

Reimagining Archetypal Feminist Patterns in Bolu Babalola's Love in Colour

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Abstract

Traditional mythical narratives emphasise archetypal beliefs about women, particularly as it relates to beauty, and other character traits. These beliefs have been generated from the Greek-Roman ideas of the goddesses, which have informed various early female narratives and general societal beliefs about women also in African literature. However, recent narrations have been expanded on retelling these stories from the African purview. Therefore, this paper aimed to examine how African writers have recreated archetypal feminist patterns from universal mythical figures in contemporary narratives. To achieve this the archetypal criticism of Jung and Bolen was adopted in a descriptive analysis of selected stories from Bolu Babalola's Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from around the World Retold. The analysis of 'Naleli', 'Nefertiti', 'Osun' and 'Siya' revealed that Babalola's narratives have transformed culturally known goddesses into contemporary feminist images to retell their stories from a relatable perspective. In addition, Babalola's work challenges patriarchal archetypal notions of femininity imbued with weakness and vulnerability by making them symbols of power and strength. The stories emphasise Babalola's philosophy that the woman reflects the "beauty and beast phenomenon which affirms the diversity of the female gender. The paper concludes that western archetypal abstractions limit the evaluation and interpretation of African archetypal myths, thus, works on such feminine mythical tendencies should reflect the African cultural specificities by adopting tenets, which encompass the ideological purview of the Africans.

Keywords: *Femininity, Goddess Archetype, Decolonial, Babalola African literature*

Introduction

Femininity in general parlance is attributed to patterns of behaviour, characteristics and physical and psychological roles associated with the female gender. These characteristics are informed by both traditional, religious and societal expectations which perceives women as a gender that embodies beauty, warmth, intuition, empathy tenderness and deep emotional connections. These beliefs are embedded in Greco-Roman beliefs about women as reflected in the different Greek goddesses such as Athena, Hera, Aphrodite and Artemis. Nahal (2017) affirms that traditionally, "women were always taught to help men and thus derive their existence in relation to them. Secondly, women were encouraged to externalize the aspects of femininity such as docility, selflessness, beauty to validate themselves in a society. Thirdly, women have enjoyed lesser rights than men" (p 3374). This is an indication of the general societal perception of women, and this is seen in different literary works over the years. It is important to note that there have been transformations in contemporary depictions of women and their femininity such that different writers have resulted to diverse expressions of women through incorporating traditional ideas and myth into modern modifications and depictions. This paper thus seek to examine how Babalola infuses traditional ideas in portraying contemporary society through an archetypal analysis of "Osun", "Siya", "Nefertiti" and "Naleli"- selected stories from the collection.

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Love in Colours and Critical Reception

Bolu Babalola's *Love in Colours* is a collection of short stories centered on a retelling of mythical stories from a modern perspective. The work contains a total of thirteen stories divided into two books; the first book consists of ten (10) mythical stories while the second book is titled *New Tales* and contains three (3) stories. As a collection on love stories, the book has not received much critical attention based on the researcher's knowledge and this may be largely due to its newness. This paper will therefore contribute to the expanding body of work on the texts by examining its relevance in literary studies.

Literature and Theoretical Review: Psycholinguistics, Archetypal and Decolonial Criticism

This paper is expanded on Psycholinguistics, Archetypal literary criticism and decolonialism. Psycholinguistics and Archetypal criticism are two distinct but similar fields of study; while psycholinguistics is central to the mental process involved in the use of language, archetypal criticism emphasises universal symbols and patterns, the connection in both can be seen in Jung's archetypal framework, Bolen notes that "Jung introduced the concept of archetypes into psychology" (p. 15).. The Archetypal criticism in the study is rooted in Jung and Bolen's mythical classification particularly as it relates to the collective unconscious; the instinctual patterns of behaviour concerned with the human psychology which reflects universal beliefs. Archetypal criticism emphasises the recurrence of certain patterns of thoughts and behaviours in different traditions which transcends individual experience but reflect universal beliefs. These beliefs are seen in dreams, religious symbols, myth and in literature. In Frye's perspective, these universal views are explored in literature through the character, plot and various symbols.

