Africana women to explain this concept. She believes in combining myth, history, spirituality, and autobiography to relate the role of women portrayed in the texts. Hers is a continuous unfolding of relatable concepts that are foreign to the stereotypical definition of Africana women. The female power is positioned through the mythological beginnings of African spirituality. She acknowledges that she stands on the shoulders of others like Zora Neale Hurston who was a trailblazer in this alternative method of interpreting Africana texts. She redefines the word “Aje” as one endowed not with evil but with supernatural powers, contrary to colonial understanding:

The erroneous translation of Aje and the misguided assumption that complex African concepts can and must be defined by false European language equivalents has led to much confusion and impeded a true understanding of Aje and similar powers.... Rather than continue to attempt to find definitive meaning in the terms and tongue of others, Aje deserves to exercise its ability to define itself, speak its own piece. (8)

The ability of characters to self-define is important to this study. Self-definition is projected through the cultural placement of the female protagonists that Nwapa and Hurston create in their works.
Karla Holloway, in Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature, posits an interesting theory through intertextual study of Africana fiction. In this work the primary focus is "that black women’s literature reflects its community—the cultural ways of knowing as well as ways of framing that knowledge in language …inversive, recursive, and sometimes even subversive structures that layer the black text and give it a dimension only accessible when its cultural context is acknowledged" (1-2). The book also addresses the difference that identifies Africana women’s literature as a distinct tradition fleshed out with metaphorical language that includes the African spiritual belief.

Furthermore, Holloway agrees with Soyinka that myth is assimilated into the ordinary every day existence of Africans. The belief of the ancestors being integral to the community validates the notion of the African’s continued connection to the spiritual realm in day-to-day earthly matters. Therefore, the mythological world and the physical world are in constant communication. Holloway explains:

I recognize appearances of myth as explanations of natural orders, as personifications of natural phenomena, and as rationale for the seemingly irrational. However, the interpretive distinction between Western and non-Western mythologies is the extent to which myth has been, in West Africa, assimilated into ordinary dimensions of human life. Rather than the extraordinary and distant environment of, for example the Graeco-Roman mythologies, the nearness of myth to reality in West African cultures is enabled by the realm of the ancestor. Ancestors continue to
make their spiritual presence felt after their death; they are unseen but neither uninterested in nor dismissed from the lives of their families. (90)

With these cultural differences between African and European cultures, Holloway asserts that Africana literary works need a vocabulary distinct from that of the Western world.

In referencing Bahlsen’s *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology*, a discussion of the African goddesses had already been provided. However her research specifically addresses an Igbo goddess, which provides a helpful backdrop to the current study and the discussion of the effects of mythology on the lives of African people. Bahlsen refers to this goddess (also known among other names as Uhamiri) as one that “embodies the forces of nature that dominate life and death”; she is locally recognized as “the mother water goddess; and the people express their indebtedness to Uhamiri/Ogbsite for their very existence and continued well-being in multiple ways” (37). The lives of the people in every aspect are merged with this goddess who resides in the lake in Oguta.

Safoura Salami-Boukari’s *African Literature: Gender Discourse, Religious Values, and the African Worldview*, an influential work on the interpretation of African literature, compels a reconstruction of theoretical and ideological approaches that have become the norm. She provides significant historical and cultural background information to aid the reader of African literature to come to a more realistic analysis of the works. In addition to the works of Africana critics presented in this chapter, this study also references the works of Abiola Irele a pre-eminent African scholar and critic of African literature. In the introduction to his work, *The African Imagination: Literature in African and the Black Diaspora*, Irele argues the fact that Africa’s present-day cultural complexities are the result of the ramifications of historical experiences on both the
African continent and in the African diaspora. These experiences cannot be ignored as an integral part of the continuous African imagination.

**Euro-American Feminist and African Feminist Ideologies**

The adoption of the Western perspective for the definition of all women experiences places the African woman’s experience at a disadvantage. The conventional feminist ideology is defined through oppositional relationship with the male, and this is not the thrust of the African feminist thought which defines a woman’s role from the mandate of the spiritual realm mainly attained through the mythological stories of Africa.

While this research is not strictly an oppositional study of African versus European perspectives, some areas of interpretation require an analysis that creates such a binary evaluation. For example, Ania Loomba speaks to this issue when she notes that to European colonists, people of other origins are labeled as “other,” and this “othering” has created binary oppositions between races (91). Binary oppositions almost automatically give superiority to Western values when paired with the “other.” Therefore, using an Africana framework to explain the novels of Africana women is necessary because of colonialism and European enslavement of Africans.

Moreover, the culture of the “other” has been marginalized and mostly made invisible to the mainstream bourgeois literary culture. In *Sex, Class and Culture*, Lillian Robinson argues, “For each of the excluded groups, the extent and nature of its exclusion differs and dictates a different criticism and different cultural alternatives” (26). People of African descent, especially the women, have suffered such exclusions. It is fitting that the criticism of their works should be done through alternative perspectives different from the European canon. Clenora Hudson-Weems, who created the term Africana
Womanism asserts, "The primary goal of Africana women...is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action" (24-50).

European feminism and African feminism evolved from different cultural histories and philosophies. The sacredness of the female protagonists as goddesses presupposes the feminist school of thought. In the broadest sense, feminist criticism is part of an oppositional binary framework in terms of male and female: Its aim is to understand the nature of gender inequality, and it holds a patriarchal or male-dominated society responsible for preventing women from reaching their potential. While this is a reality, it is not the focus of this study. African feminist thought, as defined by Filomina Steady is applicable to this study. In contrast to Western feminist theory, African feminist thought holds the following views about gender roles:

Gender roles are complementary, parallel, asymmetrical, and autonomously linked in the continuity of human life. As such, African feminism recognizes the inherent, multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production, and the distribution of wealth, power, and responsibility for sustaining human life. This feminist perspective is underscored by traditional mythical beliefs and religious practices found in African oral literary traditions and festivals that place women at the center of the social order as custodians of the earth, fire, and water and uphold men as the guardians of women's custodial rights. (Badejo 67-153)

In the African belief system, the male and female sides of every human being, particularly women, are recognized. An empowered woman is not a strange concept in Africa because African feminism thought includes femininity, beauty, power, serenity
and inner harmony on one hand, and on the other hand, it also accepts that women are powerful. In this vein, power and femininity are intertwined rather than antithetical (Badejo 94). Therefore, being strong does not negate a woman’s femininity. The acceptance of this animus makes the African woman a complete person. At this juncture this complete person connects with the male gender:

African femininity complements African masculinity, and defends both with the ferocity of the lioness while simultaneously seeking male defense of both as critical, demonstrable, and mutually obligatory. African feminism is active and essential to the social, political, economic, cultural, and evolutionary aspects of human order. (94)

Africana women are important and are not relegated to the roles of submissiveness or emasculating females—an idea that must be represented correctly in fiction. The context in which their power exists is tied to cultural milieu as defined by African feminist thought. African women who were enslaved in the New World also took this African concept of womanhood with them and used it to structure their lives in their new environment that was different from their homeland.

The archetypal pattern that takes form from the African goddess personality traits in mythical stories is used as a template to create black female characters in fiction. African feminist scholars endorse the spiritual archetypal pattern that Nwapa and Hurston use to represent black women in their novels because African Feminism posits that African women maintain historical power in the economic and spiritual realm in their African societies.
The impact of European and Euro-American colonialism that advances the Eurocentric perspectives as the criteria for judging all human experiences played a role in the reconstruction of the black female in fiction. Generally, the European representation of black female fictional characters was simplistic and homogeneous and generally represented the black female characters as oppressed, submissive and docile or as tongue-lashing, emasculating matriarchs. The response from black female writers is to use archetypal patterns to show black women as strong, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

Nwapa and Hurston achieved the character construction of their female protagonists by using the personality traits of the African goddesses as presented in their mythological stories. The authors wanted a different avenue from which to represent their female characters, and of this archetypal pattern Jung suggests the following:

It consists in my having shown that archetypes are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but that they can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence.... For it means that there are present in every psyche forms which are unconscious but nonetheless active—living dispositions, ideas in the platonic sense, that form and continually influence our thoughts and feelings and actions. (79)

The archetypal images that connect Africana people are rooted in African mythology. However, as victims of slavery, African Americans were not encouraged to connect with Africa as their ancestral home. In the reconstruction of their history in the New World, their African ancestral heritage was omitted and their history was re-constructed as starting from when they arrived as the enslaved in the New World:
Africa as the starting point, as a conscious cultural heritage, as the true home of the exiles, is ignored, and where relationships are needed, where ways of living, thinking or acting are to be interrupted and explained, the term Negro is used instead of African, so that the historical relations are lodged in the individual, and cultural traditions are falsely translated into racial traits. (Jahn 191)

For the Africans on the continent, the European conception of education superseded the African’s: “European schooling has conquered Africa....They (Africans) have learned Shakespeare at school, but many of them were forbidden to speak Yoruba in their colleges.... Since 1955, the talking drum is not on the new curriculum” (190). For both entities, continental Africans and African-Americans, Africa as a concept was presented as a problem.

The Europeanizing of Africana people necessitates what Soyinka calls self-apprehension—some type of self-discovery or reorientation in the African cultures and traditions. This may have motivated Nwapa and Hurston to self-actualize through their works. To achieve this self-actualization, Chinua Achebe articulates the fundamental theme of the African writer in the following words:

That Africans did not hear about culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect.
The writers’ duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. (Achebe 157)

This is to ensure self-identity for the African. However, Achebe also cautions writers not to romanticize the African past:

The credibility of the world [the writer] is attempting to recreate will be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts. We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like any other people’s past ours had its good as well as bad sides. (158)

Nick Aaron Ford, an African American scholar, also outlined the criteria for African American writers known as “A Blueprint for Negro Authors.” This document includes four requirements: 1) mastery of craftsmanship; 2) the continued use of racial themes; 3) use of social propaganda subordinated skillfully to the purpose of art so that it does not insult the average intelligent reader; and 4) the skillful use of symbolism.

Though Nwapa and Hurston did not literally use the set standard for writing about people of African descent as suggested by Achebe and Ford, they did use their fiction to celebrate important aspects of African cultures, specifically in the representation of strong black women. Both authors use the same idea in the creation of their female protagonists although they were not from the same geographical location nor were they from the same literary period. They created their strong, independent female characters not in opposition with the male gender; instead, they used an archetypal pattern of personification of the African female deities.
The Africana Woman

The cultural aspect of the female gender can be further examined within the culture of Africana women. This is a gender culture that does not need to be positioned against the male gender in order to survive. Speaking to this, Holloway adds, “The unifying character of mythology and women’s voices and literature by black women creates its own community” (34). Women do exist on their own within communities doing what women do well—advancing the citizens of their communities with humane actions and economic acumen. Women have always been the disseminators of information particularly to their children and mainly through the oral tradition. Africana women’s literature started long before the written format through the oral tradition. Women of African descent have always being creative storytellers. Their skills for improvising were displayed in the telling and retelling of stories that depicted their environment and their belief system. This was their way of recording history. In many instances, the oral tradition conveys knowledge and reflects the African culture which includes values, customs, and history. Lloyd Brown also writes about this influence:

The contributions of women to African literature have not been limited to the modern period. Women have always played a considerable role as storytellers and performers, in the oral tradition. The tradition always had a significant place for the voice of the woman singing or reciting tales from her own perspective…. (14)

Moreover, even in pre-colonial Africa, women had a voice. They were neither relegated to the periphery of society as docile and submissive beings nor were they dismissed because they were emasculating matriarchs. Their role was understood to be a
central part of the community which pulled everything together. Since they gave birth to
and nurtured both the female and male children, they passed knowledge to them orally
and by example. This was an important part of African compound living. Niara
Sudarkasa in “Female Employment and Family Organization in West Africa” explains
the compound as a metaphor for “female power,” not necessarily in juxtaposition with
“male power”:

In traditional West Africa the compound was usually the unit of political
organization, and decisions within the compound had implications for the
wider political units whether this was a village or a town. Thus wives,
mothers, sisters, or daughters could exert direct political influence over
males, or they themselves could play important roles by virtue of their
position of authority, power or influence in their natal or affinal
compounds. (Badejo 53)

In this woman-centered culture lies the power of women. Women’s strength, wisdom,
and independence are natural phenomena given their role in the community. They do not
wait for men to define them. They define themselves in terms of the collective
unconscious. Women’s strength and wisdom have already been established in the
mythological world: these attributes are at the core of their collective unconscious. This
is the collective unconscious that is manifested in the conscious that sets the standard for
how Nwapa and Hurston define their women. Given this premise, the analysis of the
archetypes, manifested on the personal unconscious and the conscious levels, is explored
through comparable levels of the African religious culture.
The Quest for Self-Identity

The question that propels this study is why did Nwapa and Hurston feel the need to express African perspectives in their literary works even though they were educated under the Eurocentric canon? Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish anthropologist, in his theory characterizes this revival of African traditions as unhealthy nationalism, or a product of psychological retreat in the face of European pressure. To him, this is modern myth-making. On the contrary, this revival of African traditions may actually be the first step into self-actualization (Jahn 13).

Carl Jaspers foresaw extinction for so-called primitive people in the face of the scientific-technical age. He believed that Africans will totally assimilate into the dominant European culture because their assumed deficient technological skills will write them out of the contemporary technologically informed world, so the question of relevance of acknowledgment of Africans in their cultural reality will no longer be necessary. However, based on literary works of writers of the Black Atlantic, Jasper’s theory of extinction is clearly invalid: “The present flood of literature on Africa arises precisely from the disquieting fact that the Africans are not behaving as those planners and prophets who arrogantly dispose of them predicted they would behave” (13). They have a need to self-actualize particularly through works of fiction.

Another factor is the search for identity. According to Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, needs must be satisfied in a particular order: the physiological, the safety, the love and belongingness, the esteem, the cognitive needs and the need for self-actualization. This final need which is at the top of his pyramid of needs speaks to
what may also have motivated the Africana women writers to validate their identities through their own writing.

In order to fully comprehend the style which Nwapa and Hurston adopted, some biographical information will be illuminating. Mineke Schipper, a gender theorist best known for her non-fictional studies on women's literature, contends that the narrator is an agent of the text who can be identical with the real author or a fictional one. She adds that a reader can identify with an author and narrator when they are one and the same through similarities between the author's life-story and that of a character or narrator.

This is the case with Nwapa and Hurston. Their real life experiences are intertwined with their stories. Similarly, the settings of their novels are not imaginary but represent real places where they have lived and have been participant-observer researchers. Both writers struggled with marginalization because of biological association with Africa. Their quests to know more and be accepting of their heritage, which is labeled the "other," in contrast with the dominant Western culture, started from the personal unconscious. Secondly, Nwapa, as the first African female writer of fiction published her work as precedence for creating a female character in the image of an African goddess. Hurston also wrote at a time in African American literary history when many female writers of fiction did not precede her and those who created their canon were European.

For both writers, in order to create strong and independent female characters the strategy became one that is centered in African religious culture. Their study of the traits of African goddesses provided an avenue for their creation of female protagonists who are not stereotypical and oppositional to the male gender. The African feminist concept
encapsulates this idea in what African anthropologist Filomena Steady defines as humanistic feminism (3-24). Unlike the Western feminist theory, humanistic feminism is a theory that views “gender roles as complementary, parallel, asymmetrical, and autonomously linked in the continuity of human life” (“African Feminism” 10).

The works of the Africana women in this study embrace the goddess archetype as interpreted through the mythological experiences of the African goddesses chosen. The positive and negative personalities of these goddesses serve as a template for creating female protagonists that exhibit these traits. They did not want their characters defined by societal structures that marginalize women through constant oppositional relationships with men. Marie Umeh like the Nwapa and Hurston agree that women of African descent can be presented differently from their stereotypical roles in fiction, “The theme of the empowered woman who combines male aggressiveness in enterprise with her female nature, which is evident in the cult, shows amply that women can rise to lofty heights if they are given the opportunity” (179). The personality traits that Hurston and Nwapa use to present their protagonists are strength, wisdom, and independence. In arriving at self after the confirmation of their goddess personalities, the protagonists confront their shadow, reconcile their “masculine” with their “feminine” sides and, as a result, the true self emerges.

Nwapa and Hurston, in their creation of their female protagonists, Efuru and Janie respectively, use archetypal patterns with African cultural attachments. Both authors, as persons of the letter, were aware that the idea of African spirituality derived from myths does not always appeal to many Western literary circles. However, their connecting the spiritual realm to concrete symbols in the physical, as recognizable personality traits,
makes their ideas more realistic. In other words, both writers use African cultural images in their personal unconscious to define their protagonists while still utilizing the universal goddess archetype. The monomyth represented by Campbell’s hero’s journey is the prototype for the self-actualizing journeys of Efuru and Janie. Both protagonists go through many phases in the course of their “journey”. The different experiences that they encounter dictate the various characteristics that emerge in both protagonists. Their life journeys start in the physical world and progress to another realm in their subconscious. Finally, they emerge as victors.

Summary

This chapter builds the case for the use of archetypal criticism as a literary device for interpreting black fictional works. The works of authors that support archetypal criticism in literature are enumerated and examined. Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious leads to research that spans universal archetypes, mythology, and archetypal images that fit the African culture. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is the avenue from which to connect with the unlearned knowledge residing within all human beings, sometimes referred to as the instinct within.

The universal archetype discussed in this study is the mother archetype that includes the goddesses. Others influenced by Jung are Joseph Campbell and Carol Pearson. Campbell developed the hero’s journey based on three stages: departure, initiation and return. This is the framework that Nwapa and Hurston use to advance the self-discovery journeys of their female protagonists. Pearson developed the six archetypes: the innocent, orphan, wanderer, warrior, altruist, and magician, without
giving them cultural attachments. She posits that attachment to cultures waters down the universal effects of archetypes.

This study argues that the use of modified archetypes enriches the universality of archetypes. Once archetypes are projected from the collective unconscious to the conscious level, they become influenced by culture. This is true for the African goddesses whose features, personalities, and functions are tailored to fit the African mythical stories. The use of mythological stories in the development of archetypes sheds light on the culture that informs the modified archetypes, such as Uhamiri and Oya. The in-depth analysis of the personified goddesses is advanced by African feminist ideology which defines the role of male and female as complementary not oppositional as is frequently assumed in the Euro-American feminist tradition.
CHAPTER THREE

EFURU: THE FIGURATIVE MOTHER ARCHETYPE

In an interview discussing Efuru, the female protagonist of her first novel that bears the same title, Flora Nwapa comments: “When I do write about women in Nigeria, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are women who are very, very positive in their thinking, who are very, very independent, and very, very industrious. (From an interview with Marie Umeh, 1995). The author characterizes Efuru as a strong, assertive, resilient, independent, decision-making woman who is not predictably entrenched in a hostile gender dichotomy. Based on the Jungian figurative mother archetype, Efuru’s personality is contrary to the Eurocentric representation of African women as docile, oppressed, and submissive.

