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The Archetypal Fall from Grace: Figures of Hubris and Decline in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract
This paper examines the archetypal fall from grace of two central characters—Okonkwo from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Eugene Achike from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*—through the lens of Archetypal Literary Theory and Joseph Campbell's concept of the Hero's Journey. While both characters initially occupy positions of power and respect within their respective cultural spheres, their rigid ideals, authoritarianism, and unchecked hubris catalyze their eventual decline. This study argues that Okonkwo and Eugene are archetypal tragic heroes whose inability to evolve with their changing environments leads to personal and symbolic ruin. By positioning their narratives within Campbell's monomyth and classical archetypes, this paper reveals how these figures reflect broader cultural, moral, and psychological collapses in postcolonial African contexts.
Keywords: Archetypes, monomyth, hubris, tragic hero, universal symbol

Introduction
The archetypal motif of the fall from grace—where a revered individual succumbs to personal flaws or external shifts—is a cornerstone of literary tradition, transcending time and cultures. One of the most enduring archetypes is the tragic hero, whose excessive pride (hubris) leads to their downfall—a motif deeply

embedded in classical and modern narratives. Rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, the tragic hero is often a figure of great status whose excessive pride (hubris) leads to their inevitable downfall. In postcolonial African literature, this motif often becomes a vehicle for exploring the disruption of indigenous identities and sociopolitical structures. In this context, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* present protagonists who epitomize the archetypal fall from grace, shaped by their unyielding adherence to personal and cultural ideals, leading to their tragic demise. Through the characters of Okonkwo and Eugene Achike who are driven by personal and cultural imperatives, the novels illustrate the destructive nature of hubris and the inevitability of decline.

In principle, Archetypal Literary Theory, developed by Carl Jung, is a critical approach that explores the universal symbols, called archetypes that appear in literature across cultures and time periods. The theory posits that literature draws on universal mythic structures and symbolic characters. Also known as Mythological Criticism, this critical approach seeks to identify and analyze the universal symbols, called archetypes, that recur across cultures and time in literature, reflecting fundamental human experiences and desires, and that they are present in the collective unconscious, a shared psychological reservoir that contains the universal symbols and images of humanity (Jung 1959; Campbell 1949).

One of the key archetypes in literature is the fall from grace, which is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's inflated sense of self-importance leads to their downfall. According to Jung, the fall from grace is a manifestation of the shadow archetype, which represents the repressed or hidden aspects of the self (Jung 10). The shadow archetype is a universal symbol that appears in literature across cultures, and is often associated with the fall from grace. The fall from grace is a common theme in literature, and has been explored by many critics

and scholars. According to Northrop Frye, the fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's inflated sense of self-importance leads to their downfall (Frye 15). Frye argues that the fall from grace is a manifestation of the tragic flaw, which is a universal symbol that appears in literature across cultures. Frye further categorized these into recurring patterns—the tragic hero, the tyrant, the martyr, etc.—allowing for comparative literary analysis across cultures. Maud Bodkin also explores the theme of the fall from grace in her book *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*. According to Bodkin, the fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's inflated sense of self-importance leads to their downfall (Bodkin 20). Bodkin argues that the fall from grace is a manifestation of the archetype of the fallen hero, which is a universal symbol that appears in literature across cultures.

The fall from grace has also been explored in the context of feminist literature. According to Estella Lauter, the fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's inflated sense of self-importance leads to their downfall (Lauter 40). Lauter argues that the fall from grace is a manifestation of the archetype of the fallen woman, which is a universal symbol that appears in literature across cultures.

The fall from grace has been explored in the context of postcolonial literature in recent years. According to Bill Ashcroft, the fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's inflated sense of self-importance leads to their downfall (Ashcroft 50). Ashcroft argues that the fall from grace is a manifestation of the archetype of the fallen colonizer, which is a universal symbol that appears in literature across cultures. The fall from grace has been explored by many critics and scholars, and continues to be a relevant theme in literature today.