These universal symbols according to Bartlett (1932) Rumelhart (1980), Stockwell (2002) are foregrounded in preexisting cognitive frameworks known as schemas and reflected in literature as metaphors and symbols. Thus, concepts and language used in literary works trigger an already existing knowledge classified as archetypal beliefs and symbols. Studies by von Franz (1970), Spolsky (1993), Miall and Kuiken (1994), Turner (1996) and Bolen (2004), have explored the centrality of human thoughts and language in archetypal criticism by noting the convergence of universally shared assumptions rooted in symbols and narratives which resonates with the human mind. This study thus adopts Bolen's concept, which is amenable to this study.

Bolen Jean is a Jungian analyst whose study explores the mythical psychological patterns in feminine attitudes. Bolen (2004) identifies that a fusion of Jungian archetypal concepts and feminist discourse gives a "binocular vision into the psychology of women" (p.5). According to Bolen, "women are influenced by powerful inner forces, or archetypes, which can be personified by Greek goddesses and the feminist perspective provides an understanding of how outer forces or stereotypes...reinforce some goddess patterns and repress others" (p.5). Her ideological perception emphasises the dominance of preexisting mythical forces in the interpretation of female attitudes and pattern of behaviour. Bolen identifies three goddess archetypes- citing references from Jung's perspective of the female characteristic-by categorising the different Greek goddesses based on various qualities which include beauty, wisdom, and love. The three categorisations as presented in Bolen (2004) are first, the Virgin goddesses- Artemis, Athena, and Hestia- who represent autonomous, self-sufficient femininity. According to Bolen, women in whom these archetypes are active "are not victimised by others, nor do they suffer" because they maintain strong boundaries and self-direction. These archetypes embody women who are complete unto themselves, who define their identities through their own achievements, goals, and inner lives rather than through relationships with others. Artemis represents the wilderness, independence, and sisterhood, Athena embodies strategic wisdom, craft, and rational thought; Hestia signifies interiority, contemplation, and sacred space.

Second, the Vulnerable goddess- Hera, Demeter, and Persephone- who represent relational femininity and partnership-orientation. These archetypes manifest in women whose identities and fulfillment are deeply connected to their relationships: Hera as wife and partner, Demeter as mother and nurturer, Persephone as daughter and maiden. The term vulnerable in this description is used to indicate an openness to relationship and emotional connection and these are qualities that have been exploited by patriarchal cultures but which also represent profound sources of power (p. 40).

Third, is the Alchemical goddess symbolised by Aphrodite- the goddess of transformation, passion, creativity, and generative love. Aphrodite represents the integrative principle as she combines autonomy (choosing her own partners) with relationality (deep engagement with others), and also transforms through connection, and embodies the creative principle that generates new possibilities. Bolen argues that Aphrodite's 'consciousness is focused on what is occurring in the present and that she generates love and beauty, procreation and new growth. The alchemical goddess represents feminine power that transcends the virgin/vulnerable binary, suggesting that true feminine wholeness requires integration of multiple archetypal attitudes. Bolen affirms that the "presence of common archetypal patterns in all people accounts for similarities in the mythologies of many different cultures" (15). The commonality in the archetypal patterns is emphasised in her Greek goddess archetypes which has been used for universal description of women. However, this paper aims to decolonise the cultural universal patterns of behaviour

as linked to the Greek Goddesses by identifying cultural specificity in the interpretation feminine attitudes as presented by Babalola in her *Love in Colours*.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts the descriptive analytical design and a qualitative research approach. The objective of the paper was achieved through an analytical study of four stories from Bolu Babalola's *Love in Colours: Mythical Tales from around the World Retold* purposively selected. The selected stories titled "Osun", "Siya", "Nefertiti" and "Naleli" were analysed using Bolen's Archetypal Goddess approach developed from Jung's archetypal collective unconscious.

Results and Discussion

This section contains the presentation of the results based on the analysis of the data and the discussion. The results are presented under three headings. First is the evaluation of mythical figures and their representation in Babalola's *Love in Colours*. This is followed by the discussion of Babalola's characters and the goddess archetypes. Lastly is the presentation of decolonisation of feminine archetypal patterns in selected stories in Babalola's *Love in Colours*.