The goddess Uhamiri (Ogbufide) is a symbol of benevolence and creativity. She is strong, wise, independent, and deeply involved in the lives of the people in Oguta. Uhamiri is also beautiful and has long dreadlocks. Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, who has researched this goddess since 1978, confirms Uhamiri’s importance to the community: “the concept of the ‘mother water’ goddess, mammywater, is more than a divinity. She embodies and manifests important aspects of womanhood in pre-colonial Igbo culture and society” (164). Nwapa aligns Efuru’s character with Uhamiri through a self-discovery journey. The writer uses physical attributes and personality traits of Uhamiri to characterize Efuru.
These physical attributes denote a spiritual dimension to the character’s identity; further, they are outward representations of the goddess’s ability to dispense fertility and magic to her worshippers and to draw those she wishes to initiate into her rarefied world. Through Uhamiri’s strong personality traits, Nwapa portrays a female figure vastly different from the stereotypical African women often depicted in fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adiche.

**Biographical Information**

Some biographical information about the author is necessary to understand why she chose an African goddess as a prototype of the protagonist of her novel. Nwapa was born in 1931 in Oguta, a village in eastern Nigeria. Like her parents, Nwapa was educated in the British system—one that is dominated by a Eurocentric perspective. After graduating from Archdeacon Crowther’s Memorial Girl’s School, she went on to earn a baccalaureate degree from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1957. Nwapa continued her studies in England, earning in 1958 a degree in education from the University of Edinburgh.

She served as visiting professor and lecturer at numerous colleges in the U.S. and Nigeria. In addition, she acted as a Woman Education Officer in Calabar (Nigeria) and taught English and Geography at Queen’s School in Enugu. Nwapa was Assistant Registrar (Public Relations) at the University of Lagos. She was also appointed a member of the East Central State Executive Council and was the Commissioner for Lands, Survey and Urban Development. Nwapa was married to Chief Gogo Nwakuche, a business man; and they had three children. She was a first wife in a polygamous marriage in which there were two other co-wives.
Efuru is the first novel published by a Nigerian woman, and Nwapa became black Africa’s first internationally published female novelist in the English language, earning her a respectable position in modern African literature. At the time of her death, Nwapa had completed The Lake Goddess, her final novel, and entrusted the manuscript to the Jamaican, Chester Mills. This work focused on the lake goddess Uhamiri (Mami-Wata), the eternal spring and mythical inspirer of Nwapa's fiction. Some other works to her credit are Idu (1970), Never Again (1975), One is Enough (1981), and Women are Different (1986).

Nwapa was never concerned with philosophical discussions of gender issues. She knew that women’s role in Africa deserves respect: “The women’s role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race…. In my work, I try to project a more balanced image of African womanhood…. Women have started to redefine themselves; they have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented” (Nwapa 17). Idu and Efuru, her first two novels, have Uhamiri, the goddess of Oguta Lake, as a supernatural agent, directing the affairs of human beings. In her article, titled “Women and Creative Writing in Africa,” Nwapa states, “In my two heroines, Efuru and Idu, I was inspired by the women around me when I was growing up. They were solid and superior women who held their own in society. They were not only wives and mothers, but successful traders who took care of their children and their husbands as well” (Olaniyan 28).

Though she wrote about women and their lives, in an interview with Marie Umeh in 1993, Nwapa refused to be called a feminist; she said, "I don't even accept that I'm a
feminist. I accept that I'm an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows. I try to project the image of women positively" (Umeh 27).

Initially, Nwapa was doubtful of her own culture and its beliefs—primarily because of the colonial influences that shaped her early educational experiences. Despite her educational achievements, the question “Who am I” dominated her consciousness. To answer that question, she first had to identify and understand her shadow. As Jung explains, “The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one’s shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is” (21). Her shadow was her dislike of how the British and their Christian spirituality took over her African identity. In time, because she was not static in where her formal Western education led her, she began to understand her culture.

Nwapa became increasingly critical of foreign intrusions, especially the detrimental impact of Christianity on African spirituality, African identity, and African women. Nwapa personally struggled with the mixed blessings of Christianity and westernization in Igbo society, positioned as she was culturally as a native of Ugwuta and socially within Ugwuta’s and Nigeria’s upper class and Christian elite (78). Acknowledging the negative influence of colonialism in her life helped Nwapa come to terms with her shadow. According to the displacement theory of Edward Said, a literary theorist and cultural critic, Nwapa suffered two displacements, cultural and linguistic, the same that other Africans suffered who were educated under the British system. Because she was only taught in English, her African culture was foreign to her total British educational process.
As a protest to this cultural invasion, Nwapa in her “grown up” years observed the overt hybrid culture in Nigeria that blended Christianity with African religious culture. In this accepted syncretic culture of Nigerians, she did not see a conflict between two religious ideologies. For example, in her village Oguta there was no conflict in churchgoers also believing in the goddess, Uhamiri. Consequently, she confronted her shadow and reconciled her “masculine” and “feminine” qualities in order to self-actualize. Her self-actualization is portrayed in her first two novels where she explicitly creates her main female characters using the goddess, Uhamiri as the prototype:

Nwapa builds a structure of ideas adequate for interpreting female experience. She generates a new tradition in which women are the center of focus, and draws largely from the mythic reservoir to explore every aspect of female experience. *Efuru* and *Idu* embody references to mythic symbols and themes and, in this way, make Nwapa’s earliest novels relevant to her time. (Umeh 112)

The new tradition that Nwapa generates uses nature to elevate women to their primordial position. Therefore, even though her Western formal education relegates nature to the background and associates its acknowledgement with backwardness, this is not the case with Nwapa:

Consequently Nwapa takes recourse to myth to help her reaffirm the unity of women with nature…. Nature is limitless while societal conventions make the woman a limited being. Thus the myths in *Efuru* and *Idu* help Nwapa to conceptualize authentic experiences of women which, before the
appearance of her works, had been given a superficial and stereotypical
treatment by male writers. (113)

Nwapa’s use of myth in fiction is as ancient as time. The unlearned knowledge of
women stored in their subconscious becomes visible through the mythological.
Therefore, it was natural for her to draw from the spiritual realm to anchor what she
wishes to portray in the physical world. Thus, her work seems to draw on Jungian theory
of the collective unconscious:

This inherited knowledge is the residue of repeated kinds of experiences
in the lives of our ancestors, and are buried deep in man’s psyche, beneath
the suppressed memories belonging to the individual. The mythic elements
in Nwapa’s novels often seem impossible in real life. This agrees with
Cassrier’s view that myth is “only real in the sense of its symbolic value to
a given society and can only be interpreted allegorically.” (113)

Nwapa uses myths to deliver a message about the worth of women in multi-faceted form.
Since humans create the life of today that becomes myths tomorrow, humans send back
to themselves that which becomes the archetypes. This is what German-American
psychologist Eric Fromm refers to as “a message from ourselves to ourselves, a secret
language which enables us to treat inner as outer” (249).

The treatment of inner strength surfacing in the outward is the essence of
Nwapa’s message about African women in her use of the goddess archetype. Nwapa
uses the strong personality of women in African mythological stories to challenge
stereotypical images of African women in fiction. In many fictional works, these women
are usually represented in negative terms or in weaker positions that place them in
opposition to men in the society. While her message is explicit to some readers, there are others who cannot get the message because they are unfamiliar with her constructed cultural symbols and images; or they are so detached from nature that symbols and images appear unrealistic or even preposterous.

Efuru, Nwapa's protagonist, is elevated to a plane higher than that of the human being when she is chosen to be a worshipper of Uhamiri, the goddess of the lake. In this story, Nwapa explicitly presents her character as a mirror image of Uhamiri alongside a strong female character, Ajanupu. As an author, Nwapa prefers to write stories that affirm women. She portrays women as strong with their "inherent vitality, independence of views, courage, self-confidence, and of course their desire for gain and high social status" (qtd. in Umeh 17). Because several male writers have not presented Nigerian women in this positive light, Nwapa believes that women's history must be recreated in fiction. In the paper she read at a conference in the U. S. in 1984 she says:

The Nigerian male writers fail to elevate women to their rightful plane. They overlook the safeguards with which custom surround her: the weight of feminine opinion, the independence of her economic position, the power she wields by the mere fact that she holds the pestle and the cooking pots. They fail to see all these things because they are men and are influenced by the colonial administration's Victorian-type prejudices against women. (14)

Unlike her male counterparts, Nwapa preferred to portray women from perception of strength, and also from a woman's point of view. She embeds into her fiction the customs that approve of women's leadership roles. For example, she sees the role of the
woman as the provider of the meal for the family, even if she just cooks it, to be a leadership position. All persons in the community have to eat for sustenance; therefore, the provider of the meal occupies an important position which she can use to her advantage. This is what leaders do. Nwapa discovered that Uhamiri, as a goddess, has dominion over a spectrum of roles in which women can excel as leaders, and she explores these different options in her works. Uhamiri, the goddess which Efuru, the main character in *Efuru*, mirrors, is often regarded as Nwapa's own alter ego. Marie Umeh says:

Nwapa's theory of female existence and situation in her early fiction is based on the practical experience of her life in Ugwuta as she grew up. The mystical influence of the "beautiful blue Ugwuta lake" which the community depended upon for food, transportation, and sustenance was decisive in Nwapa's mythopoeia when she began to create her women-centered fiction. Her mythic imagination derives its force from the spiritual being that controls this body of water—Uhamiri. (54)

Nwapa revealed that if she had written a sequel to *Efuru*, she would have titled it, *Efuru in Her Glory*. In addition to the portrayal of the strong aspects of women, Nwapa's work often focuses mainly on the positive effects of African values on the lives of African women. She believed that African women's cultural reality, such as those pertaining to their spiritual belief system, should be used to judge their worth to their community. Even though she is from a Christian household, Nwapa has come to understand the cosmology of her people, and she is able to make the choice to pattern Efuru's character after the Igbo deity. The shifting personalities of the deity are part of
the appeal; she is evasive, flexible, and multidimensional (Umeh 40). So, Nwapa decides that the characteristics of Uhamiri would best inform her female protagonist, Efuru. She saw women as humans who exist first as independent beings and secondly, as humans who complement one another and can also be in interchangeable roles.

Therefore, Nwapa preferred not to juxtapose her female characters with men. In depicting strong female voices, Nwapa demonstrates the interchangeable role of men and women in the Igbo society. In Efuru, she presents a male storyteller rather than the usually accepted female storytellers of the community. This interchangeable role is explained in Ifi Amadiume’s trailblazing book, Male Daughters, Female Husbands. In this book, Amadiume focuses on the flexibility of social roles, which were not associated with gender (15). In this regard, unlike the English language, Igbo language has no distinctive gender subject pronoun; this grammatical feature allows for fewer language distinctions between the sexes in Igbo language (89). In this system, women can fill male roles. Thus, daughters could assume male roles and become sons or husbands as exemplified in Buchi Emecheta’s Joys of Motherhood. Ona’s father in the story has no son. The female protagonist becomes the designated daughter to have a son or sons for her father through her union with a man: “Ona grew up to fill her father’s expectation. He maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was not going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father’s name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made” (12).

In African cultural philosophy and cosmology, the woman is regarded as one with the inner strength to sustain her family. This theory is based on the fact that the human race comes through the womb of women. In an interview with journalist Amma Ogan,
Nwapa said Oguta women were taught to be self-sufficient. However, with colonization, Christianity, and the Western concept of marriage, the women were reeducated to be dependent on their husbands. But the majority of the women still emulate Uhamiri, the strong goddess of the lake.

After sifting through her “colonial mentality” and her African traditions, Nwapa made informed decisions about what best fulfills her role as a woman. She became a voice for women through her fiction. She came to terms with her “animus,” the archetypal masculine symbolism within a woman’s consciousness; and hence she wrote *Efuru* and later started a publishing company, Tata Press. Furthermore, she accepted the goddess Uhamiri, a cultural icon that had been tucked away in her personal unconscious as she went through her Westernized educational process. Her acceptance of the goddess is an acceptance of self. What makes Uhamiri qualify as a prototype for the creation of her female protagonist is contingent on her mythical story.

The mythological beginnings of this goddess is said to be from the moon. The goddess descended into the lake in Oguta and has resided there since. Her physical appearance is that of a mermaid, known as Mami-Wata—a mermaid who is beautiful and has long hair. Uhamiri has long dreadlocks that signify her spiritual power. This spiritual power is shown through her ability to dispense fertility and feminine magic. Uhamiri brings health and well-being to her followers but this often comes with a price. To women who seek her, she brings beauty and wealth, but few or no children. This goddess also has a dark side which can be destructive when provoked. The personality traits contained in this archetype are portrayed in a cultural context on both the personal unconscious and the conscious levels: “the archetype is essentially an unconscious
content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (Hull 5).

The goddess’s strength is tempered with vulnerability, yet her focused essence helps her to achieve her goals. Her wisdom builds her confidence and she attains independence through a balance of her inner self. In Umeh’s critical analysis, she quotes the exact words of Onyemuru Uzonwanne, a local ferry woman from Oguta, who ferries people across the lake where Uhamiri resides, and she refers to her with one of her other names, Iyi:

Iyi comes from the moon. Iyi has followers. Iyi killed a person’s son and used ram to pay back. Anyone who wants to go well on his way must offer a ram to her. If anyone drowns, you must give her a ram. Ogbuide has twisted hair; she has a big head. Iyi is good. The Woman King is fine. You cannot see her from the outside. She helps her group very well. She helps and feeds the poor. When a poor person is hungry and comes to the waterside, she will find food to eat for that person. (78)

Again, it is reiterated by the woman from Oguta that Uhamiri is an essential part of the lives of the people in Oguta. Nwapa brings Uhamiri from the spiritual realm to the physical realm and personifies her through Efuru as a woman who has strength coupled with weaknesses that ultimately humanize her as she sets out on her journey of self-actualization.

Cultural Setting

The story is set in a rural community, Oguta, an Igbo village in post-colonial Nigeria in the 1960s. The setting for this story is one that actually exists. This is a place
that Nwapa knows, having firsthand knowledge of the reality of the dual society that colonialism forced on Nigeria, which allows her to skillfully weave that knowledge into the fabric of the story among the static and evolving indigenous traditions. In explaining his theory of the collective unconscious, Jung alludes to the connection of the so-called primitive man to nature: “Primitive man impresses us so strongly with his subjectivity that we should really have guessed long ago that myths refer to something psychic” (Hull 6-7). This inclusion of nature in the African religious culture makes the acceptance of the merging of the mythological and physical world possible. Nwapa establishes the connection of this place with nature and religion. Therefore, the importance of water, the lake as the habitat of Uhamiri, becomes the norm rather than the exception. Uhamiri descended from the moon into the lake in the village and stays in the subconscious:

Water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious. The lake in the valley is the unconscious, which lies, as it were, underneath consciousness, so that it is often referred to as the “subconscious,” usually with the pejorative connotation of an inferior consciousness. Water is the “valley spirit,” the water dragon of Tao, whose nature resembles water – a yang embraced in the yin. (18)

First, Uhamiri’s occupying a body of water is symbolic. Water is an important element in this story because the divine union that resides in the collective unconscious is the yang and yin symbolized with water. Yin and yang in Chinese philosophy are complementary forces seen and unseen that intermingle to form a whole. In turn, this water as part of the unconscious is the merging of the masculine with the feminine sides of each human, thereby creating a divine union in its complete state. This divine union
can be symbolized in the conscious state as the unity of a body of water operating as one entity even when it has many components. Within herself as a goddess, Uhamiri has divine union. It is this spiritual balance that her worshipper, such as her mirror image Efuru, comes to attain in the unconscious: “Psychologically, therefore, water means spirit that has become unconscious. The dream of the theologian is quite right in telling him that down by the water he could experience the working of the living spirit like a miracle of healing in the pool of Bethesda” (18-19). Water heals and settles the conflicting struggle within the human being. Therefore, water is essential, and to the people of Oguta familiar with prophecy, and they often attach divination to water worship, and many of their best-known and reputed diviners are priests and priestesses of the water deities (Jell-Bahlsen 265).

As a continuation of this culturally modified collective unconscious, the author introduces the religious belief of Oguta through Efuru’s need for a child. When initially Efuru does not have a child after two years of marriage, she goes to her father to express her worry. He immediately takes her to a dibia, a medicine man, who tells her after divination that she must make a sacrifice to her ancestors. The idea of sacrifice to the ancestors connects the living to their departed loved ones. This is part of the African religious belief that merges the physical world with the spiritual world that Jung refers to as esoteric knowledge:

All esoteric teachings seek to apprehend the unseen happenings in the psyche, and all claim supreme authority for themselves. What is true of primitive lore is true in even higher degree of the ruling world religions. They contain a revealed knowledge that was originally hidden, and they
set forth the secrets of the soul in glorious images. Their temples and their sacred writings proclaim in image and word the doctrine hallowed from old, making it accessible to every believing heart, every sensitive vision, every farthest range of thought. (7)

In Oguta, the spiritual world meets with the physical world through divination. Furthermore, in this setting, all unlearned knowledge seems universal, hence Nwapa connects the African traditional religion to Christianity through one of her male characters, showing the syncretic nature that is also present in Oguta.

Gilbert, Efuru’s second husband, shows his syncretic belief when he is nearly robbed in Onicha, and he says, “Immediately I returned, I told my mother and she sacrificed to our ancestors” (112). This exchange between Efuru and Gilbert ensues:

“How is that, you go to church?”

“What about that? I shall give the pastor some money to thank God for it.”

“I see. I can never understand you Churchgoers” (112).

Even though Gilbert is a professed Christian, deep down his belief system is African. He is accepting of the practice of honoring ancestors by thanking his ancestors for protecting him and hence the failed robbery attempt. Nwapa uses the Christian ideology here to create binary thinking where difference is defined in oppositional terms. Gilbert, however, refuses to see it this way. To him, both religious beliefs are necessary.

Language, in the form of oral tradition, the indigenous Igbo language and Africanized English, is another vehicle Nwapa uses to construct her setting. Her novel becomes the “talking book” that Henry Gates identifies in his theory on Africana literature (Gates 5). From a society where the art of the spoken language is powerful,
Nwapa brings this into the sense of place through articulation, mainly by the women:

"Thus all the activities of men, and all the movement in nature rest on the word, on the productive power of the word, which is water and heat and seed and nommo, that is life force itself" (Jahn 126). The word once uttered becomes a powerful force. In this tale about womanhood, strength is also exuded through the spoken word. Nwapa presents Efuru’s aunty-in-law, Ajanupu, for this purpose. Nwapa uses this woman to illustrate the role that a strong African woman plays in her community; she is apt in the art of verbal language and, in many cases, becomes Efuru’s mouthpiece.