Another influential archetype in literature is the Hero's Journey, a concept developed by Joseph Campbell (1949). The Hero's Journey describes the transformative quest of the hero, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery and growth. Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) outlines a mythic structure known as the Hero's Journey or monomyth, comprising stages such as the Call to Adventure, Transformation, Call to Change, the Refusal, the Ordeal, and the Return. Although traditionally associated with victorious transformation, this model can also highlight deviations from the heroic arc, revealing tragic inversions. In this paper, the Hero's Journey is used not to glorify the protagonists but to chart the divergence that leads to their fall.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) feature protagonists who rise as patriarchal pillars within their societies but whose hubris precipitates their tragic downfall. Drawing on Archetypal Literary Theory and Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, this paper investigates how Okonkwo and Eugene represent archetypes of the authoritarian father and the tragic hero. Their respective declines symbolize the psychological and cultural ruptures of a continent grappling with tradition, modernity, colonial legacy, and spiritual identity. *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Okonkwo, a powerful and proud man living in pre-colonial Nigeria. Okonkwo's story is a tragic one, as his hubris and fear of weakness lead to his downfall. As Achebe writes, 'Okonkwo was a man who had come to be known as a fierce and fearless warrior' (Achebe 10). However, this bravado masks a deep-seated insecurity and fear of vulnerability. Similarly, *Purple Hibiscus* is a powerful novel that explores the complexities of post-colonial Nigeria. The novel tells the story of Eugene Achike, a wealthy and influential man who is struggling to come to terms with his own fears. Eugene's story is also one of hubris and decline, as his patriarchal values and desire for control lead to his downfall. As the novel states, 'My father was a big man, a man of great importance' (Adichie 11). However, this

grandeur is a façade that masks a deep-seated insecurity and fear of being overthrown.

Hence, the Archetypal Literary Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the fall from grace in these novels under study. This archetype is particularly relevant to the characters of Okonkwo and Eugene Achike, who both embody the qualities of hubris and pride, thus, examining the tragic trajectories of Okonkwo and Eugene through the lens of archetypal criticism, highlighting their rigid adherence to authority, their fear of perceived weakness, and their eventual downfall. The study will also investigate the cultural and historical contexts in which the novels are set, and how these contexts influence the characters' journeys. By examining the archetypal fall from grace in these novels, this study hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human condition and the universal themes that connect us across cultures. As Achebe writes, 'The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did' (20). This proverb highlights the dangers of self-praise and the importance of humility, themes that are central to both novels.

Okonkwo and the Burden of Tradition and Masculine Hubris

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* offers a portrayal of pre-colonial Igbo society and the disruptive influence of European colonialism. Okonkwo, the novel's protagonist, is a revered warrior and leader whose rigid masculinity and fear of weakness become his greatest flaws. His unwillingness to adapt to societal changes and his impulsive actions—such as the killing of Ikemefuna—set him on a path of self-destruction. According to the novel, 'He was afraid of being thought weak.' (61) Okonkwo is a man defined by his obsessive fear of failure and effeminacy. His entire life is overcompensation for the perceived weakness of his father, Unoka. His pride and rigid masculinity make him a figure of excessive hubris. His rise to prominence in Umuofia is marked by his

strength, martial prowess, and an almost pathological disdain for anything considered weak (61)

This pride leads him to commit acts of extreme violence, including the killing of Ikemefuna, a boy who considers him a father. The act, rather than reinforcing his strength, alienates him from his own sense of morality: 'He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak." (Achebe 61)

According to Carl Jung, the concept of the archetype refers to 'a mental pattern or image that is shared among members of a particular culture or across cultures' (Jung 4). The archetype of the fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures, where a character's hubris and pride lead to their downfall. Okonkwo embodies this archetype, as his rigid adherence to traditional Igbo values and his fear of being seen as weak lead to his tragic demise. His hubris and pride ultimately lead to his downfall, as he refuses to adapt to the changing circumstances of his village and instead clings to his traditional values (Achebe 10). According to Simon Gikandi, Okonkwo's downfall is a result of his inability to reconcile his traditional values with the changing circumstances of his village (Gikandi 20).