Mythical Figures and their Representation in Babalola's *Love in Colours*

Babalola's *Love in Colours* revisits and represent different mythical bodies and their significance in the African tradition. From the title, Babalola emphasises that the text is a representation of figures who have attained mythical standard in different traditions. In *Love in Colours*, Babalola identifies mythical feminist figures from Nigeria, (Osun), Ghana (Siya and Yaa), Egypt (Nefertiti) Lesotho (Naleli). The focus of this paper is on the stories titled Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli. Osun in Yoruba mythology has been classified as an Orisha, the ruler of Osogbo, the goddess of fertility, womanhood, the divine spirit of water and a mother (Kuyebi 2008). Her dominion transcends the Nigerian Yoruba space as it extends to other societies like Jamaica, Brazil and Cuba. Osun is often described as a radiant, beloved and powerful woman who resides in the Osun River located in Osogbo, Nigeria and also depicted as the wife of Sango. In Babalola's retelling of her story in the eponymous narration, Osun is depicted as a powerful lady whose passionate relationship with Sango reflects her power and dominance, as she is described as the only woman who could "calm (Sango) when he thunder(s) over some perceived disrespect or when someone dared to question his innate authority" (Osun, p. 4). Babalola's focus on the relationship between Osun and Sango and her eventual fall for Erinle indicates Osun's strength and her refusal to demean herself over love as Sango is often seen flirting with other women. Babalola examines her vulnerability and her power as a woman. Siya in mythical traditions represent the pure maiden archetype in the legend of Wagadou in Western Africa. In the legend, Siya a beautiful maiden was chosen to be sacrificed to the serpent Bida- a divine snake who takes human sacrifice in exchange for Wagadou's prosperity. However, this did not happen because of the intervention of Siya's betrothed, Maadi who kills the serpent. In the fictional narration in *Love in Colour*, Babalola depicts Siya as a warrior who has deep love for her people and her nation as seen in her willingness to fight and even die for it. After the death of her father and the betrayal by her uncle, Bida, Siya forms her own army called 'The Eagles', and they fight tirelessly to protect their land from Bida's invading forces. Her actions reflect a form of love that is rooted in duty, sacrifice, and a desire to preserve peace and justice for her people.

Nefertiti is an Egyptian historical figure whose name translates to beauty has come. She was a Queen married to Pharaoh Akhenaten and both were known to have 'promoted a monotheistic religion centered on the sundisc'. It is believed that she ruled after her husband's death and this is fictionally depicted in modern day rendition in Babalola's *Love in Colour*. In the story, Nefertiti is presented as a queen, leader and a woman with needs. As a queen, she defends her boundaries and protects the vulnerable women from abuse and neglect. In the story, her domain at Thebes City, Kemet is a club, a home and sanctuary for other women. Her story begins with her punishment for Mr Hermit who had beat his beautiful strong and smart wife to the point of miscarriage. She tells him "Mr Hemti... I'm not going to kill you. I'm not a brute like you. And I know you won't lay a finger on her again...because you won't be able to" (Nefertiti p. 135). Nefertiti's character symbolises a combination of sovereign power and compassion as she fiercely protects all in her domain.

In Naleli, Babalola focuses on the Lesotho myth of a woman whose beauty is hidden by her parent beneath a crocodile skin. Her beauty is eventually discovered by a prince named Khosi who falls in love with her to protect her from public gaze (Jacottet 1908). Babalola uses Naleli's story to emphasise individual acceptance as seen through the character of Naleli who has vitiligo. Naleli's confidence has been battered by people's reaction to her which makes her self-conscious of her body. She's often reminded of her physical condition by questions like "Were you born that way? or Did it like...grow? or Do the white parts of your skin like...itch?" (Naleli p. 164). Such questions made her self-aware and kept her from activities she loved like swimming, her classmates and childhood best friend and crush Khosi. Eventually, she overcomes this feeling by internalising her fears and appreciating her true beauty and worth.

Retelling the stories by Babalola captures the significance of the mythical and historical figures. As individuals, the characters are not mere symbols for love, beauty and femininity. Their true essence is captured in the ways the characters embody strength, power and reconnection with their innate abilities. The stories are not set in ancient societies, they are transplanted in modern societies to depict their significance and representation in modern characterization. Each of the protagonists is a stereotype for modern characters whose actions reflect their passion, commitment and ideology.