In one of many instances, Ajanupu’s strength of character and “mouth” are displayed. When she goes to collect money owed to Efuru, she tells the debtor, “You are talking rubbish.... I have heard these stories before. You go to the room and bring me five pounds. That’s all I want. I won’t go until you have given me that amount. I am not leaving your house if you give me four pounds, nineteen shillings, eleven pence and half-penny. Do you hear?” (Nwapa 47). Ajanupu’s “sharp tongue” is a mark of outspokenness, and she uses this to protect Efuru on many occasions. When a woman sympathizer comes to see Efuru after the death of her child, Ogonim, and her consoling language decorum does not please Ajanupu, she shouts at her, “That will do, I say. What nonsense, Nwasobi, if you don’t know how to sympathize with a woman whose only child has died, say you are sorry and leave her in peace, and don’t stay there enumerating all her misfortunes in a tone that suggests that you enjoy misfortunes” (73).

In this instance, Ajanupu’s spoken word is direct and addresses the problem that must be solved. She does not use a proverb, the African protocol that indirectly transmits the intended message. Further, as Nwapa continues to solidify the function of the power
of the tongue in the novel, after Efuru decides to marry Gilbert, Ajanupu tells him, on behalf of Efuru, that his mother is a difficult woman, so he must protect his wife Efuru from her as they all reside in the house. When later in the marriage Gilbert accuses Efuru of committing adultery to cover up his wayward behavior, it is Ajanupu who also fights for her and curses him.

Another example of how Nwapa includes the oral tradition in her narrative structure is through storytelling within the story, and beginning stories with a sentence such as, “It was a full moon” (105). In the African cultural setting, that sentence is full of expectation; if it is a moonlit night, that means there will be storytelling. Efuru sends Ogea to go and ask the storyteller Eneka to come and tell stories. One woman comments, “He tells his stories beautifully. It is not only the story that is so absorbing, but the way he tells it. And he has such a beautiful voice too” (105).

The Igbo names of her characters continually create an authentic setting throughout the story. From her main character, Efuru, to Adizua, Ossai, and Ajanupu, Nwapa uses Igbo names. Nwapa goes further to sprinkle the Igbo language itself into the mix through expressions like the proverb, “Di bum ma ogri” (97) which means marriage is a necessary evil for women. This expression suggests that women only marry because they have to. Apart from language authentication, this is a hint that marriage is not always the answer, as witnessed in the case of Efuru.

Nwapa sometimes gives a verbatim translation of characters’ discussions from the Igbo language to the English language: this is referred to as Africanized English. To Ajanupu’s question, “By the way is she a good daughter-in-law? Her sister’s answer, “You cannot see two like her” is a direct translation from the Igbo language. Other
expressions such as "Let day break" and "Is this your eye" are also direct translations in the arrangement of the syntax. Further, with the interjection of some Igbo words such as "Ewo-o-o," throughout the story, the reader is made aware that in reality these characters are really speaking through their culture’s linguistic paradigm.

This setting, with all the scenarios mentioned above, creates the authentic sense of place where Efuru the female protagonist thrives with Uhamiri. The personification of Uhamiri as Efuru is explicitly portrayed through alignment of physical attributes with personality traits that embody decisiveness, wisdom, and independence with both good and dark sides as in the figurative mother archetype of Jung. Jung describes the goddess as the embodiment of many qualities: maternal, magic, wisdom, instinct, growth, rebirth, secret, and seduction all condensed into strength, wisdom and independence (82). Efuru shifts from one personality to another but her goodness is constant. Therefore, the dark side that must be realized is manifest through Ajanupu.

Major Themes and Comparative Analysis

Efuru is a beautiful, intelligent, independent-thinking young woman who defies local custom when she marries Adizua, a man who could not afford to pay her dowry at the onset of the marriage. She suffers the loss of a child and the failure of two marriages before she begins having dreams about the goddess of the lake, Uhamiri. At the end, she becomes a worshipper of this lake goddess, who is a mirror image of her. Efuru is blessed with beauty and wealth, and the story ends at the threshold of her self-actualization. However, in the course of the story, this coming actualization that is assumed is already witnessed through the person of Ajanupu, the independent, outspoken older woman of wisdom, who is also a character in the story.
Nwapa uses Joseph Campbell’s template of the hero’s journey as a prototype of the departure, initiation and return plot of the story. Secondly, Efuru’s beauty, long hair and the gentle side of her personality are shown to be identical to Uhamiri’s. However, to portray the tough side of Efuru, Nwapa partners Efuru’s character with that of Ajanupu who is a symbol of what she is intending to accomplish in Efuru, “the grown woman.” The combination of these two characters produces the true picture of Uhamiri. In creating this protagonist, the author’s personal unconscious, which is her repressed memories of African religious culture, is revealed.

A comparative study of Efuru and Ajanupu shows the former as the gentler part of two personalities and the latter projects the forceful part. When merged into one, both become a perfect goddess archetype. Nwapa uses physical beauty to attach Efuru to Uhamiri. She is presented as the mirror image of Uhamiri from her outward physical appearance to her personality; she is beautiful with a long hair, and she has a good personality. When people wonder why Adizua always goes home from the farm, the response is that he married a very beautiful woman.

Others pay special attention to Efuru because of her looks. The woman who comes to perform her circumcision tells her, “You are beautiful, my daughter. I will be gentle with you” (Nwapa13). After the circumcision, again she is showered with gifts in the marketplace, “You are very beautiful my daughter, take this” (18). People acknowledge her beauty the same way they do Uhamiri at the lake and her shrine. Every time the villagers cross the lake either to go fishing or to go to Uhamiri’s shrine, they adorn her with praises for her beauty.
When Nwosu and the fisherman return from fishing, Nwosu says in praise of the goddess, “Uhamiri, the most beautiful of women, your children have arrived safely, we are grateful to you” (200), and other men at her shrine say to her, “We have returned, the great woman of the lake; the most beautiful of women; the kindest of women; your children have returned safely” (202). However, Uhamiri’s physical attributes are not just for adornment, they serve a purpose. Her beauty draws people to her, and her hair is symbolic of fertility and magic. Fertility in this case is not just in reference to child-bearing but also fruitfulness in other areas. Igbo women of Oguta refer to Uhamiri as Nwanyiishiajakaja, woman of thick hair. Bell-Bahlsen explains:

*Uhammiri/Ogbuide* is often described as “the embodiment of beauty,” the epitome of fertile giving. Her hair is described as long, thick, and at times twisted. Her beauty is awful, a “killer beauty,” who kills with excess and may take the life of those who refuse to follow her. The goddess’s long hair is synonymous with fertility and the ability to grant, bear, or beget children. Yet, it has twists. Dreadlocks signal danger, crisis, and temporary derangement, but also signal revolt, a young woman’s unconstrained beauty, power, and potential refusal to lead an ordinary life. *Dada* means connectedness to the spirit, the esoteric, and its associated dangers and healing forces. (239)

Therefore, Efuru is revered for her beauty, and throughout the story there is reference to both her beauty and long hair. She recognizes that her hair and beauty are her endearing physical assets, for her and, perhaps for other women. Consequently, when she suspects there is another woman in her husband’s life, she wonders if the woman possesses
physical attributes similar to hers: "Perhaps she is very beautiful and has long hair like mine" (Nwapa 54).

In the personification process, Nwapa aligns the strong decisive persona of Uhamiri with that of Efuru. Efuru's strength reveals itself in the decisive manner in which she makes the decision to marry Adizua before her dowry is paid; and she works out a deal on how and when her father will be paid. At the beginning of Efuru's grown-up life, she biologically and emotionally craves an attachment to someone. This craving can be attributed to an unlearned knowledge existing in the collective unconscious. Nwapa uses this natural process to initiate the call for Efuru to set out on her journey into the world.

The world is represented by her marriage. She leaves her natal home and ventures into the world when she makes the decision to marry Adizua, her first husband. Although Adizua cannot pay her dowry, she discards this important aspect of Igbo tradition and moves in with him. This behavior characterizes Efuru as a non-conformist. In her action, she places herself above the conventions of her society even though the dowry is one mechanism that tradition puts in place to test the economic capacity of the prospective husband to maintain a wife as well as the husband's respect for her family by overcoming the challenges placed before him. In making the decision to marry him, Efuru may not have discerned a profound weakness in her husband's character—that is, his tendency to take the easy way out. This is established through his reply to her question, "But about the dowry?" (1). He answers, "You will come to me on Nkwo day. Every place will be quiet that day being market day. Take a few clothes with you and
come to me. We shall talk about the dowry after” (1). Therefore, Efuru did not marry him for his chivalry, but for his love and companionship.

Others wonder how a, beautiful and intelligent woman like Efuru ends up marrying a man they refer to as an “imbecile” (6). At the onset of the relationship, Efuru ignores Adizua’s personality flaws, but her capacity to focus is the saving grace that balances her bad judgment in choosing a mate she thought would complete her. In keeping with Uhamiri, Efuru imitates a decision-making goddess “whose rules determine the norms of daily life” (Bell-Bahlsen 138), and Efuru makes a decision to marry and carry on with her life. This is an important first step in her journey to self-actualization.

In her usual single-mindedness, Efuru makes another decision not to go to the farm with her husband: “If you like,” she said to her husband, “go to the farm. I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade” (10). She recognizes early that the marketplace, not the farm, is where she can attain economic success. This innate knowledge is in alignment with her psychological attachment with Uhamiri who as a goddess presides over the affairs of women in the marketplace and her followers and those she decides to bless in the marketplace. Efuru tries to include Adizua in this circle of financial blessing when she makes the decision for him to leave farming: “I would like you to leave the farm. But you have to wait until the harvest and after that you can come to town. Both of us can trade together” (20). After Adizua leaves her, Ossai, her mother-in-law, tells her to be patient. She says she went through the same predicament with Adizua’s father, and that she is proud that she stayed true to a husband who left her. Nwapa uses this scene between these two women to give the reader an access into the inner thoughts of Efuru. The character’s thought process shows that she is not always in
touch with her collective unconscious. The goddess qualities in her silently revolt against her mother-in-law’s self-sacrificing response to her marital problem that is expected of Igbo women. This is when Efuru begins to define herself, and her transformation starts. She immediately decides that unnecessary self-sacrifice is not the way she wants to show her strength by wasting away on an irresponsible husband. Since such martyrdom does not appeal to her, she says to herself, “Perhaps self-imposed suffering appeals to her. It does not appeal to me. I know I am capable of suffering for greater things. But to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua, is to debase suffering. My own suffering will be noble” (61-62).

It is clear that her mother-in-law chose to solve her marital problem through self-sacrifice because that is what society expected of her; however, Efuru is decisive about where she would rather invest her strength. Further, she remembers her physical beauty and her confidence resurfaces, so she says to herself, “This is done to women who cannot stand by themselves.... My face is not burnt; I am still a beautiful woman” (64). The remembrance of her physical beauty, rather than being only a boost to her ego is really a reaffirmation of who she is as the goddess Uhamiri. She now realizes that marrying the worthless Adizua, can be explained as “leaping before looking,” the flipside of constructive reasoning, which most of the time is allocated to the actions of a child. On the other hand, this is the opportunity she needs to first set out on her journey, and second be initiated into the world through the challenges she faces away from the cocoon of her father’s house.

The divine union Efuru envisions when she marries Adizua does not materialize. Even though this marriage proves to be an error in judgment, it provides the opportunity
for her to evolve. Jung says, “The eternal child” in man is an indescribable experience, an incongruity, a handicap, and a divine prerogative; an imponderable that determines the ultimate worth or worthlessness of a personality” (179). This is Efuru’s first introspective analysis of her life as Adizua’s wife. Efuru’s ability to evolve displays her strength. She makes the choice to leave her marriage at the appropriate time that she sets for herself, thus informing her mother-in-law about her decision: “I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua, you can bear witness that I have tried my best. I am still young and would wish to marry again” (88). Her statement to her mother-in-law further demonstrates her continuing desire to seek a divine union to another man through marriage, even as her first marriage crumbles right before her eyes.

Efuru then goes on to marry Gilbert, her second husband. However, while he is educated, he fairs no better than her first husband. Again, as in her first marriage, both Efuru and Gilbert are happy for a while, and then Gilbert, like Adizua leaves her. Margaret Laurence, the essayist, novelist and author of Long Drums and Canon, may be right when she points out that Efuru’s goodness to both men may be what scares them away (187). The radiance of her inner spiritual being “blinds” these men. She is not a whining, helpless person who wants to lean perpetually on others. Her kindness seems to “kill” her relationship with men. This may be because her kindness is not a reciprocal act to the action of the men; it just exists in her as a person. Similar to Efuru, Uhamiri is also married twice. However, unlike Efuru, Uhamiri remains married to the two water gods, Urashi and Njaba. Through this act of marriage to two men, Uhamiri as a goddess defies tradition that assigns only one husband at a time to women, while men can marry multiple women at the same time.
Therefore, the contrast between Efuru the human and Uhamiri the goddess is drawn through the structure of marriage. It could be as a lake goddess, Uhamiri is a supernatural being who dwells in extremes that ordinary women may not easily attain. On the other hand, it could be that in the humanized form, Uhamiri does not want to be married because she is already married to two gods in the spiritual world. Whatever the case, Nwapa uses this difference in the marital status of Efuru and Uhamiri’s to humanize the former and give her the opportunity to evolve. So, Efuru’s decisive personality that gets her into two disastrous marriages also rescues her. Since her love and economic capabilities do not endear her to her two husbands, she picks up the pieces and forges ahead. From the African feminist perspective, Efuru is a woman who is fulfilling her part of the bargain, trying to complement her husband, but her role does not yield any reciprocal dividends. However, as a goddess this is the path her spiritual journey must take in order for her to attain divine union and be spiritualized. Her relationship with men, especially through marriage, is not important to her spiritualization; if the relation is at all necessary, it is used as a means to an end.

The marriages furnish the story with varied challenges for Efuru to face in order to grow as a person in her initiation into the world. Nwapa cleverly uses Efuru’s failed marriages and the death of her only child to create a path for her protagonist to be independently female outside of the traditional roles of wife and mother. This is not to say that she is not feminine, but that her natural cravings to love a man and nurture a child are not her path to womanhood. It may have been instinctive for Efuru to want to be a wife and a mother, because her subconscious furnished her with that information at a specific time in her life, but it can be argued that in that same collective unconscious that
informed her of her biological needs, there are other options from which to choose. However, she makes the choice of marriage and motherhood which replicates those other choices made by women that surround her.

The author at first allows Efuru these two “normal” choices to exist for her to function as a normal woman; then she changes the development of Efuru’s life journey to fashion for her a unique life. Her husbands, unknowingly to her, are hindrances to a destiny she will later attain, and, as such, after their roles to provide her with challenges are fulfilled, they are no longer needed. Secondly, her role as a mother is terminated when she loses her only child. After Efuru is severed from traditional roles one by one, she is now viewed through other lenses. Her female authority as a mother archetype is “fruitfulness and fertility” which is defined through her economic prowess and her generosity and kindness to others in her community, not in her roles as wife and mother. The men are released from the story, not because of their bad behavior but because their use is complete. This is not a gender obstacle, but an elemental one for her status as a goddess. Efuru’s child, Ogonim, is also removed from the story because it is a commonly known fact that even though Uhamiri gives children to those who want them, she does not have any children of her own. Therefore, if Efuru is the mirror image of Uhamiri as already noted through their physical resemblance, other areas of her life must also align with that of the goddess. Additionally, even though the gentle and good side of Uhamiri is visible in Efuru, her dark and tough side that belongs to the goddess is achieved through Ajanupu, another character in the story.

Efuru’s decision to marry Adizua who could not pay her dowry is a mistake; however, the marriage resulted in Efuru meeting Ajanupu, her mother-in-law’s sister,
who is also the omniscient pillar of strength in the village. From their first meeting they become inseparable. Her character is ever present in all the crevices of the story, pulling things together as she is always within Efuru’s reach. However, while Ajanupu’s actions are elaborate throughout the story, Nwapa never describes her physical attributes as she does those of Uhamiri and Efuru. Ajanupu’s physical features are described, only leaving her actions and words define her. Nwapa, in creating Ajanupu alongside of Efuru, blurs the former, so that when she merges with Efuru at the end of the story, there is no picture image of her features to leave her hovering in the story. She is not a worshipper of Uhamiri; that role is left to Efuru. She is the manifestation of what Efuru will become.

Further, Ajanupu is seen as Uhamiri herself separated from the humanized Efuru; however, they become united at the end of the journey. In contrast to Uhamiri, Ajanupu she has many children and Uhamiri has none. This may be a maneuver Nwapa uses to stop the reader from perfectly matching Ajanupu to Uhamiri at the onset of the story. Ajanupu’s important influence is seen in the way she “bulldozes” her way into Efuru’s life and remains there. Even after Efuru is no longer married to Ajanupu’s nephew, Adizua, Efuru and Ajanupu continue their relationship, uninterrupted by such an inconvenience. Efuru starts to see her as a mother figure: “Although the figure of the mother as it appears in folklore is more or less universal, this image changes markedly when it appears in the individual psyche” (Hull 82). For Efuru, Ajanupu’s role spans many possibilities beyond the mother-daughter relationship.

Ajanupu comes into the story right after Efuru’s circumcision, and after eating the welcome kolanut, she questions her sister Ossai: “Why was I not told that Adizua’s wife
was going to have her bath. Why am I treated these days as if I am a stranger and not your sister” (Nwapa15)? This is the starting point of a relationship that covers the length of the story. Ajanupu is strong, knowledgeable, courageous and outspoken, yet nurturing. She supports Efuru throughout her pregnancy, helps to birth the baby, and also serves as the doctor that treats the baby when she has convulsions, and finally she serves as the mortician who prepares the corpse for burial after the child dies. She helps to train Ogea, the girl who comes to live with Efuru to help her with the baby in exchange for the money Efuru lends her parents to farm. Ajanupu instructs her on many things when she takes the baby, Ogonim, for a visit: “bend down and sweep like a woman…. Put your legs together and sit like a woman…. You eat your fish last” (45). She also reprimands Efuru for not teaching Ogea basic things that would help her in future.