Okonkwo's hubris is also evident in his treatment of his son, Nwoye, whom he perceives as weak and effeminate. His inability to understand and connect with Nwoye is a manifestation of his own pride and fear of vulnerability. As Achebe writes, 'Okonkwo was a man who had come to be known as a fierce and fearless warrior' (Achebe 10). However, this bravado masks a deep-seated insecurity and fear of being seen as weak. Okonkwo's downfall is equally precipitated by his accidental killing of a clansman, which leads to his exile and eventual suicide.

In essence, Okonkwo embodies the classical tragic hero driven by hamartia—his fatal flaw being an obsessive fear of weakness. His entire life is constructed in opposition to the memory of his 'effeminate' father, Unoka, driving him to pursue hypermasculinity, dominance, and stoicism. As a respected leader in Umuofia, Okonkwo initially follows the heroic path: he earns fame, wealth, and status, undergoing trials such as defeating Amalinze the Cat and enduring exile after the accidental killing of a kinsman. However, when the colonial presence emerges, Okonkwo faces the 'Call to Change,' which he categorically refuses. Rather than adapt, he clings to a collapsing patriarchal and warrior-based value system. Campbell's Hero's Journey falters at the point of 'Transformation': Okonkwo cannot reconcile his identity with the new sociopolitical reality. His eventual suicide—a desecration in Igbo culture—signals not only personal failure but the symbolic death of the old order. Ultimately, Okonkwo's inability to reconcile his identity with the evolving sociopolitical landscape leads to his tragic suicide, an act that signifies both resistance and surrender: 'It is against our custom... It is an abomination for a man to take his own life.' (207)

Critics like Abiola Irele (2001) argue that Okonkwo's tragedy is not merely individual but emblematic of cultural dissonance: a society built on communal negotiation is usurped by a protagonist who embraces violence and isolation. His fall reflects the larger fragmentation of African cultural institutions under colonial strain.

Eugene Achike and the Tyranny of Religious Hubris

Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) presents Eugene Achike as a tragic figure whose excessive religious zeal and authoritarian rule over his family result in his downfall. A staunch Catholic, Eugene's devotion to colonial Christianity is accompanied by an abusive disposition that isolates him from his loved ones. His strict Catholicism and obsession with perfection make him a tyrannical figure. His hubris stems from his belief that

he alone understands morality and righteousness. His fanatical religiosity blinds him to the suffering of his family, particularly his wife and children. Like Okonkwo, Eugene justifies his actions through a rigid worldview. His children, Kambili and Jaja, suffer under his iron-fisted control, and his oppressive nature mirrors Okonkwo's authoritarian masculinity: 'Papa flung his heavy missal across the room. It landed on Jaja's shoulder. "You should strive for perfection."' (Adichie 7)

Notably, Eugene's inability to recognize the destructive consequences of his own actions eventually leads to his death at the hands of his wife, Beatrice, marking his tragic fall. His pride and arrogance lead to his downfall, as he becomes increasingly isolated and tyrannical (Adichie 30). According to Ernest N. Emenyonu, Eugene's downfall is a result of his inability to reconcile his traditional values with the changing circumstances of his family and society (Emenyonu 40). Eugene Achike's arc mirrors Okonkwo's in psychological structure but is distinguished by its setting and modernity. A devout Catholic, Eugene is a public philanthropist and staunch anti-corruption advocate, earning reverence as a model citizen. Within his household, however, he exercises tyrannical control, inflicting physical and emotional abuse in the name of spiritual purity.

Eugene's journey also fits an inverted Hero's Journey. His 'Call to Adventure' is religious conversion, an inner quest toward salvation. Yet, his rigid understanding of Catholic doctrine leads him to conflate divinity with authoritarianism. Rather than undergoing apotheosis or reconciliation, Eugene's path culminates in moral decay and martyrdom. His fall, unlike Okonkwo's, is not a public disgrace but a private implosion, culminating in his wife's rebellion through poisoning—a symbolic rejection of his oppressive legacy. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) and Susan Andrade (2008) interpret Eugene's fall as an allegory of postcolonial spiritual trauma, where imported belief systems

displace indigenous values, resulting in psychological fragmentation and familial collapse. Eugene's brutality, much like Okonkwo's, stems from an unyielding adherence to an ideology that forbids compromise. His sense of self-worth is deeply entangled with his need to control and punish those who deviate from his imposed moral code.