In the four stories, the protagonists are portrayed as exceptionally beautiful. Oṣun's beauty is described as otherworldly, placing her among the gods. Siya is described as a woman whose beauty turns heads and captures hearts instantly. Nefertiti is described in rich, sensual terms- dark, sweet, and full-bodied- highlighting her physical appeal and Naleli's beauty shines through her eyes and natural appeal. These descriptions establish the women's beauty as striking and memorable. However, they are not only beautiful but also powerful. Oṣun possesses innate power, which gives her influence over others, including the powerful Sango, all she needs to say is "be still" (Osun 17) and Sango's thunder is abated. Also, it is this beauty that captures Erinle and made him bold enough to approach Osun despite the imminent danger from Sango. As a goddess of water, her power is natural and respected in her world. Siya's power lies in her position as a military commander, leading an army and making strategic decisions for her people. Nefertiti is the Queen mother "the queen of the House of Aten" who has a natural ability to enchant, control and protect her people. Naleli's power is more subtle as it lies in her intellectual ability and the control she gains through her complexion. These women are portrayed as both beautiful and powerful, with their beauty enhancing their influence. Babalola highlights that these women embrace their femininity and still hold significant power in society. This description challenges the idea that beauty limits women to passive roles and instead shows it can coexist with strength and influence. In Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli, Babalola redefines power and beauty as a force of strength rather than as a weakness.

It is important to note that the protagonists' beauty, power and strength do not make them immune to self doubt as presented in the stories as each of the characters personally nurses emotional turmoil which makes them relatable in real situations. Osun is presented as a character people dote on, she was "used to being looked at" and never seen. According to Babalola "Osun was accustomed to being a spectacle, people observing her in wonder, trying to surmise what they could from what they saw. Which was why she hid as much as she could and kept as much of herself to herself" (Osun, p. 2). A situation which prevents her from even laughing out loud as she would want and made her unapproachable. This compounds her relationship with Sango as he finds other ladies more likeable. Sango's remarks about her not liking to dance further shakes her self-image, but she still feels unable to change, bound by her sense of duty and familiarity with her role. Oṣun hides her true self and conforms to the image others have created for her. This leads to a deep sense of loneliness. To be accepted and appear normal, she tries to imitate her sister, Yemoja, whom she often compared herself to. However, this only worsens her feelings of inadequacy. When Erinle enters her life, his sincerity and love help her to see herself more clearly. With his support, Oṣun accepts herself and reveals her true nature to the world. Though this surprises others, it brings her freedom and genuine happiness.

Similarly, Siya is conflicted between her public role and her personal desires. After rising to the position of commander, Siya begins to believe that she must suppress her femininity to maintain respect and authority. She longed to express herself more freely. Her desire to wear elegant clothing and embrace her femininity is stifled until Maadi reassures her that she can be both strong and feminine. His reassurance encourages her to be more open and confident in expressing herself. As a result, Siya begins to dress in ways that reflect both her strength and her femininity. The necklace Maadi gifts Siya symbolises her feminine charm and this marks a turning point in her life as she begins to dress like a woman. This shows that she does not need to suppress any part of herself to be respected. She can be a woman and be a warrior.

Nefertiti's self doubt is portrayed through her fear of losing those close to her especially the ones she is meant to protect. This fear is physically depicted when Nefertiti discovers Baz, her friend and right hand in a pool of blood after she was shot by an officer. Nefertiti's fear was overwhelming that she buckles and faints in shock. This moment depicts her anxiety and dread that she might fail in her duty to others. Nefertiti's sense of duty and dread of failing also prevents her from fallen in love. She believes this would compromise her capacity to protect those who depend on her and this made her keep her emotions contained. This moment reveals that, at times, individuals place these expectations on themselves, even when those around them do not.

Like other characters, Naleli's social interaction is inhibited by her profound self-awareness. She constantly withdraws from her classmates as a result of her perceived physical difference. Although, she is aware of her intellectual dominance over others but this intellectual confidence does not extend to her consciousness of her physical self. Her appearance and the way she imagines others see her becomes a barrier and prevents her from participating on fun activities with the others. Her self-preservation also contributes to her attempt to suppress her feelings for Khosi

to avoid his rejection. She was eventually encouraged, by her friend, Letscha, to attend a party and it was at this party she arrived at a self-discovery and sees herself as she truly is, a smart, intelligent, beautiful woman.