Ajanupu is Efuru’s debt collector, who gets a percentage of the debt she collects. Although her tactics are extreme, they usually work. When she gets to the house of Nwabuzo, “Ajanupu sat down on the mat and stretched her legs. She was determined to stay there till doomsday” (47). When a woman comes to plead for the debtor, Ajanupu tells her: “I will not go, Nwabuzo will give me Efuru’s money today…. So don’t worry yourself begging me” (47). She has that kind of tenacity to focus on the task at hand. Even Ajanupu as a debtor herself wants to have the upper hand. She tells a woman to whom she owes money, “It is because of these people…. If not you wouldn’t have got this money” (49). As a debtor herself, Ajanupu refuses to succumb to her type of debt collecting tactics even though she does the same. Again, this may be because she is a goddess and, as such, she refuses to adhere to rules set by humans, while she can dictate rules to others.
When Gilbert, Efuru’s second husband, accuses her of committing adultery, Ajanupu again comes to her defense. Her distrust of Gilbert’s accusation makes her question the man’s motive and integrity. Enraged, Ajanupu asks:

What did you say? My god, what did you say? That Efuru, the daughter of Nwashike Ogene, the good, is an adulterous woman. Ewo-o, I am afraid, my people, I am afraid. Eneberi, who are you? Who is your father, who is your mother? What have you got to be proud of? You went to school. Eh? If your own brand of education is the only brand, then I am glad I did not go to school. (217)

Ajanupu lets Gilbert (Eneberi) know that he cannot get away with speaking ill of Efuru, the good one. She is Efuru’s tutor, protector, and mouthpiece. From this standpoint, Ajanupu is the embodiment of the qualities that Efuru will inherit as she matures as a worshipper of Uhamiri.

Efuru’s wisdom continues to unfold through Ajanupu’s traditional knowledge. Bell-Bahlsen records that “Many of Ogbuide’s rules are behavioral codes concerning the female body and specify women’s sexual and procreation behavior, as what a woman may and may not do before, during, and after her baby is born…. Other practices are controversial (female circumcision, locally referred to as a woman ‘taking a bath’)” (277). In keeping with the rules of the lake goddess, Nwapa makes sure Efuru “takes a bath” (Nwapa 11). The woman who circumcises Efuru prepares “black stuff” from herbs, puts it in a small calabash, and leaves it at the door, and commands Efuru’s mother-in-law, “Sprinkle this on the feet of all the visitors before they come into the room. It will be infected if this is not done” (14). In order for Efuru to fulfill her role as
one with medicinal knowledge, she has to first be seen as one who abides by the health rule of the land that includes circumcision. After Efuru’s bath, Ajanupu is presented as one with traditional medicinal knowledge. She is the first to know Efuru is pregnant, and she tells her sister, “You are just a woman for nothing. You can’t see, you can’t even smell. Your daughter-in-law is pregnant” (27). From then on she takes charge and mentors Efuru. She enumerates the don’ts of a pregnant woman: “‘She must not go out alone at night…. When she is sitting nobody must cross her legs...’” (29). She treats Efuru’s swollen legs during the pregnancy, “she brought some leaves and some palm-wine. She also bought a new clay pot. She cooked the leaves adding a little palm wine. When she finished, she gave some to Efuru” (29). When it was time for the baby to be born, Ajanupu presides over the delivery. Nwapa explains where she attained her expertise:

Ajanupu attended to both mother and child. It was so easy for her. One would think that she was a trained midwife. She had eight children. One died of convulsion. It was only the first and the second that she was helped to deliver. All the others she delivered herself. There was usually nobody around when she had her babies. She would have her baby all alone, wash it and wash herself before anyone knew what was happening. (31)

Ajanupu acquired the knowledge of a “trained midwife” through her personal experience. Nwapa reflects this knowledge in the story to feature Uhamiri as the custodian of medicinal enlightenment; it is believed that she shows her followers the knowledge of plants that heal and those that kill (Jell-Bahlsen). She has a profound understanding of
nature and its medicinal capabilities, comparable to the medicine man that Jahn describes:

As one that is renowned for his knowledge of herbs and his treatment for special types of illness, while another might be sought out more often to diagnose obscure maladies and treat them by the method of discovering what form of spiritual cleanliness.... The herbal specialists certainly had a considerable knowledge of the healing properties in various plants and their juices and fruits. (Jahn 129-130)

"Man" in this quotation refers to both male and female. The personality of Uhamiri, a goddess, with both male and female persona, validates this interpretation. Her medicinal knowledge has objectively positive effects, especially for women. Ajanupu in the physical realm displays Uhamiri's medicinal knowledge. Since the initiation process takes a while, spanning many years chronologically and psychologically, Nwapa shows Efuru in her glory through Ajanupu. All the things Efuru would not or cannot do are done by Ajanupu on her behalf.

Efuru's independence is portrayed through her legendary business acumen. She is not formally educated in Western capitalism, but she has a firm grasp of economic structures and the shrewdness and tenacity for business. Her feminine magic is defined by her trading skills. Jung points out that for the figurative mother archetype, there is "the magic authority of the female" (82). Everything Efuru touches in business multiplies in a good and prosperous way, perhaps because she is blessed by Uhamiri, who is also the goddess of the marketplace. On this issue Bell-Bahlsen offers the following insight:
Ogbuide, Oguta’s ancient patron of people in general, and of women and their wealth in particular, prevails in the market. The goddess’ association with the market is not accidental. The market is the Oru-Igbo women’s realm. A major venue, preoccupation, and source of women’s wealth, the market has maintained its importance to women.... (244)

So, it can be assumed that Efuru’s success as a trader is not coincidental; it becomes obvious that Uhamiri blesses Efuru with wealth but not children, as the only child she gives birth to dies in infancy. Efuru’s economic success is continuous throughout the story. Her wealth is the vehicle through which her “fertility and fruitfulness” is realized, so she blesses people in the community with it. She teaches her first husband, Adizua, to trade, but he fails to keep up with the wife’s skills.

Efuru the good is static throughout her two failed marriages. In defense of Efuru, Laurence states in *Long Drums and Canon*, “In a sense, she nearly kills her husbands with kindness. She never points out her own qualities and in fact seems unaware of them, so she cannot even be accused of being self-righteous. If she had been stupid and malicious, even occasionally, her men might have found her easier to live with” (189). She is good at business; her wealth grows while other aspects of her life deteriorate. Her magic authority as a woman lies in her fruitfulness, but for Efuru this is not in the biological reproductive type; it is in her economic success. The divine union she seeks through two marriages fails to materialize. However, this union that is essential to her, according to Jung, is not the physical coming together of a man and a woman. It is the recognition of the feminine and masculine (anima/animus) aspects that reside in every human being that also need reconciliation (Hull 27). On the conscious level, societal
constructs often define this as a gender issue. This may explain the constant dichotomy that plagues the so-called “civilized” thinking when it comes to the issue of male and female. It is a fact that humans use what they know best to explain a phenomenon that does not lend itself to complete human understanding, which Jung explains thus: “From this fact we may reasonably conclude that man’s imagination is bound by this motif (male/female), so that he was largely compelled to project it again and again, at all times and in all places” (59-60). So, the divine union is always defined as a successful marital union between a man and a woman and this becomes the reality.

As Efuru begins to dream about Uhamiri, she becomes her worshipper. Women of the town feel that the step she takes to be the goddess worshipper seals her fate as a barren woman. The female view of womanhood is that for a woman to be fulfilled, she must have children. The females project what they think or what society expects a woman should want on Efuru, but that does not deter Efuru from becoming Uhamiri’s follower. Jell-Balshen rightly points out that, “The water goddess protects, encourages, and empowers those who cannot or would not live up to society’s norms, ancestral customs and the laws of the land” (39). Efuru is protected by Uhamiri and her spiritual centering is at its prime. She gets closer to water because water represents all that Uhamiri is in her subconscious. Water is also needed by all humans. As Jung notes, “It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension; where the realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this and that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me” (21-22). Uhamiri resides in water, and from her Efuru will complete her journey to self-actualization.
Even though Nwapa unfolds this tale explicitly, still some underlying meaning remains in the unconscious. This unconscious begins to manifest through dreams as Efuru is about to get to know herself. Jung describes this event in human psychology as:

The necessary and needful reaction from the collective unconscious expresses itself in archetypally formed ideas. The meeting with oneself is at first, the meeting with one’s own shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is. For what comes after the door is surprisingly enough, a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad. (21)

Efuru embarks on the first step of her final stages to “meet” herself. With this dream experience that emerges, the dots start to connect. Efuru’s ethereal beauty mirrors that of the unearthly goddess, Uhamiri. Efuru’s status as a goddess in the physical realm exemplifies the extreme goodness that is not human. Laurence remarks, “Efuru’s tragedy is partly that she cannot permit herself the mistakes of ordinary people” (189) within her relationships. Her beauty matches her goodness; she is described as “A good woman who has good words for everybody. A good woman who greeted you twenty times if she saw you twenty times a day. A woman with a clean heart, who respects her elders” (77). Her good attributes make her unreal in a very real world. Her high standards may have frightened away her two husbands. When she tells her mother-in-law’s sister that she is leaving her marriage, Ajanupu espouses her goodness, “You are a good woman.
There is no woman like you” (83). Nwapa could not bring herself to “taint” the integrity of her protagonist.

However, for a complete representation of this humanized goddess, a dark side must be part of her personality repertoire, so Nwapa develops an alternate way to show her protagonist’s dark side in the form of another female character, Ajanupu. Efuru’s first marriage brings into the story the other side of her personality through Ajanupu. Efuru is humanized through the incidences that crowd her life at the beginning of her self-actualizing journey. Her strength, her ability to make decisions, and her self-sufficiency on the physical level remain constant. Throughout the story, Efuru and Ajanupu operate as two separate entities; however, the meeting point to become one occurs towards the end of the story as Efuru is about to enter her “glory.” The incident that is the culminating point is the confrontation with Gilbert.

Jung says that in order to arrive at self, two other steps must be sequentially followed. First, there is the meeting of one’s shadow and secondly the reconciliation of the “masculine” and “feminine” before the divine union:

Its beginning is almost invariably characterized by one’s getting stuck in a blind alley or in some impossible situation; and its goal is broadly speaking, illumination or higher consciousness, by means of which the initial situation is overcome on a higher level. As regards the time factor, the process may be compressed into a single dream or into a short moment of experience, or it may extend over many months and years, depending on the nature of the initial situation, the person involved in the process, and the goal is reached. (Hull 39)
Throughout the story, Uhamiri’s personalities are manifested through Efuru and Ajanupu. In the former, her gentle strength is made obvious through her two marriages and her survival after the death of her only child. She evolves, but her full evolution is not seen in the story; it is assumed through the understanding of Ajanupu’s role in the story. The strength and wisdom that Efuru uses to navigate her journey to self-actualization are embedded in her personalities since Nwapa usually represents women from a space of positive self-definition, revelation, rediscovery and relocation.

As previously mentioned, when Gilbert accuses Efuru of committing adultery, the dark side of Efuru surfaces through Ajanupu. Ajanupu curses Gilbert:

Eneberi, nothing will be good for you henceforth. Eneberi, Ajanupu, the daughter of Uberife Nkemjika of Umuosume village, says that from henceforth nothing good will come your way. Our ancestors will punish you. Our Uhamiri will drown you in the lake. Our Okita will drown you in the Great River. From henceforth evil will continue to visit you. (Nwapa 217)

Ajanupu evokes the power of words to curse Gilbert, “All magic is word magic, incantation and exorcism, blessing and curse” (Jahn132). This is a power that only a goddess has to affect things, and Ajanapu decides to exercise this power on behalf of Efuru. When Gilbert dares to slap Ajanapu, the slap evokes the destructive part of Uhamiri. Her anger elevates to the level where she gets hold of a mortar pestle and breaks it on Gilbert’s head. After this violent act, there is transformation. This is witnessed as Efuru relates to her friend Difu why she left Gilbert: “I have ended where I began—in my father’s house. The difference is that now my father is dead” (Nwapa 219).
By now, Efuru is at the end of her journey, the return phase. She goes through many challenges during her initiation into the world through her marriages, and comes out triumphant. Her stronger personality that is portrayed by Ajanupu is being passed on to her as she continues to narrate her situation to her friend Difu. She emphatically brings her relationship with her second husband to a close: “But I have nothing to say to Eneberi. He will forever regret his act. It is the will of our gods and my chi that such a misfortune should befall me” (220). Though she thinks of her second marriage as a failure, she will come to see it differently later. She refuses to even contemplate going back to her husband as Difu suggested at the end of their conversation. To Difu’s question, “What will you do now?” (220), she answers, “What have I been doing before?” (220). This question as an answer to Difu’s question, indicates that Efuru is secure in what she has always done with or without a husband.

Efuru does not come to know herself suddenly; this happens gradually in the process of her life. Her long journey of self-actualization begins to wind down when she confronts her shadow, which is her hatred for both her first and second husbands, Adizua and Gilbert, respectively. It is now understood that Efuru’s journey is not meant to culminate in a happy union with a man; it is a journey that would end in the attainment of the divine union in the subconscious that manifests as contentment in the conscious. Efuru begins to understand herself when she finds out that her shadow is a narrow door that can squeeze the life out of her unless she comes to know who she is. She finds herself and comes to the conclusion that her happiness and spiritual centering cannot rely on being married or in motherhood. After this epiphany, she dreams of her future, from which she attains her divine union when her “masculine” and “feminine” sides are united.
as she becomes content with being the worshipper of Uhamiri or being Uhamiri herself.

Her connection to Uhamiri is explicitly obvious from her dream:

Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreams of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did women worship her? (221)

Nwapa ends this powerful womanhood story with a nagging question in the unconscious state of Efuru’s dream. The question is: “Why then did women worship her?” (221), the thought that Uhamiri does not have children, and she in turn does not give women children, precedes the question. The answer to the question based on this self-actualizing story could be that Nwapa wants women to be defined not just as mothers, but also through other roles they perform in the community. She wants women to know that other options exist that could result in their being contented, hence she uses the archetypal pattern to create female characters as personified goddesses in order for the women represented in her fiction to have alternative recourse from which to choose their roles in society. Nwapa uses the mythological sphere to elevate women through connection with nature where distinctions of the capabilities of men and women are not grouped by gender rules of opposition.

In the spiritual realm, the figurative mother archetype represents a woman in charge of her destiny, so portraying this figure in the physical realm through fiction is designed to help women control their destiny. Nwapa believes women should self-
define--before men and those from other cultures define them. Efuru in her unconscious dream state makes the decision on how she will exist in the new conscious state after her failed marriages and the death of her child. Efuru who is portrayed as decisive, introspective and financially strong throughout the story appears to be even stronger in her actions and words at the end of the story. Ajanupu, after playing her various parts that exhibit the dark side of Efuru's personality, could either exit from the story or merge with Efuru. The author chooses the latter. Therefore, Uhamiri the personified goddess crosses the threshold into her full womanhood and her spiritualization through the unification of Efuru and Ajanupu as two sides of an ideal female character. The confirmation of this form of transformation is through the dream motif, in which the goddess Uhamiri emerges and blends with the protagonist's subconscious.

Summary

This chapter has presented an analysis of the protagonist in Nwapa's Efuru. Biographical information about the author, which is relevant to the study, precedes the analysis. In the analysis, Efuru is shown as she gradually proceeds through her actions and thoughts, as well as those of her partner character, Ajanupu, and how both characters merge into the goddess Uhamiri. Nwapa explicitly presents Efuru as Uhamiri, making the protagonist go through two cycles of self-actualization before her spiritualization. In her first marriage to Adizua, she is initiated into the world through the problems she encounters with a lazy husband who could not master the skills of providing for his family and the loss of her only child. Efuru finds herself introspectively and leaves the marriage a year after the errant husband runs away with another woman. In her second marriage to Gilbert, another session of initiation occurs. Again, her husband also leaves
her, but later comes back to accuse her of committing adultery in order to alleviate his
guilt.

Efuru comes to realize that she does not need either of her husbands for her to
attain divine union. She comes to discover that the union she was seeking through
marriage was really unnecessary; what she truly needs is an internal union with her own
essence or spirituality. Her self-identity is ultimately encased in her taking full
responsibility for her life, and in her service to the community through her acts of
generosity. Efuru who throughout the story has her voice projected through Ajanupu
finds that voice by the end of the story. In her conversation with her friend Difu, she
expresses disappointment and anger at her second husband, Gilbert. However, she does
not dwell on that anger for long. She decides to move back to her natal home and take
responsibility for herself knowing that her father is now deceased. She had always been
financially responsible for herself, but now she must also be emotionally independent.
CHAPTER FOUR

JANIE IN THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD: THE PERSONIFIED GODDESS

In Their Eyes Were Watching God (Their Eyes), Zora Neale Hurston recreates the mythological story of Oya, an African goddess. Using Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, this study advances the view that the universal goddess archetype is personified through the author’s female protagonist Janie Crawford. The author uses Oya as her frame of reference and, by doing so, rescues Africana women from the stereotypical images often seen in fiction. By creating the personified Janie in stark contrast to the European American imagination, Hurston develops an unusual persona for her protagonist. Thus, she portrays the protagonist as a beautiful, fiery goddess who represents female regenerative and transformative power; as a result, the personified Janie is strong, resilient, assertive, courageous, independent, and risk-taking character.

Hurston wrote Their Eyes while conducting research in the Caribbean. In her autobiography she reveals that: “It was dammed up in me, and I wrote it under internal pressure” (Dust Tracks 77). The novel was an outgrowth of several factors: 1) her search for self-identity, 2) her need to heal a failed relationship, 3) her need for contentment, and 4) her search for an alternative spirituality.

Hurston captures her interest in African culture in a story that implicitly explores her African heritage through the creation of a protagonist personified as
an African goddess. Hurston's research on African goddesses leads to a self-discovery journey in which her sense of identity is transformed. One of her legacies is depicting African-American female characters in novels and short stories that are comparable to African female characters.

**Biographical Information**

Examining Hurston's biography is essential to understanding why she selected an African goddess to personify the protagonist of her novel. Hurston was born on January 7, 1891, in Nostasulga, Alabama, where her father grew up and her grandfather was a Baptist preacher. She was the fifth of eight children born to John and Lucy Hurston. Her father was a Baptist preacher, carpenter, and sharecropper; her mother was an elementary school teacher.