Ultimately, Eugene Achike's character embodies the archetype of the fall from grace. Eugene's hubris is rooted in his patriarchal values and his desire to control and dominate those around him. As Adichie writes, 'My father was a big man, a man of great importance' (Adichie 11). However, this grandeur is a facade that masks a deep-seated insecurity and fear of being overthrown. Eugene's downfall is precipitated by his physical and emotional abuse of his family, particularly his wife, Beatrice, and his daughter, Kambili.

Comparative Analysis and Archetypal Significance

Both *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* employ archetypal patterns of the tragic hero's journey—hubris, downfall, and symbolic death—to critique rigid ideologies and the perils of authoritarian rule. By examining Okonkwo and Eugene through the lens of Archetypal Literary Theory, this paper seeks to explore the universal implications of their narratives, emphasizing how their downfalls serve as cautionary tales against excessive pride and inflexibility in the face of change.

Okonkwo and Eugene are archetypal patriarchs whose obsession with control and purity precipitates their downfall. They inhabit the mythic roles of the Tyrant and the Fallen Hero—figures whose rule, initially celebrated, becomes destructive. Their deaths serve as narrative and symbolic closures, clearing space for renewal through secondary characters: Nwoye and Kambili, respectively, who represent the archetype of the Seeker or Healer. While Okonkwo's downfall is precipitated by his accidental killing of a

clansman, Eugene's downfall is precipitated by his own actions, specifically his physical and emotional abuse of his family. This difference highlights the distinct cultural contexts in which the novels are set. While *Things Fall Apart* is set in pre-colonial Igbo society, *Purple Hibiscus* is set in post-colonial Nigeria.

Despite these cultural differences, both novels illustrate the destructive nature of hubris and the inevitability of decline. As Achebe writes, 'The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did' (Achebe 20). This proverb highlights the dangers of self-praise and the importance of humility. Similarly, Adichie writes, 'My father's hands were strong, but his heart was weak' (Adichie 50). This contrast between physical strength and emotional weakness highlights the flaws in Eugene's character and foreshadows his eventual downfall. While Achebe and Adichie operate in different temporal and cultural contexts, both texts critique the dangers of rigid ideological adherence—be it traditional masculinity or religious extremism. The fall from grace is thus not merely a personal tragedy but a literary device that reveals the fractures in patriarchal and colonial legacies.

Conclusion

Okonkwo and Eugene Achike exemplify the archetypal fall from grace through their hubristic refusal to adapt to evolving realities. Their narratives, structured around the inversion of Campbell's Hero's Journey, subvert traditional heroic ideals to foreground tragedy, repression, and resistance. Through Archetypal Literary Theory, their stories reveal enduring cultural conflicts—between tradition and change, authority and compassion, colonialism and identity. Ultimately, their deaths mark the end of destructive legacies and the emergence of more introspective, adaptive, and hopeful generations. Hence, Okonkwo and Eugene Achike, as archetypal tragic heroes, epitomize the consequences of unchecked hubris. Their rigid adherence to personal and cultural ideals,

combined with their fear of weakness, leads them to a tragic fall from grace. Achebe and Adichie, through these figures, critique not only toxic masculinity and authoritarianism but also the dangers of inflexible worldviews in the face of change. Their downfalls serve as cautionary tales, reinforcing the archetypal theme that excessive pride and fear of vulnerability inevitably lead to ruin.

In sum, the archetypal fall from grace is a universal pattern that appears in literature across cultures. Through the characters of Okonkwo and Eugene Achike, both *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* illustrate the destructive nature of hubris and the inevitability of decline. As Jung writes, 'The archetype of the fall is a reminder that the human psyche is prone to inflation and that the only way to avoid this fate is through humility and self-awareness' (Jung 15). Both novels offer powerful cautionary tales about the dangers of hubris and the importance of humility.

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