In each of these stories, Babalola demonstrates the importance of embracing ones' identity and this can only be achieved by freeing oneself from general expectations of others which limits growth and self awareness. In the view, the next section will dwell on decolonising general archetypal beliefs as it relates to the culture reflected in the selected stories.

Babalola's Characters and the Goddess Archetypes

Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli exemplify the goddess archetypes in their characterisation. Each character can be described as virgin goddess, vulnerable goddess and an alchemical goddess. Babalola presents these female mythical protagonists as wise, independent, self sufficient and protective. The radiance, wisdom and glory of Osun is not dependent on anybody but herself. She is a maiden, a love and beauty goddess and a woman wise beyond her years.

Siya and Nefertiti both reflect the independent, protective feminine power; a reflection of a fierce warrior queen who defends her boundaries and protect the vulnerable. They are equally both beautiful and compassionate. Both Siya and Nefertiti are imbued with the characteristics of the different goddess archetypes.

Naleli possesses the power of self-sufficiency. Her transformation is contingent upon the discovery of her beauty, which is totally dependent on self-realisation and self-worth. Naleli's acceptance of her appearance activates the innate beauty goddess, which is not to attract others but in honour of herself.

Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli embody Babalola's concept of beauty and the beast in her declaration that "I think women are beauty and beast. We can be sweet, yet savage. We can love deeply and fiercely, but that doesn't mean we're not intelligent and capable of making our own decisions". This statement resonates with each of her protagonists as they navigate love, beauty, power and self-realisation.

Decolonising Feminine Archetypal Patterns in Selected Stories in Babalola's *Love in Colours*

One of the basic limitations of traditional mythical archetypal criticism is its focus on Greco-Roman mythologies as a universal representation of feminine archetypes as seen in Bolen's classification. This centrality has marginalised goddesses from other societies particularly the African goddess. Babalola's stories have aimed to decentralise this belief by portraying different goddesses from other societies to demonstrate their existence and mythical influence on humanity from an African point of view.

Each of the protagonists in the selected stories integrate multiple archetypal images beyond Bolen's categorisation. This shows that the characters are not limited to single archetypal roles. This is a demonstration that the female power transcends single role as she encompasses different attributes that cannot be consigned to one definition. In addition, the multiplicity in the characters of Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli contrasts with the categorisation of the Greek and Roman goddesses, an indication that the figures from non-European traditions are larger than the boxes they have been categorised into using the European classification. For instance, Aphrodite, the alchemist goddess is imbued with the power of beauty, love, sensuality and generative power, Osun has these qualities coupled with being a river goddess, a wealth goddess, a mother goddess, and a healer. This shows that Osun as a central figure integrates multiple characteristics which belong to different European mythological goddesses.

Beyond integration, Babalola decenters and challenges the assumption that Greek and Roman narratives should be seen as reference point for universal archetypes as seen in her portrayal of African figures whose characterisation symbolises different individual characters in the actual society. The belief in Eurocentric goddesses have diminished the importance and existence of goddess archetypes in different traditions of the world. Babalola's text thus seek to reestablish their significance.

In essence, the decolonial leaning of this paper aligns with recent studies that seek to deemphasise European assumptions in Jung's archetypal studies. This is achieved through Babalola's adoption of various cultural myths in her depiction of archetypal wisdom and values which shows that different cultural contexts can produce different archetypal images. The paper avers that archetypal patterns are universal as they represent various fundamental beliefs, however, the images through which they are portrayed are specific to different cultures.

Conclusion

The analysis of the selected stories Osun, Siya, Nefertiti and Naleli from Babalola's *Love in Colours* shows the imperativeness of archetypal criticism in contemporary literary traditions. Her retelling of mythical stories is an indication of contemporary indebtedness to classical cultural beliefs. In adapting mythical stories in modern narrative, Babalola challenges different classical notion of femineity informed by European abstractions. This paper thus concludes that European archetypal abstractions limit the evaluation and interpretation of African archetypal myths, thus, works on such feminine mythical tendencies should reflect the African cultural specificities by adopting tenets which encompass the ideological purview of the Africans.

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