When Hurston was three years old, her family moved to Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated black municipality in the United States. Hurston grew up in a hostile economic, political, and social climate, where the Ku Klux Klan terrorized blacks—leading to the steady decline of African American political representation. Hurston, however, was shielded from much of this, as her father was elected mayor of the all-black town which she describes in her stories as a place where blacks could live as they desired— independent of white society. Hurston was nine years old when her mother died, which was a devastating event for her. Hurston's father and stepmother sent her to a boarding school in Jacksonville, Florida; but they eventually stopped paying her tuition and the school expelled her. Shortly thereafter, her father sent her to care for her brother's children. Hurston, a restless and rambunctious teenager, was soon eager to leave the responsibility of her brother's household.
After leaving her brother's household at age sixteen, she became a member of a traveling theater and subsequently began domestic work in a white household. The woman for whom she worked arranged to send her to Morgan Academy in Baltimore, Maryland (now Morgan State University). She later attended Howard University where she spent most of her time writing. At Howard, she was inspired by Alain Locke, professor of philosophy and authority on black culture, and decided to pursue a literary career. Beginning with a college publication and then branching out into writing contests in newspapers and magazines, the early 1920s marked the beginning her literary career.

In 1925, Hurston headed to New York City, where she enrolled in Barnard College to study under Franz Boas, an important founder of the discipline of anthropology. She also studied at Columbia University. After graduating from college, Hurston returned to her hometown of Eatonville to collect stories to advance her literary career. She launched her writing career during the Harlem Renaissance, a period when "local color" was not an accepted style for literature. Her interest in black culture is reflected in her cross-genre novels trying to capture the culture embedded in the life and dialect of blacks in America.

Although Hurston's father was a preacher, she explains in her autobiography, *Dust Track on a Road*, that she was searching for spirituality:

>You wouldn't think that a person who was born with God in the house would ever have any questions to ask on the subject. But as early as I can remember, I was questing and seeking. It was not that I did not hear. I tumbled right into the Missionary Baptist Church when I was born. I saw the preachers and the pulpits, the people and the pews. Both at home and
from the pulpit, I heard my father explain all about God’s habits, His heaven, His ways, and means. Everything was known and settled. . . . That should have been enough for me. But somehow it left a lack in my mind. (Dust Track 215-216).

The void that her hometown religious background left in her mind precipitated her search for an alternative spirituality in African traditional religion in parts of the United States and the Caribbean—New Orleans, Haiti, and Jamaica.

In her autobiography, Hurston also records another experience that prompted her interest in African culture: Her mother’s deathbed instructions:

That day, September eighteenth, she had called me and given me certain instructions. I was not to let them take the pillow from under her head until she was dead. The clock was not to be covered, nor the looking glass. She trusted me to see to it that these things were not done. I promised her as solemnly as nine could do, that I would see to it. (64)

However, as the older women from the community took over, Hurston was unable to fulfill her mother’s wishes, and, instead, she let them perform the death ritual that her mother asked her not to allow. This death ritual appears to have been a covert African tradition that still existed in Eatonville at that time. Her inability to carry out her mother’s wishes caused her much agony, resulting in years of suppressed memory stored in her personal unconscious before it resurfaced in her adult years.

Hurston traveled throughout the Caribbean and the American South, immersing herself in local cultural practices to conduct her anthropological research. Through a Rosenwald Fellowship (1934) and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1935-136), she engaged in
her most fruitful field research which produced her finest literature. From 1936 to 1938, Hurston studied in Jamaica and Haiti on a Guggenheim Fellowship, which laid the groundwork for *Tell My Horse* (1938), a travelogue and a study of Caribbean voodoo.

As an anthropologist, Hurston based her novel on observations of her hometown (Eatonville) as well as the knowledge gained during her visits to Haiti, New Orleans, and the Georgia Sea Islands. As a result of immersing herself in these cultures, she became knowledgeable about the lives of Black people—learning their songs, music, speech, folktales, and stories. She recorded her ideas and observations on paper and phonographic discs (Kennedy 1991).

Although she never went to Africa, she alludes to various African religious practices in her novels based on the research she collected in the Caribbean. While in the Caribbean, she developed an interest in voodoo practice, which gave her the background knowledge for including supernatural elements in her stories. Her research in Haiti guided the development of her fictional characters based on the universal human experience originating from the mythological sphere.

In her study of cultural anthropology, Hurston became an ethnologist—using the participant-observation method to gather information about the cultural connections between Africans and African-Americans. As an ethnologist, she gained a greater understanding of Black people: "to know how a people view the world around them is to understand how they evaluate life; and a people’s temporal and non-temporal evaluations of life provide them with a charter of action, a guide to behavior" (Hubbard 56).

In *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, for example, she uses the word Hoodoo to describe a religion that has special powers, tying it to biblical stories in the tradition of syncretism—
the merging of religions: Christianity and African Traditional Religion. For instance, when a character in the novel asks a church-going deacon if he believes in Hoodoo, the Deacon replies:

Ah done seen things done. Why hit’s in de Bible, Sister! Look at Moses. He’s de greatest hoodoo man dat God ever made. He went ‘way from Pharaoh’s palace and stayed in de desert nigh on to forty years and learnt how tuh call God by all his secret names and dat’s how he got all dat power. He knowed he couldn’t bring off all dem people lessen he had power unekaltuh man…. And then agin his wife wuz Ethiopian. Ah bet she learnt ‘im whut he knowed. (Hurston 147)

According to literary research, Hurston was initiated into many Hoodoo/Voodoo sects in America (Washington 167). Victor Turner, a member of the college of Hoodoo doctors in New Orleans, names Hurston a child of Oya, the goddess whose force is demonstrated in gale winds, tornadoes, hurricanes, and in breath that sustains life and promotes speech (Washington 168).

A theory of Voodoo discourse is analyzed in African Religious Influences on Three Black Woman Novelists. The author says, “While Voodoo symbols in Their Eyes emphasize the ultimately spiritual nature of Janie’s quest, Hurston also develops Voodoo aesthetics to indicate the quality of Janie’s relationships” (Smith 24). In Jump at the Sun, however, John Lowe argues that although Hurston was exposed to both the Christian and the Voodoo religions, she did not fully commit to any. He believes that her exposure to both resulted in her being syncretic: “…her religious sensibility, particularly after her hoodoo research, was always multicultural, syncretic, and personal” (160).
Hurston’s interest in hoodoo stems from the *naissance* of her literary career. Her first published short story, “John Redding Goes to Sea,” deals with the power of witchcraft used by Judy Davis, a character in the story, to make John leave home. Conjure spirituality was present in the central Florida of Hurston’s childhood, and financial support from Charlotte Osgood Mason made it possible for Hurston to turn the “spyglass of anthropology” toward the subject (128). Hurston was therefore determined to incorporate in her works the covert African religious practices uncovered in her research. Her most noted works include *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Mules and Men*, and *Dust Track on a Road*.

Commenting on Hurston’s *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, Larry Neal says that the character of the protagonist John Pearson, a Christian preacher, “springs from formerly enslaved communal society, non-Christian background, where there is no clean-cut dichotomy between the world of spirit and the world of flesh”(26). Both arguments support the syncretic nature of Hurston’s religious belief referenced in Lowe’s work. In her article, “Defeating the False God: Janie’s Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God,*” Wilentz argues that the Everglades scene during the hurricane represents Hurston’s idea of a dualistic God who is both constructive and destructive, having the same opposing forces present in human beings.

**Cultural Setting**

Although based on a mythical story, *Their Eyes* is set mainly in Eatonville and the Everglades, real places in Florida. The story takes place during the 1920s and 1930s and is set in a series of all-black communities. This cultural setting gives authenticity to the story since Hurston grew up in Eatonville, left the place in her youth, and later returned
as a participant-observer researcher. After conducting research on African culture, the author’s mythological stories of the African gods and goddesses implicitly embedded in Eatonville became clearer to her. In light of this newfound understanding, she chooses Eatonville as the major setting for Janie’s initiation into life through the challenges the protagonist would encounter, and she chooses the Everglades as the setting where Janie’s ultimate transformation takes place in the midst of water.

The novel begins at the end of the story in a flashback narrative form. Janie comes back home to Eatonville from the Everglades and she goes back in time when she tells her friend Phoeby her story. Hurston narrates the story from a third-person viewpoint, which allows readers to have interiority into the characters’ perspective in addition to giving the protagonist a voice. Having a voice proves Janie’s independence, especially at the end of the story. The reader follows Janie’s whole life beginning with when she was “called;” her departure into the world begins in her search of the horizon.

**Themes and Comparative Analysis of Physical and Spiritual Realms**

Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, most important to this study, connects Janie to an African goddess. As Janie gets initiated into life through challenging experiences, she instinctively knows when to move from one stage to another following the path of Oya, the African goddess. In characterizing Janie, Hurston uses chronological incidences in Oya’s mythological story to parallel Janie’s life.

A comparison of the qualities of Oya with those of Janie is evidenced through the personalities exhibited by both females as they go through struggles within three marriages. Within these marriages, their wise, decisive, and independent personality traits exhibit both good and dark sides consistent with the Jungian figurative mother
archetype. In her mythological story, Oya marries her first husband, Ogun the god of iron and war, while they are in the spiritual realm. When they got to earth, however, the older god was no match for the young, vibrant, energetic goddess: “the young and energetic Oya found Ogun too old and taciturn” (Washington 168). While she finds him ugly and unappealing, he finds her independent nature displeasing. Dissatisfied with her independent character, Ogun wars with her and beats her. As a result of this abusive treatment, Oya leaves him.

The call for Janie to go on a life-changing journey is symbolized with her sexual awakening through her encounter with the blossoming pear tree. Jung posits that the primitive man is closer to nature because his subconscious knowledge is undisturbed by evolution: “His knowledge of nature is essentially the language and outer dress of an unconscious process” (6-7). Janie is comparable at this stage in her life to the primitive man who has an uncorrupted understanding of nature. The protagonist is young and on the verge of womanhood, as she experiences her first deep encounter with her innate self. Here, under the blossoming pear tree, the unlearned knowledge that resides in the collective unconscious is revealed to her. Her reception of the message confirms her readiness for the goddess archetype in her subconscious to be projected into her real life experiences:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes
arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root
to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight.
So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation.
Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and
languid. (Hurston 24)

Janie’s sexuality awakes in the spring as the pear tree blossoms and bees come together
in cross-pollination; in her innocence, she sees this only as a display of loving intimacy
not as the natural process that ensures the continuity of a living object. Nature prompts to
the surface the unlearned knowledge that Janie possesses as she masters the language of
nature. Her sexual awakening tells her grandmother that Janie is ready for marriage. The
sexual overtones are surface understandings of what was happening to Janie; but on the
supernatural level she receives a call for departure into the world that she must answer.
As she answers this call, which is her marriage to Logan, her first husband, she pairs up
with Oya. Like Oya, she marries a man she cannot relate to at her young age.

Hurston presents Logan as a one-dimensional character who is old and
unattractive, a sharp contrast to the beautiful Janie. Janie, young and vibrant at sixteen,
maries an older, ugly Logan whom she says “look like some ole skull-head in de grave
yard” (28). Although she finds him unappealing, she marries him because Nanny, her
grandmother, wants her to have material security but ignores the fact that Janie wants a
relationship which respects her independent nature. To Janie, Logan’s image desecrates
her vision of love and the blossoming pear tree that exposed her to love. In the midst of
this unlikely relationship, Janie experiences the second deep encounter with her innate
self after an incident with Logan. Logan threatens to kill her with an axe but, instead of
answering him back with angry words as she usually does, she carefully comes to the decision to empower herself with silence. A veil of secrecy which is characteristic of Oya becomes visible through this act.

At sixteen it is apparent that Janie is in tune with her subconscious where this goddess archetype resides. Janie’s personification as Oya begins. Therefore, if the relationship with her first husband is not working, she is ready to move on. She realizes her power to take her decisions about life into her own hands. So when she threatens to leave him, Logan, inept at expressing his feelings to her, lacks the words to dissuade her from the idea. Therefore, she leaves him. Like Oya, she is not prepared to remain in a marriage that is not taking her to the horizon. Although Oya and Janie’s first husbands, Ogun and Logan, respectively, are hardworking (Ogun, the god of iron works at his forge all day, and Logan is a hardworking farmer), the women do not find them visually appealing. Furthermore, the women find that their own independent nature is stifled. The marriages end when both women move on to other relationships where they think their independent personalities will flourish.

For a second husband, Oya marries Shango the god of fire, thunder, and lightning, who is much younger than Ogun. He is handsome, wears ostentatious clothes, and is an impressive warrior. She finds him “aesthetically appealing, with flashy clothes, long braided hair, and jeweled ornamentation” (Washington 169). Prior to his posthumous deification, Shango was the Alafin (king) of Oyo. Legend has it that Oya spends time in this marriage—assisting Shango in his work as the king and in the process she further empowers herself. However, Shango, a violent and egotistical warrior who controls as he rules, does not like the independent nature of Oya. Thus, Oya is not free to roam with her
spiritual female comrades at night. She becomes secretive because of Shango’s drive to control her. Even though they have complementary functions displayed through the thunder and lightning that merge with storms, Oya leaves Shango.

The basis of Janie’s attraction to her second husband, Joe Starks (Jody), is his discussion about the horizon. She admires his “city ways,” especially the way he dresses. His appearance is indicative of his vanity, and he carries himself with confidence. He is ambitious, egotistical, and controlling. He says, “You ain’t never knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show yuh” (Their Eyes 50). In her youthful state of mind, it does not occur to Janie to get to know him better before marrying him. He implies a horizon tied to his ego, but at the time Janie does not know this. Joe’s words give Janie the assurance that life will be much better than the life she had with Logan. Still nurturing her dream of true love that she feels will bring her independence, Janie marries Joe and they settle in Eatonville. Joe, a hardworking ambitious young man, becomes the proud mayor of the town.

However, to Joe, Janie is an ornament, a symbol of his success, and Janie discovers that her husband, despite his wealth, cannot give her what she really wants out of life. Eatonville becomes the physical embodiment of Joe’s dream of what the life of a black man should be. In an all-black town, he has power and status, and he lords this over his wife and others in the community. He builds a store in which Janie works with him. Unrecognized to Joe—who seems detached from spirituality—Janie may be the reason why he is prosperous and successful. For one reason, Oya presides over market women, and she ensures that the women are financially successful. Furthermore, Janie’s
constant presence in the store guarantees wealth for Joe. Joe, however, only recognizes Janie's beauty as an asset to him as the mayor.

Joe turns into the “big voice” of Eatonville, and all of his energy is focused on status and material gain; and marrying Janie is the first in attaining the status symbols he seeks. Joe curbs Janie’s independence and she must exist as his “trophy” wife. Joe does not take her to a higher state of feeling, the “horizon” she has waited for. With so many restrictions forced on her, Janie feels that she may have been better off staying where she came from. When the townspeople invite Janie to a speaking engagement, Joe is quick to tell them that his wife knows nothing about making a speech. Hurston uses Joe’s comment about Janie’s oratorical skills to foreshadow the strength that Janie’s “spoken word” will possess later in the story. In addition to all his rules, Joe tells Janie not to participate in the “porch talk” of the men of Eatonville. He also demands that she cover her hair in the store.

Although Joe forbids any display of Janie’s independent nature, Janie, unlike Oya, stays with him but remains detached. However, after Joe slaps Janie, something inside her changes. The self she is losing revolts and the magic authority of the female associated with the Jungian goddess archetype starts to manifest. Merging with Oya through the supernatural, Janie’s third encounter with her innate self ensues. This time, however, she is a mature woman and her experience is deeper and more detailed. As Janie’s wisdom awakens, she becomes introspective and her spiritual nature prompts her to assess the situation: “she stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody (Joe) tumbled down
shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dream. Just something she grasped up to draped her over” (112).

As Janie’s subconscious and her collective unconscious bring understanding to her conscious self, she begins to recognize her supra-human status. The submerged African religious culture in Eatonville, repressed in Janie’s memory, now resurfaces; the recalled memories of her personal unconscious promptly remind her of her ability to function as an African goddess of transformation, in this case, Oya. Consequently, the inward and outward manifestations of Oya’s psychic abilities begin to exteriorize themselves in Janie.

Gleason has referred to Oya as “the dynamic interplay between surfaces of transformation from one state of being to another” (2). As Oya’s progeny, Janie’s interaction with her inner self helps her understand her egotistical husband, Joe, and herself better. She realizes that Joe is not the man of her dreams; thus, she copes with her mistake and begins to mask her true feelings and her independent nature. This is another feature of the Oya persona. As an ancestral Egungun (a masquerade), Oya’s mask shields her from the public eye. In Yoruba culture, the mask is a remarkable cultural artifact and has a special place of honor: “The great mask of Egungun Oya is kept in a shrine supervised by the Onira, whom one might call the pope of Oya-worship, and tended by women initiates” (Gleason 98). This revered mask that shield’s Oya from the public eye, in the case of Janie, becomes the symbolic masking she uses to hide her true feelings about her circumstances from Joe.

Janie is an initiate of Oya but, at the same time, Oya is personified through her; therefore, the protagonist is entitled to the mask. In perfecting her masking, she separates
her physical outer self from her inner mental self: “One day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending the store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and clothes” (119). Her mystic knowledge helps to illuminate her situation; therefore, she balances her outward masking with an inner peace and then waits for the time to make a crossroad decision. It takes longer in this second marriage. As she continues to live with Joe, he establishes new rules but she is detached and no longer open with him. Being married to Joe for many years gives her space within which to grow from adolescence into adulthood. Within this time span, Janie grows both inwardly and outwardly. Henry Louis Gates, in The Signifying Monkey states, “The text represents Janie’s crucial if ironic scene of self-discovery rather subtly in this figurative framework of inside and outside. This coming to consciousness is not represented by a speaking scene, however; rather, it is represented in these inside-outside figures” (202). Gates uses these thematic oppositional dimensions in Their Eyes to explain Janie’s journey to self-actualization.

Janie now begins to use her psychic ability to manage her affairs in addition to using the mule as a shroud. This metaphor of the mule is reflected in how Joe wants Janie to exist as a hard worker and how he wants her to function as “wife” who works in the store but in silence. Interestingly, Janie transforms the silence of the mule into a power tool that enables her to attain a sense of inner independence. Moreover, this mule image is Janie’s shroud of power just as the African buffalo is Oya’s shroud of power.

Janie’s collective unconscious links her to the innate power within, providing her with ancient solutions to problems. Janie accepts her outward mule status in order to fool
Yet the mule is the very animal that Nanny does not want Janie to represent as an African-American woman. The “mule,” however, shrouds her independent spirit and empowers her for action—denoting the spiritual-shifting of consciousness that also occurs with Oya. For example, Oya’s divorce from her second marriage to Shango grants her freedom to sojourn at her will. She becomes shrouded as a spirit and takes the form of a buffalo (Washington 169).

Gleason describes this African buffalo as her avatar which embodies many of Oya’s characteristics. In this guise, the goddess acquires instinctual depth, moral weight, and fierce commitment to her own kind (152). Using creative license, Hurston changes Oya’s African buffalo to the mule for Janie. A mule is a more recognizable animal in America, particularly Eatonville. It is a strong animal that can be very stubborn. Both the buffalo and the mule, however, are associated with wisdom hidden to the naked eye. When Oya changes to a buffalo, she is free to move around dispensing her power, but this is not the situation for Janie. As a mule, Janie adopts silence and stays put in the store; she is not even allowed to participate in the conversation of the men on the porch. Her shroud of a mule renders her powerless on the outside but powerful on the inside. In contrast, Oya exudes more power once she transposes herself into a buffalo. In their similar secretive dispositions, both Oya and Janie hide their shape-shifting abilities from their spouses. Although Nanny tells Janie that the black woman is the mule of the world, as a negative term, this motif represents strength for Janie; her cultivated silence strengthens her ability to internally prepare herself for the external battle that comes later.

In the meantime, the “strength of silence” remains in the subconscious in order for her to endure the mental anguish of her conscious state. Janie adopts Oya’s strategy
while Oya’s motive is obscure until it happens. This supra-human being is for a moment in her full glory, as illustrated through her strength of will and wisdom and her ability to choose her battles as the independent spirit within carries out her plan. As a “mule,” Janie empathizes with Matt Boner’s yellow mule. When Joe witnesses the yellow mule being abused, he buys the animal from Matt and frees it. This act propels the fertility of the “spoken word” buried deep inside Janie, forcing her good side to surface when she compliments Joe:

   Jody, datwuz mighty fine thing fuhyuhtuh do. ‘Tain’ everyone would have thought of it, ‘cause it ain’t no everyday thought. Freein’ dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham, he had the whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh whole town so you freed uh mule. Yuh have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak king uh something. (Hurston 91)

Using her voice in this incident, Janie has nothing but praise and kind words for Joe. Her tongue is untied with gentle, generous words masking her cry for her own freedom. Joe, however, does not get the meaning buried underneath her words. Even when Hambo says, “Yo wife is uh born orator, Starks. Us never knowed datbefo’. She put jus’ de right words tuh our thought” (92), Joe misses this opportunity to rectify his past rejection of Janie’s abilities and desire for independence. Instead, he feels that this is more about him than Janie. Because of Joe’s egotistic, selfish attitude, Janie no longer expresses herself: “So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush” (93).
Thus, the spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor:

“It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again” (111). Janie’s patience and endurance become her strength. She stops fighting Joe and detaches from her surroundings and simply exists. As her journey of self-discovery progresses because she sees through her husband’s antics, her depth of knowledge increases. She wisely measures out a little time for him and sets it aside to wait, but the “big voice” Joe is oblivious to the plan Janie has laid out for her retaliation. The act of Janie measuring out a limited time for Joe shows her ability to hide what she does not want to divulge yet. This represents the proverbial “calm before a storm.” As a storm approaches, there is usually an eerie stillness in the atmosphere, a warning from the unseen realm. Comparatively, in her silence, Janie is calm like a gathering storm as she prepares for an inevitable battle with Joe in the future. Janie’s secretive nature parallels that of Oya, the goddess of secrecy, who hides behind the mask of the masquerade (Gleason 102).

As the time Janie sets aside for Joe begins to expire, she decides to confront him with words. At this juncture of the story, Hurston changes some features of the Oya story to suit Janie’s situation. Oya has nine children; and while some of her fertility magic is embedded in having many children, Janie’s is embedded in her fruitfulness with words. For example, one day at the store when she does not cut the tobacco on the line mark, Joe angrily addresses her, “I god almighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can’t cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don’t stand dererollin’ yo’ pop eyes at me widyo’ rump hangin’ nearly to yo’ knees” (121). Joe is surprised when Janie’s dark side emerges and she takes to the floor and answers him
back: “stop mixin’ up mah doings widmah looks, Jody” (122). Furthermore, Janie strips away Joe’s regal façade with this remark, “You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ‘tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ‘bout me lookin’ old. When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (123). She fights back with a few but powerful emasculating words locked inside her all this time: “And it is Oya who speaks, through her human surrogate, with infinitesimal spit of conduction—enough to ionize whatever copulative corridor” (Gleason 65). Her fiery words were meant to humiliate Joe. Her contained dream of love and the horizon fights back through her utterance, and Joe never recovers from the humiliation.

Joe is unknowingly a catalyst for Janie’s transformation. In African religious culture, words are very important; once they are spoken, they become lively or animated: “Everything comes into being only through the word...nommo” (Jahn132). After Janie utters the words, there is no going back. Janie’s thoughts about Joe spill out: “Every human thought, once expressed, becomes a reality. For the word holds the course of things in rain and changes and transforms them. And since the word has this power, every word is an effective word, every word is binding” (133). Joe’s fate is sealed with the words of Janie, the personified Oya.

Janie does not consciously mean to harm Joe, but her dark side emerges and she identifies his inside and outside; then unconsciously she curses him. In Yoruba cosmology, what Janie does is to utter profound damning words, “kengbe Oro ... is speech with profound metaphoric depth, complex multiple significations and deep fearful implications (Olaniyan 35). The clashing between Janie and Joe can be compared with that between the fiery Oya and powerful Shango. Both marriages involve a power
struggle. The men stifle the women's independence, and the women fight back. Oya leaves her marriage but slaps her husband with paranoia—a mental disorder. Janie stays in the marriage but places a curse on Joe with her words. On the conscious level, Janie denies the accusation that she cast a spell on him, but Joe never recovers from his illness.

Oya, dissatisfied with her second marriage, is secretive with Shango. She does not share the extent of her spiritual powers with him. That both benefit from the power of their union does not stop Oya from leaving a marriage that stifles her independence. Unlike Janie, who physically remains in her marriage while her inner self departs from it, Oya physically and emotionally leaves Shango. Oya's independence is more important to her than her marriage: “domesticity and romantic love threatening her personal and spiritual needs, she left Shango, choosing to feed her spirit rather than his ego” (Washington 169). Oya realizes that with Shango she cannot be herself. Although there is a difference in the women's responses to the behavior of their husbands, both women (Janie and Oya) come to their own recognition of what they absolutely dislike. As a consequence of that, Oya leaves her second marriage, while Janie stays and battles for her dignity.

After Joe's death, Janie evaluates her life and begins to realize that she has detoured from her original plan to go out into the world and experience the horizon. Starting on this adventure at age sixteen, she was “forced” into her first marriage. At this stage, however, she comes to terms with her shadow and meets with herself. Coming to grips with her own self confirms that her growth is advancing to a spiritual depth demanding more of her. Her introspective examination of herself shows maturity, as
self-evaluation is one of the most difficult activities for most human beings. Janie’s self-evaluation reveals that she wants lasting solutions to her challenges.

This meeting with self occurs when Janie acknowledges some disturbing issues in her subconscious: the realization that she hates Nanny and the narrow-mindedness that she tried to impose on her. Janie sees clearly the obstacle that Nanny has been in her life. The “safe” limited space Nanny attempts to create for Janie in her marriage to Logan interferes with the broader perspective of life that Janie always wanted. This is a giant step in Janie’s transformation: the ability to admit that she hates the only parent she ever knew—the person who thought she was doing what was right and looking out for Janie’s best interest.

All her life, Janie has been seeking the horizon, which translates to a divine union. This divine union cannot be expressed in words nor represented with concrete images such as being a married woman. However, when the divine union is attained, it brings contentment. Because the divine union can only exist within the subconscious, it takes a deep relationship and an understanding of self to bring it alive. Janie realizes that she has not attained this elusive divine union because she allowed others to dictate the direction of her life; like a zombie, she followed the instructions doled out to her. She promises herself that from this time forward, she will only live the life she wants, not the life others want for her.

Janie, however, finds it unforgivable for Nanny to reduce the horizon to Logan Killicks and sixty acres and for Joe Starks to reduce it to material things. Joe assumes that being the mayor’s wife and having material success should be enough horizon for Janie. But, they are not, for Janie discovers that she could never reach her full potential
as long as she let others dictate who she should be and what she should have in life. During her self-evaluation, Janie recognizes that her grandmother is the first person to stifle her independence and sense of self, long before Joe and Logan. Joe’s death symbolizes Janie’s emergence into a world of freedom and independence. She becomes emotionally independent because she has no forced obligation to anyone. She becomes financially independent because of the money she inherited when Joe died. At this second major crossroad in her life, Janie vows to make decisions that suit her, not others.

The goddess that Janie mirrors, Oya, marries a third time. Oya marries Olukosi Epe, the hunter who discovers her secret of shape-shifting. She achieves this shape-shifting through an Egungun shroud that allows her to take the form of an African buffalo:

He [Olukosi Epe] saw a strange woman beneath the tree where he was hiding. . . . To his surprise, the woman threw her head-tie on the ground. Then she pulled a shroud from the base of the tree. The woman brought forth the dress of Egungun [the ancestors], and she was wearing it in the middle of the forest. . . . When she came to a large anthill, she removed the shroud, placed it inside the anthill, and continued moving into the forest where she joined her spiritual group. (Washington 169)

Oya’s shroud, the African buffalo, masks her supernatural power. When Olukosi Epe confronts her with her secret, she agrees to marry him contingent upon his not revealing her secret to anyone. She marries him, the relationship blossoms, and she bears nine children—a manifestation of her goddess fruitfulness and procreative prowess. Because
Olukosi Epe knows her secret, Oya is able to be her independent self in this marriage. This makes her happy.

Similarly, after Joe’s death, Janie takes up with Tea Cake, a much younger man who becomes her third husband. When she initially meets Tea Cake, he indulges her in a love dance which reawakens dead human feelings. Furthermore, he talks about the horizon, embodying the dream that Janie has put on hold for so long. This relationship blossoms, and he teaches her how to play checkers—an act of seduction, one of which the moves in a game of chess denote stages in a seduction as their courtship progresses into marriage. In this third marriage, Janie finds the love she has searched for most of her life. The love they share becomes the “secret” between them. Janie is thrilled; the “girl self” she asked to wait for long ago comes back. At age forty, Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake makes her feel like a giddy teenager. Moreover, Tea Cake not only plays with her but also treats her as an equal. His intimate, non-controlling relationship with her is decidedly different from what she encountered in her first two marriages. She tells her friend, Phoeby, that Tea Cake makes her feel alive. He takes her to the Everglades where they work in the muck. Although the work in the muck is difficult, they are happy. Janie comes to understand that her horizon is not in the expansion of space, but in the ability to be herself in the space she occupies.

In the Everglades, Janie discovers who she is among ordinary people who work hard and play hard. She feels complete as a participant in this life because she is able to self-define. Then Tea Cake tempts fate when he slaps Janie. Though Janie, the ordinary human, forgives him, he crosses a line where there is no return. Her forgiveness is shrouded in a woman’s justified anger which is also exemplified in Oya. Janie
remembers from her previous marriages that a slap is a call for transformation. In her
euphoric state, she forgets who she is, but Tea Cake’s slap awakens her goddess fury; the
blueprint of her life in her collective unconscious is revived. Of course Janie forgives
Tea Cake, the love of her life, but for Janie not to engage in a serious conversation with
him about the incident should have frightened him if he were in tune with his wife’s
spirituality. The unseen forces in the spiritual world inform the physical realm of
impending danger through an approaching storm. The Everglades is submerged in water,
a symbol of the unconscious. Along this line, all Yoruba goddesses are associated with
water, Oya being a prime example of a goddess named as a river.

Therefore, as the wind mixes with water, Oya’s power is amplified. Hurston
clearly understands the identity of Oya in this regard. So, she picks a setting conducive
to the full transformation of Janie to Oya. As the storm approaches in the Everglades,
many signs indicate that all the inhabitants should move to higher grounds: “The animals
hint at the severity of the storm…... That night the palm and banana trees began that long
distance talk with rain” (Hurston 229-230). K. A. Opoku, Senior Research Fellow at the
University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies, generally explains a storm through the
instinctive connections of all living things, “animals and plants are said to have played a
crucial role in the survival of the forebears…... Thus, a sacred relationship is formed
between these objects” (10). The implication is that all living things respond to each
other. This also applies to the storm in Their Eyes. The signs that announce the coming
of the hurricane are recognized by the Native Americans who are in tune with nature in
their religious culture that connects the physical realm with the spiritual one. Janie sees
the Seminoles passing by, “the men walking in front and the laden, stolid women
following.... They headed towards the Palm Beach road and kept moving steadily” and to her question of where they are going, they answer, “Going to high ground. Saw-grass bloom. Hurricane coming” (229).

However, Tea Cake is not in tune with nature and therefore does not understand the severity of the approaching storm. He lacks the sensibilities of the primitive nature consciousness to which Jung refers. Tea Cake refuses to move to higher ground. When he is informed that the Indians, the natives of the land who understand the “language” of the supernatural, have gone east, he says, “Indians don’t know much uh nothing’, tuh tell de truth” (231). On the other hand, his stubbornness to yield to both common sense and natural warnings of the impending danger can be attributed to the power above him who knows his fate.

The more Tea Cake’s actions are examined, the more he seems like a pawn used to advance a cause. Therefore, he is vulnerable in the environment in which he chooses to remain. That Tea Cake brings Janie to the Everglades to work is divine providence working against him. In this dark atmosphere that precedes the storm, there is expectancy of danger. Oya is flourishing in her domain. Tea Cake’s uninformed conscious status cannot see beyond the physical. In her subconscious, Janie is probably aware that she will benefit from the hurricane coming through the Everglades. So she remains with him through the storm.

In the transformation that Oya initiates through the hurricane, Tea Cake is punished for daring to slap Janie, the symbol of a woman’s righteous anger. Hurston mystifies the justice of the gods when she proselytizes:

All gods who receive homage are cruel. All gods dispense suffering
without reason. Otherwise they would not be worshipped. Through indiscriminate suffering, men know fear and the fear is the most divine emotion. It is the stones for altars and the beginning of wisdom. Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers. Real gods require blood. (215-216)

Even though Tea Cake and Janie love each other, Tea Cake is no exception to the rule. Goddesses are worshipped not abused, so Tea Cake’s love for Janie does not make up for the goddess status that is desecrated with a slap. Though Janie is in love with Tea Cake, internally, she is aware that there are boundaries that separate her from the human. She is not that type of goddess to be worshipped with wine and flowers. She demands more. Blood sacrifice is needed to appease the goddess for that violent act.

Oya and her husband, Olukosi Epe, share the secret of her power and her ability to shape-shift as a buffalo. The marriage is wonderful until Oya finds out that Olukosi Epe betrays her trust by sharing the secret about her power with his mother and his other wives. Her dark side is revealed because of this betrayal. Therefore, Oya’s justified anger leads to her committing murder; this is the blood sacrifice to appease her. Her anger and actions are justified because of who she is. According to Jung, “On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead….” (Hulls 82). This dark side completes the cycle of Oya’s being.

As she becomes the goddess of death, she realizes that she does not need a husband anymore. In their third marriages, both Oya and Janie drop their guards for a season and appear to have gained their independence. Their vulnerability invites disrespect to their goddess status. As a result, Oya reconciles her masculine and feminine selves and her divine union occurs before she departs the physical world for
eternal existence in the spiritual realm. In *Their Eyes*, Hurston brings in her alter ego Oya, and merges her with Janie. Oya collects her debt of blood from Tea Cake and facilitates Janie’s transformation. Janie’s arrival at self is her destination in her evolutionary journey, which happens in the midst of the hurricane, including water that sustains life: “It is water, where all life floats in suspension; where I am indivisibly this and that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me” (Hull 21-22). The water brings out the definitive strength of Oya and transformation comes after the blood sacrifice.

Oya returns to the spiritual realm after she gives her shroud to her children, so they and their father can worship her, and Oya becomes deified. Oya’s ability to leave her nine children speaks to a spiritual conversion. Everything that exists in the physical world pales in comparison to her attainment of spiritual status in the spiritual realm. As a goddess, however, Oya needs followers; this she ensures through her nine children and her errant third husband, Olukosi Epe. As her initial worshippers on earth, they will feed and revere her.

Janie also ascends to the spiritual realm psychologically and bestows herself a fellowship, starting with her friend, Phoeby, in Eatonville. The initiation phase of Janie’s journey comes to an end. She discovers that the horizon encompassing the idea of life and the endless journey of humankind for which she yearns from the very beginning is really her journey to her divine union. Her three husbands have existed in her life to give her challenges to overcome. This is a necessary step in her self-actualizing process. She could not change the behavior of any of the three men but each one serves as catalyst for her growth and spiritual transformation. The initial call to depart from her natal home
and go into the world comes when she is sixteen. Janie’s interaction with all three husbands seemingly exposes her to some traditional roles expected of her as a wife. Logan tells her that her duty is to obey whatever he wants her to do. Joe tells her that she must only exist for him as a silent trophy. The knowledge in her collective unconscious, however, forbids such roles for women.

Hurston advances the plot of the story through life challenges in the initiation stage, which makes it possible for the protagonist, Janie, to experience what is considered abnormal if she is to follow her path as a goddess. Following the path of Oya, Janie learns to solve her problems by embodying the personality of the goddess. In portraying the journey, Hurston uses her creativity to bring together two unlike elements to serve the same prescribed purpose for transformation. For example, when Oya removes her head-tie, it is a sign that she is about to shape-shift. On the other hand, the only time Janie removes her head-tie is after Joe dies and before she informs the townspeople that he is dead. The symbolic removal of her headscarf is a sign of freedom, deliverance, or liberation from a stagnant life situation.

After the necessary reprisal of the physical realm, the supernatural power takes over, while Janie and Oya ascend to the spiritual realm physically and psychologically, respectively. This parallels the return stage of the hero’s journey that was fraught with worldly challenges. Both women are victorious in their self-journey and their reward is their spiritual transformation. Oya returns to the spiritual realm, whereas Janie’s psychological ascension takes her back to Eatonville.

Even though the ideas of exploration, adventure, and living life to the fullest are tied in with the horizon, the length and breadth of the self-discovery journey is beyond
imagination: “no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you” (Hurston 284). This is true because the horizon that Janie seeks is within her as it is with each individual. It is the feeling of contentment that has no physical, concrete representation. After all the searching for the horizon, Janie comes back home to a place where she spends more than twenty years of her life. Contentment with herself is possible because she has reconciled her masculine and feminine sides, thereby bringing about divine union. In her psychological ascension into the spiritual realm in her subconscious, Janie also leaves her beloved friends in the Everglades and returns to Eatonville. Here, she becomes the great orator that Joe once told her she knows nothing about. Janie’s feminine mystic is in her fruitfulness with words; so Hurston gives Janie the opportunity to tell her own story.

After telling her story, she encourages Phoeby to also go on a hero’s journey: “Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (285). Janie recognizes that her experience can help others, but that simulated involvement cannot compensate for the real thing:

Janie makes it clear that the metaphorical and the metaphysical of the inside must be developed externally. Hearing of Janie’s transformation is insufficient; the word and text must be manifest in personal experience, in and with the flesh. Just Janie “[goes] tuh God” inside and returns rich, whole, and shining, so too must Pheoby and all Hurston’s listeners/readers “go there” for themselves, return, and add their texts to Oya’sitan and Nanny’s great sermon. (Washington 183)
Hurston again unites the external experience of Janie with her inner collective unconscious. This is implied when the narrator states, “Janie ‘[goes] tuh God’ inside and returns rich, whole, and shining...” (183). To conquer the outward challenges that face Janie in the physical world, she goes into her subconscious and uses the power bestowed on women that is easily available in the goddess archetype. Her gradual recognition of this power within her is the spiritual journey.

Personalizing Oya through Janie gives the reader a stage-by-stage account of how self-actualization can occur in the process of growth through three marriages fraught with challenges. Because the collective unconscious is present in every human being, each person must discover that strength within that was passed down through generational transfer. In this case, the message in the novel is particularly geared toward women. Hurston implicitly theorizes that using the template of the goddess to navigate life makes it easier because it is like having a road map. In the end, Janie wants to make sure that her “worshippers” recognize that they too must have a personal spiritual experience before they arrive at self. Still, she bestows the gift of her fruitfulness, the power of the tongue, on Phoeby: “mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (17). She gives Pheoby permission to go forth and repeat to others the story she just heard from Janie and hopefully, also go on to one day tell her own story to others. In this way, Phoeby becomes a worshipper of Janie.

Oya ascends to the spiritual world, but is associated with the living through her worshippers. On earth she is known as the goddess who plays an essential part at traditional funerals, the patron of the marketplace, one who speaks her mind especially for purification purposes, the transformer through tornadoes and hurricanes, and, further,
she is also the goddess of a woman’s righteous anger. Through a fictionalized medium, Hurston implicitly tells this story of an African goddess, Oya. Although Hurston never mentions the goddess’s name throughout the story, those familiar, or who become familiar, with the mythical story of Oya, will recognize the masking. The pear tree and the horizon are the metaphors she uses to cloth the collective unconscious and the divine union. Both of these elements are integrated into the subconscious.

Janie’s esoteric knowledge helps her to navigate her life in the form of the African goddess, Oya. She absorbs Oya, and the latter becomes personified through her. In the three stages Hurston uses to frame her story, the pear tree (collective unconscious) and the horizon (divine union) are the continuous threads that run through the plot. In each of Janie’s three marriages, the type of men she marries and her personality align with those of Oya. Like Oya, Janie’s search for self through seeking the horizon has different results in relation to her interaction with each of her three husbands. Oya’s first two husbands do not understand her need for independence or what the horizon represents for her. Their plan for married life is totally different from hers.

After Janie marries Logan, she goes to Nanny for some answers. She tells her grandmother that their relationship does not advance into love, and in her naivety, she thinks a loveless, non-romantic relationship is the problem. She did not know that her inability to be herself is why she is not blossoming in her marriage to Logan. Logan’s idea of the horizon is limited to the sixty acres of land he owns and Janie working with him in the fields. Oya also left her warlord husband, Ogun, who resented her independent nature even though he is always disengaged from her away fighting wars or smelting iron at home. In her union with Joe, the horizon that he promises Janie only has
to do with his position as mayor, the big voice in Eatonville. She tries to make Joe understand her concept of a good marriage. He defines marriage differently, however; and Janie finally understands that their relationship is heading in the opposite direction of her horizon.

This pattern is similar for Oya in her union with an egotistical Shango who wants her to feed his ego continuously. Janie’s third husband, Tea Cake, rescues her from the wrong direction, and furnishes her life with the horizon she seeks. He engages both her heart and her spirit, and she finds she can again dream about the horizon in her process of self-discovery. The Everglades, though not a place of glamour, becomes the horizon she seeks because of her loving relationship with Tea Cake. Though there is love between him and Janie, he oversteps his boundaries when he betrays her with a slap. Oya, at first also has a good relationship with her third husband, Olukosi Epe, until he also betrays her. All three husbands for the women bring forth the personalities that assist the women in attaining their rightful status. As Janie struggles in her humanized status, whenever she seems on the verge of totally losing herself, there is always transformation. She leaves Logan when he tries to bury her in more work; she curses and “slaps” Joe with insanity when his behavior threatens her independence. Later she brings forth the hurricane after Tea Cake slaps her, and, finally, she shoots and kills Tea Cake when he, in his rabies-induced state, tries to kill her.

Some readers, especially those with the feminist perspective, may read Janie’s story and think that all her problems are caused by men in a patriarchal setting. In reality, like Oya, all three men Janie marries are the catalysts for her evolution. Hurston could easily have used women or other means to pose serious challenges in Janie’s life during
her initiation period. Using men, as in Oya's mythological story, gave the protagonist a
glimpse into how society constructs some women's lives if women let them. The
mythological stories show that women do not have to adhere to rules that place them at a
disadvantage when they are really equipped in their collective unconscious to be leaders.
However, these roles are not in competition with the roles of men in society. While
throughout her journey, she thinks her divine union is in a marriage or a relationship with
her men, her divine union with her soul only occurs after the departure of the three men.

In the spiritualization of both Oya and Janie, the two personalities become one,
and Oya of the tornado, the hurricane, and the winds arises majestically in Janie enabling
her to claim her rightful place:

Orisha Oya of African origin manifests herself in various natural forms;
wind, which can be playful and refreshing, but especially strong wind,
escalating into tornadoes; fire both generative and all-enveloping, but
especially quick, nervy, directional lightning; the river Niger... she takes
the form of an African buffalo, which appreciates muddy wallows... Oya
speaks her mind. Always a purifying element, in social situations,
especially tense ones, she clears the atmosphere of bad faith and
mystification. (Gleason 2)

Janie, the personified Oya has boundless power, which she uses judiciously. Her wisdom
resides in the collective unconscious that manifests itself throughout her life journey.
Janie meticulously uses wisdom to solve the challenges she encounters in her initiation
into the world. Among her many personalities, Oya uses silence or pointed speech to
control situations. Similarly, Janie adopts silence, when necessary, to help her
introspectively deal with situations, for instance, dealing with the two slaps she receives from Joe and Tea Cake in the progression of her journey. At the appropriate time, her self-imposed silence gives way to prophetic words that release her from her imprisoned status with Joe, while the destruction initiated by the hurricane takes care of Tea Cake.

Comparable to Oya, Janie’s decisiveness is constant from the time of her journey into the world, through her initiation and return. Janie is not scared to make a decision right or wrong. She makes the decision to marry Joe and Tea Cake, two very different men that she eventually had to get rid of in order for her evolution to be complete. At every crossroad in her life she makes a decision, and although each decision does not always have the desired results, however, she self-actualizes in the end.

Like Oya, she also decides to shape-shift, which is an act of female secrecy, but neither she nor Oya divulges this secret to her second husband. This shape-shifting is an important part of the personality of Oya and Janie. While married to Shango, Oya hides her power through her ability to turn into a buffalo while she executes her power. Janie, becomes the mule her grandmother never wanted her to become in order to hide her independent personality until she is ready for a battle. Finally, before their ascension, Oya and Janie are betrayed by their third husbands. For Oya, when her third husband, Olukosi Epe, finds out her secret, she marries him, and he promises not to share her secret, but he betrays her by breaking the promise. In the same way Janie’s beloved third husband, Tea Cake, betrays her by slapping and disrespecting her. Both women confront their shadows, reconcile their masculine sides with their feminine sides, and attain the elusive divine union they do not get in three marriages.
In Hurston’s autobiography, there occurs a revelation about the horizon:

“Everywhere I turned, it was there, and the same distance away” (27). This may have been the collective unconscious archetype looking for an avenue from which to project into the conscious domain. Her protagonist in Their Eyes also sees this horizon looming everywhere. The problem is how she will reach this distant yet near horizon. To achieve this self-actualizing journey that uses the horizon as a focal point, Hurston brings Oya along in the construction of the story. This journey of self-discovery that Oya and Janie embark on is replete with challenges; and according to Jung, it is invariably characterized by one getting stuck in a blind alley or in some impossible situation as evidenced by the difficulties that individuals encounter in trying to exhibit their independent nature.

However, these challenges bring about an inner self-evaluation for both women. It takes three marriages each for Oya and Janie to reach their goal of self-actualization. Their ability to make decisions at crossroads in their lives advances their journeys. Oya moves through three marriages based on her own decision to do so. Janie also decides when to leave her three husbands and returns to Eatonville to tell her life’s story.

In each of their three marriages, Janie and Oya seek the romantic love they hope would lead to divine union and self-discovery. Lasting loving relationships do not occur in any of their three marriages; both women have the spiritual inheritance as goddesses to persevere. The men become the means to their evolution. They are part of the worldly challenges the women must face before they qualify for ascension. Oya’s dark side emerges when she murders her co-wives and mother-in-law who become the blood sacrifices to appease her. Janie’s dark side also emerges when she curses Joe Stark, exposing his weakness and leading to his death, and when she kills Tea Cake in the
Everglades. Both deceased husbands become the blood sacrifices for appeasing the supernatural realm. After the comparable sacrifices offered by both Oya and Janie, their similar forms of spiritualization were able to begin.

Janie’s ascension to her goddess status begins during the hurricane. For what is about to happen, which is for the dark powers of Janie to come forth, Hurston foreshadows with a warning, “All gods who receive homage are cruel.... Real gods require blood” (*Their Eyes* 139). The death of Tea Cake can be seen as the sacrifice that was needed for the transformational Oya to complete her evolution that was necessary. When Janie goes back to Eatonville after Tea Cake’s death, she walks majestically back into her “powerless past life” with a newness that exudes power and the independence of spirit. Janie ascends to the spiritual realm but occupies the physical realm to become one who foments the growth and the protection of medicinal and spiritual properties of her community. Given that Hurston wrote *Their Eyes* in Haiti while studying Voodoo, it seems apparent that she understands the unpredictable ways of the gods, and while Janie and Tea Cake were watching God when the hurricane descends, the eyes of Oya were watching them.

Using this goddess archetype effectively, Hurston reconstructs a reinterpretation of the African American not as a tongue-lashing, emasculating matriarch—often portrayed negatively in fiction—but as a transformational matriarch. According to her goddess persona, Janie’s reaffirmation of self is embedded in her spoken words that bring forth transformation. In addition, African women have always been the storytellers thus the culture and history of Africa is on their tongues. Such is the African legacy of African American women. Women like Janie can be silent until provoked, and the
consequences can be either inspiring or destructive. The words that come out can impart healing or curses as this is shown in the relationship between Janie and Joe. The impact of Janie’s spoken words is shrouded in metaphoric language. When Joe dares to strip Janie of her independence and displays her for public inspection, Janie decides to return the favor in that instance in the store. The words become her weapon against the erring Joe. He is the catalyst that brings forth Janie’s courage for emancipation. Once her formally restrained tongue is free, her evolution speeds up.

Janie, the personified protagonist, becomes an emblem that informs. If African American women in fiction tongue lash, it is not to belittle the African American man. It is a natural phenomenon that resides in the mythological essence of African goddesses; and their role of the speaker they have assumed on earth also make them the custodian of the history and culture of the African people and the ability to bless or curse.

Further, in the novel, it is known from discussions in the Eatonville community that the African religious culture is very much present. Janie’s subconscious absorbs this religious culture and stores it in the collective unconscious until she needs it to self-actualize. The water in the Everglades also makes this setting important to the story. Jung says, “Water is the commonest symbol of the unconscious” (Hull 18).

The most intense transformation for Janie happens in the Everglades where all the right props were present. The strong wind mixes with the storm and a hurricane was born. This occurs through Oya’s beckoning because it is time for Janie’s journey to come to an end. Sometimes in the story, it seems Janie is strolling through her problems; she does not seem extremely perturbed. It could be she knows that eventually, the goddess that she is in her collective unconscious will rescue her. Therefore in these appropriate
backgrounds, Janie, the personified Oya, makes decisions, grows in wisdom, and becomes independent without cultivating an oppositional position with the male gender of her community. She just wants to be a multidimensional female individual.

Summary

In this chapter, the study presents a full analysis of the protagonist in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Using Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey framework, the study shows how Hurston takes the protagonist on a self-discovery journey that culminates in Janie’s spiritual transformation. Biographical information about the author is discussed before the comparative analysis of the personality traits of Janie and Oya are revealed. Hurston implicitly presents Janie as Oya. After Janie goes through her initiation to the world in three sessions within three marriages, she finds herself. During her three cycles of finding herself, her transformation is always prompted with a slap. Her grandmother Nanny slapped her into her first marriage to Logan Killicks. It takes that first slap for Janie to depart into the world through her marriage to a much older man (as her grandmother dictated). In her second and third marriages, she is slapped into reality again and transformation takes place after each incident. To self-actualize, Janie accepts responsibility for her own life as she shares her story with others through her friend Phoeby.

Janie also finds her voice as illustrated in her ability to answer Joe, her second husband, who demands her silence as she worked alongside him in the store. She also finds her voice when she tells her story to her best friend back in Eatonville. In her personified state, Janie wants a loving marriage. Her first and second marriages do not give her the loving relationship that she craves. Janie’s strongest stumbling block is her
continual chase for a divine union that does not exist in a marriage. For a while, she sits passively by while others define her and how her life should proceed. When she takes control of her life, her transformation ensues and her goddess persona is amplified through a strong, resilient, and decisive attitude about her own life. Her attainment of these personality traits is possible only as she reaches into her collective unconscious where her goddess power resides. She becomes Oya the goddess of transformation as this assumed persona rescues her from the traditional role as someone’s wife. The African feminist thought that recognizes the role of women as dictated on the spiritual level is an underlying theme of this self-defined status.
CHAPTER FIVE
NWAPA AND HURSTON: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

Using archetypal criticism as an interpretive framework, the study compares how the qualities of the two archetypal goddesses, Uhamiri of the Igbo cosmology and Oya of the Yoruba cosmology, are personified in the novels of Nwapa and Hurston, respectively. Further, investigating the influence of biography on selected fictional works helps the study to account for the parallels between the life stories of the writers and the life challenges of their fictional characters.

The study has noted previously that Nwapa and Hurston as black women writers from different literary periods and geographical locations have created fictional works that independently explore the African goddess archetype. Born in Nigeria, Nwapa grew up in the Igbo ethnic culture—the setting that informs her story. Hurston, on the other hand was born in the United States and grew up in Eatonville, Florida—the setting that frames her story. Although both were formally educated from a Eurocentric viewpoint, their works reveal an attempt to self-identify from their own cultural universe as women of African descent. Integrating their life experiences into their writing, the authors merge their African heritage with that of the characters they portray in their novels. Based on their biographical stories, their aim was to use their African perspective to inform their work—not as a reactionary to a Western paradigm but as a journey of self-actualization.
Stemming from their shared backgrounds of colonialism and slavery, both authors seem to possess repressed memories of the African religious culture in their personal unconscious. They also seem to have used the repressed memories of their collective unconscious to frame the self-actualizing journeys of their protagonists and to construct positive images of Africana women in fiction. In creating their female protagonists, Nwapa and Hurston use archetypal patterns with African cultural attachments, not just to connect spirituality to the mythical world but to mirror elements of the spiritual realm through concrete symbols in the physical as recognizable personality traits—a strategy that both authors used.

An important question that drives this study is why Nwapa and Hurston felt the need to express African perspectives in their novels even though they both had a Eurocentric educational background. According to their biographies, they lost their religious and cultural identities through a denial of access to their African culture by the colonizing Eurocentric culture. The lost culture, it seems has been materialized in their fictional works.

Archetype Goddess

Both authors chose the goddess archetype as a model to construct their protagonists. The mother archetype associated with fertility and fruitfulness does not refer only to the ability to reproduce children but also to the ability to engage in the reproduction of other things that enhance a community. Accordingly, the universal mother archetype has both positive and negative attributes. The positive goddess qualities include maternal solicitude and sympathy, magic authority of women, wisdom
and spiritual exaltation, helpful instinct and impulse, all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, and all that fosters growth and fertility. In contrast, the negative attributes include anything that is "secretive, hidden, dark; the abyss; the world of the dead; anything that devours, seduces, and poisons; anything that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (Hull 82). These goddess attributes characterize the universal mother archetype (goddess). However, Nwapa and Houston used culturally modified goddess archetypes in the form of African goddesses Uhamiri (Igbo) and Oya (Yoruba), respectively to personify their protagonists.

In this study, both women appear to have embraced the goddess archetype as interpreted through the African mythological experience of African goddesses. The positive and negative personalities of these goddesses serve as a mechanism for creating female protagonists that exhibit these traits. Nwapa and Hurston did not want their characters defined by societal structures that marginalize women through constant oppositional relationships with men. Like Nwapa and Hurston, Umeh agrees that women of African descent can be presented differently from their stereotypical roles in fiction, "The theme of the empowered woman who combines male aggressiveness in enterprise with her female nature, which is evident in the cult, shows amply that women can rise to lofty heights if they are given the opportunity" (179).

**Personalities of Goddesses**

Uhamiri and Oya—the transformational goddesses—are among the deities that enslaved Africans brought to the New World through their memories. In the New World, Uhamiri and Oya seemingly merged into one and became Yansa. Both goddesses have a strong affiliation to water and have similar personality traits: wisdom, strength,
assertiveness, and independence. Both are empowered by their feminine mystique, which includes the ability to create wealth for themselves and their worshippers, the ability to lead women, and the ability to radiate physical beauty. On the dark side, they can be evasive and secretive, cause insanity, and bring about natural disaster, even in the process of creating.

The goddesses Uhamiri and Oya are both beautiful and generous and both bring wealth to their followers. In both stories, the common personalities of strength, wisdom, and independence are personified in their protagonists. As the authors parallel the mythological stories of the goddesses with the life of the protagonists, they used creative license to change some aspects of the goddesses to humanize their persona. For example, the personified goddesses are givers of children to their worshippers. Yet, neither protagonist has children by the end of the story: Uhamiri has no children and Efuru lost her only child and is left childless. While the goddess Oya has nine children, Janie has none. The writers did not want their female characters to exist only in the traditional roles of wife and mother. Perhaps the authors preferred not to saddle their female characters with conventional female responsibilities thereby leaving them open to explore other roles.

Cultural Settings of the Novels

After choosing the goddess to portray, each author used a real place of familiarity for the story’s cultural setting. Thus, the female protagonists become self-defining in appropriate spaces to accommodate their African cultural mythological values. Moreover, the interconnections of the spiritual and the physical worlds are norms in the cultural contexts of both novels. In Efuru, Nwapa’s setting is her village Oguta where
Uhamiri, the goddess she personifies, resides in a lake and is explicitly accepted in that surrounding. *Efuru* takes place in a Nigerian village isolated from the colonial climate of the larger cities. In this setting, the African indigenous culture is the norm. Nwapa’s character is immersed in Oguta women’s culture: the protagonist is circumcised by a woman; a woman attends to her when she gives birth; and women in the marketplace and the community keep her informed.

Eatonville, Hurston’s hometown, is the main setting of her novel, *Their Eyes*. However, Oya—the goddess personified in her protagonist—is worshipped not openly but covertly in her community. Eatonville is an all-black southern town where remnants of the African cultural values and mores of enslaved Africans were still prevalent. In this cultural context, Janie is immersed in a male culture where men sit on the porch all day in front of the store. Her husband Joe, however, does not allow her to interact with the men, which makes her an outsider observing the male culture.

In addition to location, both authors used language of delivery to authenticate their cultural settings. The authors adopted the language that demonstrates their cultural intent. In the course of her story, Efuru translates Igbo language directly into English without using the rules of the latter language. In subtle ways, this variety of personalized English claims an African heritage that was discouraged during the British colonial rule. By using the African American English dialect, Hurston also reclaims a heritage that was not intended to flourish in the New World. Using these linguistic manipulations, both authors authenticate the sense of place where their stories reside.

In *Efuru*, Nwapa’s characters’ discussions are sometimes translated verbatim from the Igbo language to the English language. However, through the sprinkling of some
Igbo words throughout the narrative, the reader is made aware that in reality, these characters are really speaking in Igbo. Similarly, Hurston used a different language to give meaning to the setting of her story. The African American dialect, a derivation of English and African languages, adheres to its own rules. It has its own distinct set of phonological and syntactic rules that are often different from those of Standard English.

Uhamiri Personified as Efuru

Uhamiri is believed to give and sustain life, but she also destroys in order for change to occur. With her all-encompassing power, Uhamiri controls the watery transition between life and death. As Nwapa humanizes this goddess through Efuru’s life, there is no doubt about this deity’s place in the community. With the help of her partner-character Ajanupu as her dark side, Efuru exhibits the beauty and the good as well as the dark traits of Uhamiri. Like the goddess Uhamiri, Efuru is kind and generous and shares her wealth with the less fortunate, as evidenced in her giving money to Ogea’s parents who lost all their farm crops in the flood. Efuru also takes the sick Nwosu to the Western trained doctor and pays for his treatment.

As the Personified Uhamiri, Efuru is not only physically attractive but her feminine authority is embedded in her financial savvy. “Her hands make money,” as Nwapa puts it (34). In her first marriage, her husband Adizua is aware of this quality, so he knows his limitation: “Adizua was not good at trading. It was Efuru who was the brain behind the business” (36). Since he knew this, he told Efuru, “Efuru it is time you should face your trade. Your baby is old enough to be left with a nurse” (36). In her second marriage to Gilbert, Efuru’s mother-in-law also recognizes her financial acumen:

But what pleased Gilbert’s mother most was the fact that since her son had
married Efuru things had moved well for him. Any trade she put her hand to was profitable. Soon Gilbert began to contemplate building a house of his own and buying a canoe. Efuru told him that a canoe would be better at this stage. So they bought a canoe and gave it out on hire and this fetched money for them. (136)

Efuru’s good qualities are balanced by her dark side as represented in Ajanupu, who has the gift of verbal skills. Ajanupu, quick to let others know exactly what she thinks without mincing words, has an independent nature which is not curtailed by the convections of her community. When she becomes Efuru’s debt collector, Ajanupu uses any means necessary to collect any money owed. The healing power of Uhamiri is also exhibited through Ajanupu, who helps to deliver Efuru’s only child who later died. Throughout the story, Ajanupu is Efuru’s backbone until Efuru finally evolves. At the appropriate time, Ajanupu quietly exits the story.

Oya Personified as Janie

Similar to Nwapa’s personified goddess, Hurston also portrays Janie as a personified goddess, Oya. Hurston traces Janie life’s journey through Oya, the powerful, transformational goddess. Hurston adopts the same physical beauty and traits of Oya in portraying Janie’s personality. Like Oya, Janie is secretive and does not reveal her plan until she feels totally ready. Janie measures out a specified time for Joe to make a move. In this time frame, she becomes two persons in one—an outer self and an inner self—as she prepares herself for spiritual transformation. In her inner self, she understands Joe as a person and understands also how to neutralize his power over her. Janie has the
financial knowledge of Oya, the goddess of the marketplace. When Janie works alongside her second husband Joe in the Eatonville store, the business prospers.

Janie’s wisdom also manifests through her interaction with nature and her ability to use silence as a thinking tool while she introspectively sorts out her affairs. Janie is the duality of the good and the dark sides. On her good side, she praises Joe when he buys a mule to rescue it from hard work. Janie’s dark side emerges: When Joe insults her again in the store, she unleashes her tongue on him. When Gilbert slaps Ajanupu, she hits him with a pestle to appease her justified anger. Similarly, when Joe slaps Janie, she recoils into herself to prepare for battle in the future, and when the future arrives she curses Joe. When Tea Cake, her third husband slaps her, her revenge is shrouded in the hurricane, which makes the situation ripe for Tea Cake’s demise.

The Structure and the Quest for Self-Discovery

The writers’ works illustrate the use of Joseph Campbell’s theory of a hero’s journey of departure, initiation, and return. For each protagonist, the different stages of the journey are fraught with challenges that interfere with what is later understood to be their spiritual journey. However, the presentation of the characters as goddesses is explicit for one and implicit for the other. Nwapa presents Efuru, her protagonist, as the personified Igbo goddess more explicitly. The character resides in Oguta village in Nigeria where the blending of Christianity and African traditional religion are accepted. The goddess that Efuru personifies is embedded in the myth, history and custom of the Oguta people. Hurston, on the other hand, implicitly presents her protagonist as the personified Yoruba goddess, Oya. Hurston’s world, Eatonville, Florida, is where her
character resides. It is also a place where African traditional religion has a negative connotation—shrouded in secrecy and not practiced openly.

Another difference in the structure of the stories is Nwapa’s merging of two contrasting females, Efuru and Ajanupu, to represent Uhamiri while Hurston uses one female (Janie) to personify as Oya. Despite these two major differences in the representation of the goddesses, similar instances of the portrayal however occur in the different stages of the protagonists’ journey beginning with the departure which starts with marriage for both characters. Both protagonists venture into the world by getting married. Efuru gets married twice and Janie three times. In each of their multiple marriages, they encounter difficulties. Because of these difficulties, the strength exhibited in the goddesses they personify begins to evolve in the women as well. As the protagonists face various challenges, they are compelled to search deep within to understand their plight. Becoming wiser in the choices that they make to solve their problems, each protagonist is empowered spiritually and is able to return to her starting point. Efuru goes back to her father’s compound and Janie goes back to Eatonville. At this time, they now interact with the world around them from the elevated position of a supra-human.

Nwapa and Hurston create scenarios in which the characters must be introspective to discover their abilities. They reach into the Jungian collective unconscious to find solutions to their challenges. In this process, the two female protagonists come to realize that the divine union they were seeking will not occur through the union between a man and a woman. Becoming introspective, the two heroines gradually move to a higher dimension of consciousness. As their wisdom begins to manifest in the physical, they
become selective about the battles they fight, and they employ watchfulness and silence as endurance mechanisms that enable them to attain their goddess status.

The authors also use verbal artistry as a weapon through which their characters fight life challenges. Their authorities as women lie in their tongues and in their justified anger. Nwapa uses the tongue of Ajanpu to represent the mouthpiece that solves Efuru’s problems. Since Efuru seems too good for Nwapa to putrefy with a dark side, she sets up another strong female character to be the dark side. It is Ajanupu who performs this role; she goes to Efuru’s debtors to collect money owed to her; and she is the one with the power of words who curses Gilbert when he accused Efuru of committing adultery.

Similarly, Janie finds her “true” voice when she confronts Joe. True voice is used to indict the maturity of her voice in her second marriage compared to her immature verbal skills with her first husband, Logan. This verbal art becomes a token of her spiritualization when she returns to Eatonville and tells the story of her life to her best friend, Phoeby. Her words convey her life’s struggles, and imprint her legacy in her friend’s consciousness.

Transformation

The idea that the protagonists will go through a spiritual transformation is hinted early in the each of the stories. Right at the beginning Nwapa portrays Efuru as a wise young girl who has the ability to make decisions about her life even at the expense of offending her father and other family members. Her radiating beauty is a sign of her interaction with the spiritual dimension on a deeper level because she does not use her beauty to seduce men or to acquire undeserved wealth for herself. Efuru’s philosophical
acceptance of painful events in her life such as the death of her only child, and the abandonment by her husband, speaks to her elevated understanding of life.

Janie even at sixteen is in tune with nature. She understands the language of the pear tree and its symbolic message for her own self-discovery. Though she is young and immature at this stage in her life, she knows instinctively that it is time to explore beyond her familiar environment, so she recognizes the call to depart. Her grandmother though thinks this “departure” should be in the form of marriage to the older Logan Killicks. Later, Janie becomes a “mule” in order to bear the burden of her uncertain adventure. Janie is also able to reach within to her collective unconscious for religious knowledge to harness her goddess strength and to navigate her complicated journey into the unknown.

In her transformational journey, Efuru encompasses two cycles in the story. Her goddess female authority registers through her ability to fend for herself and introspectively dissect her challenges. When Adizua leaves her, she thinks through what she wants to do and comes to the unconventional decision to wait for him for only one year—not forever as society expects of her. In her second marriage, Efuru attempts to solve the problem of her childlessness by bringing in a surrogate mother as a second wife to Gilbert. This second marriage, however, fails; but she takes responsibility for her life emotionally and moves forward. She returns to her natal home and dedicates herself to giving to the community through her generosity and kindness. Her deeper transformation occurs as she begins to dream of Uhamiri, and from that point on her life begins to unravel. Finally, she finds her voice in the conversation with her childhood friend, Difu. She tells him she will not reconsider life with her husband; instead, she will return to her father’s house.
In Their Eyes, Janie goes through her spiritual initiation with three marriages. During the three cycles of marriage, her transformation is always prompted with a slap. Her grandmother Nanny slapped her into her first marriage to Logan Killicks. Through this forced marriage she ventures into the world to begin her initiation. In her second and third marriages, she is slapped into reality before transformation takes place after each incident. When Janie self-actualizes, she takes responsibility for her life and shares her life with others. Janie also finds her voice in her relationship with Joe, her second husband, who had demanded her silence as she worked alongside him in the store, and also when she tells her story to her best friend back in Eatonville.

Nwapa and Hurston used their fiction to celebrate and create strong, independent female characters who are not in opposition with the male gender in their communities; they use an archetypal pattern of personification for African female deities to create such strong characters. The writers began with the universal archetypal pattern for character creation, and then used myths and rituals that quickly place them in an African culture. To create strong and independent female protagonists, the writers had to rely on the African female religious culture. Their aligning of the traits of African goddesses with those of the female protagonists provided the avenue where the female characters were not stereotypical or conventional. The African feminist perspective projects a humanistic paradigm that does not pitch one gender against the other; therefore, one can understand why the female characters may appear unconventional.

The authors created events and situations where female protagonists remain strong and independent of their husbands. Efuru, for example, tried to help her first husband master the art of trading, but when he could not gain mastery of the profession,
she continues to trade and bring money into the home for both of them. In her second marriage, she continues in the same way. She was never in a competitive mode with either of her two husbands. She only tries to help whenever possible. When her fertility was in question in both marriages, Efuru was willing to accept a co-wife to make children for her husband; and she actually does have one co-wife in her second marriage to Gilbert.

Similarly Janie in Their Eyes worked alongside her three husbands in a complementary role until they take her for granted. Janie in her first marriage cooks and takes care of the house. She naively thought that once she marries Logan Killicks that love will come and her marriage will succeed, but love fails to thrive in the marriage; however, she continues to manage the household, cooking and cleaning. In her second marriage, she works along her husband in the store for many years. She wants a marriage of love and not just accumulation of wealth and power; still she stays married to Joe even though their ideas of marriage differ. Janie also tries to explain to Joe after he gets sick that she did not put a spell on him, which would have put her in an oppositional relationship with him. In her third marriage to Tea Cake, she goes with him to the Everglades and works in the muck with him. During the hurricane when he refuses to move to higher grounds, she stays with him at her own peril, although Tea Cake himself ultimately becomes the casualty.

Summary

This chapter compared Nwapa and Hurston using their biographical information and their narrative strategies. Both novelists use archetypes, modified to fit African religious culture of goddesses embedded in the collective unconscious, to create female
protagonists that are decisively wise and independent, and yet not hostile to the male gender in their community.

From Nwapa's literary perspective, the female deity Uhamiri becomes the writer's vessel for constructing her main character, Efuru. From Hurston's perspective, the female Yoruba deity Oya is implicitly explored through Janie, the main character. The functions and personalities of both goddesses, Uhamiri and Oya, are similar. Therefore, through the comparison of the functions and personality traits of the goddesses and the protagonists, it is fairly apparent that both Nwapa and Hurston have used the same archetypal model to create their strong female protagonists in their respective works of fiction.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Flora Nwapa and Zora Neale Hurston, although they are from different sides of the Atlantic Ocean, use the same archetypal pattern of the personified African goddess to create the female protagonists in their literary works, *Efuru* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God (Their Eyes)*, respectively. This conclusion is based on historical facts, research on African traditional religion, biographical information, a comparative analysis of the protagonists and archetypal goddesses, as well as literary interpretation of primary texts and related works.

Nwapa and Hurston portray their heroines as personified goddesses—discrediting stereotypical images that depict African women in fiction as docile, oppressed, and submissive and African-American women as emasculating and tongue-lashing matriarchs. These negative stereotypes disappear in Africana fictional works when characters are studied from the vantage of archetypal goddess patterns, African feminist theory, and African traditional religion.

Henry Gates, the African American critic, formally began the comparison of African and African American relationships in *The Signifying Monkey*. Wole Soyinka, in his work *Myth, Literature and The African World*, demonstrates the aligning of male protagonists in drama to gods in the African mythological stories. This dissertation has continued the critical discourse about Africana literature by showing an African religious
and cultural connection between Africana writers through their use of Jungian collective unconscious to access the African goddess archetype pattern that resides in their female protagonists.

Though Nwapa and Hurston received their formal education from a Western perspective, they have consciously decided to gravitate toward an African canon which best informs some of their realities. They use the African religious culture in the goddess archetype to advance the theory that the Africana woman's strength resides within and should be approached from the spiritual standpoint that can be accessed through the collective unconscious. In this vein, the study suggests that the Jungian universal collective unconsciousness archetype of the goddess is manifested through the personal unconsciousness of African religious culture in the forms of goddesses (for example, Uhamiri and Oya).

Secondly, African feminism places the woman in the spiritual role that projects her image as one who brings forth mankind through her womb. In this role, she is not in an oppositional relationship with the male in her community. Even though the stories of Nwapa and Hurston have stereotypical female roles that adorn the background of each, the authors have carefully navigated the paths that concentrate on the protagonists' struggle for growth and self-empowerment, which does not depend on society's acknowledgement for it to exist. The power of each female protagonist is outlined through comparison with the personalities of her goddess counterpart.

As represented in the two works of fiction studied, it appears that in some cases personality traits may define a woman more appropriately in addition to her environment. The female protagonists Efuru and Janie, due to the goddess personalities assigned to
them, do not allow the traditional roles usually assigned to women to define them completely. In the beginning of their discovery journey, they seem to embrace the traditional roles for women as wife or mother. However, as they evolved, the multi-dimensional, multi-faceted personalities of both women are exposed through the archetype of the chosen goddesses.

Even though they did not collaborate, nor were they from the same literary period, yet the pattern Hurston and Nwapa use to mold their female protagonists is not necessarily hostile to the male gender in their patriarchal settings. Chauvinistic men and patriarchal setting do exist in their worlds, but they serve no impediment to the women’s self-actualization journey. Through the goddess archetype, Nwapa and Hurston lead each of their female protagonists on a self-discovery journey that in reality is a search for a spiritual revelation that manifests at the end of each novel. Nwapa, the Nigerian writer, uses the female deity Uhamiri overtly as her vessel for the creation of the main character, Efuru. Hurston, on the other hand, uses the female deity Oya from the Yoruba cosmology covertly, and explores the goddess implicitly through Janie, the main character. The functions and personalities of both goddesses are almost identical.

Finally, Nwapa and Hurston through their fiction have preserved aspects of traditional Black culture that depict women in non-traditional roles. For Hurston, among others, one aspect of black culture that she cultivates is that of African religion that enslaved Africans brought with them from their homeland. In bringing Oya from the spiritual realm to dwell on the physical realm, Hurston validates the collective unconscious of her enslaved ancestors. Nwapa through her fiction also explores the African religious culture that was also not accepted during the colonization period in
Africa. She also makes a conscious decision to present her female protagonist in a positive light. This form of narratology relates a message of cultural preservation that elevates women.

Through this study, one finds a valid connection between Africans and African Americans in the African religious culture that resided in the subconscious of both writers. In other words, both authors use African cultural images in their personal unconscious to define their protagonists while still utilizing the universal goddess archetype. The monomyth represented by Campbell’s hero’s journey is the prototype for the self-actualizing journeys of Efuru and Janie. Both protagonists go through many phases in the course of their “journeys”. The different experiences that they encounter dictate the various personality qualities that emerge. Their life journeys start in the physical world and progress to another realm in their subconscious. Finally, they emerge as victors.

Archetypal criticism, the theory that advances the use of archetypal patterns, is based on Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious. This theory posits that although human beings have commonalities that transcend cultures, they also have specific personality traits that are influenced by specific cultures that reside in the subconscious. Adopting this position for the study, Nwapa and Hurston appear to have had repressed memories of African cultures and traditions in their subconscious, and these cultural memories could have been passed down to them from their ancestors. However, either through generational transfer or disclosure of unlearned knowledge, both authors used their writing of fiction as an avenue to explore their African ancestral heritage and to preserve aspects of African cultures and traditions for posterity.
Finally, future researchers may consider exploring how African cultural perspectives and religious culture in the goddess archetype reveal themselves in motherhood and other areas of female life, including the implications of childlessness, polygamy and serial monogamy.
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