• PORTFOLIO •

Fortune Chigozie Ogulere

English Program

Union Adventist University

Introduction to the Inkbender.

I picked up a pen when the Igbo in me came knocking. That was many years ago after my form six teacher had called me a second-class writer. At the time, my language was crude, "unrefined," and in her words "un-English-like." But why did I need to be English-like? My nose was very wide, my skin—black, like ripened elderberries, and my stories rooted in the dusty streets of Nigeria, where my identity was shaped.

The stories I wrote in my early childhood were often shrouded in silence—hidden away from the prying eyes of judgement. Writing was my guilty pleasure—a secret outlet for the creative chaos that was my mind. It would take me another decade to unearth the courage to embrace my voice fully, guided by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's assertion: "To choose to write, is to reject silence." Adichie's words echo the truth of my journey as a young Nigerian writer. For years, I silenced myself—not because my voice lacked power, but because I feared it would be dismissed as too Avant Garde—too Igbo. Yet, it is precisely this tension between cultural identity and creative expression that drives my writing today. My stories are rooted in themes of cultural identity, belonging, and the dualities of human complexity, blending the personal and the universal. As an immigrant, I am equally curious about how African literature contributes to global literary conversations and how I can have a say in that.

My writing is the strongest when I don't think. When I dive into it like a mad man—that's when it flows from an endless stream of ideas. I'm a pantser. I tend to be organized here and there but for the most part I let my characters lead me, show me their world and the deep dark secrets they're ashamed to let anyone else know. Some days they whisper endlessly in my ears, other days they are radio silent—feeding me crumbs. This symbiotic relationship can mean many things for my manuscript; many plot holes to fix and fast paced characters who move from saying hi to being in a relationship the next day. Like Blacksmith to hammer, pacing is a weakness I need to work on. I need to find a balance that feels natural and fully lived in.

My academic and creative journey has been a constant negotiation between finding my voice and refining my craft. Before college, my internships with multimedia companies such as Tribes and History allowed me to hone my storytelling for diverse audiences. As a resident writer for SLAM, a traveling theater group, I deepened my understanding of dialogue, character development, and stage dynamics. During this time, I also enrolled in ABS film academy, where I received training in screenwriting, acting, and cinematography, further expanding my appreciation for storytelling as a multidimensional craft. These formative experiences cemented my desire to pursue creative writing as a lifelong journey.

At Union Adventist University, my major in English provided a solid foundation in literary analysis and storytelling. I contributed regularly to *The Clocktower*, the university's official paper, where my articles often explored immigrant narratives and journalistic writing. Inspired by this, I launched *The Truth*, a short-lived but impactful independent paper, where I discovered the powerful ways my voice could advocate for change. My feature writing course introduced me to magazine writing, and I had the privilege of working with *Outlook Magazine*, a Mid-American regional publication focused on community and storytelling. Seeing my name alongside an Igbo proverb I contributed felt like heritage made tangible—a testament to the power of cultural expression. I am also proud of my article on environmental justice for people of color, which was published by *Message Magazine*. Writing for a publication of that caliber allowed me to examine the intersection of environmental issues with social justice, deepening my understanding of the impact that both storytelling and activism can have in shaping public perception and advocating for change. Beyond publishing, I have sought opportunities to engage with other writers and refine my craft collaboratively. As a peer consultant at the Studio for Writing and Speaking, I engaged in critiquing, editing, and refining the work of other writers. This role has taught me to view revision

not merely as a step in the process, but as a creative act in its own right, where uncovering layers of meaning can transform a piece into its most authentic form.

As someone who favors style over technicality, I have grown tremendously as a writer. This past semester in many ways more than one have aided me in unearthing my voice. I no longer feel like a sophomore writer (sophomore because I was born a writer.) but a mature Inkbender who can invoke the embers of my style and tone. Creative writing class helped shape my writing structure and introduced me to the superpower of group revision. Going into the MFA program at St. Joseph's University, Brooklyn, this coming fall, I see this as a necessary skill in my arsenal if I'm to be of value to the literal community as a whole. During my MFA program I'll continue to work on my novel *The African Yankee,* which explores the journey of an immigrant writer navigating identity and belonging in a fractured world. Through the program's workshops and the mentorship of its distinguished faculty, I hope to refine my creative voice and bring my story to life. After earning my MFA, I intend to keep writing, pursue publication, and teach creative writing at the faculty level.

Annotated Reading List.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart.* Penguin Classics, 2006

In this timeless novel, Chinua Achebe tells the story of Okonkwo, a respected leader in the Igbo community, whose life takes a spiral with the arrival of British colonizers. Achebe explores themes of cultural conflict, community, colonialism, masculinity, and inevitable change, painting a vivid portrait of pre-colonial African life. Things Fall Apart is regarded as a key text in postcolonial literature. It is one of the most translated novels of all time and is important for its portrayal of the Igbo culture from an Igbo perspective. It is my biggest influence because of the cultural perspective and humanity it gave me, *an Igbo boy.* It's highly influential also, as it maintains and furthers the tradition of my people's storytelling.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus.* Algonquin Books, 2003.

Adichie taught me how to fly with my words. In Purple Hibiscus, Kambili, a young girl and her brother Jaja are growing up in the strict house of their conservative catholic father Eugene. Set against the backdrop of political unrest, the novel explores themes of family dynamics, religious oppression, and personal freedom. Adichie uses excellent imagery and rich character development to depict Kambili's coming-of-age journey, showing the tension between tradition and change. This novel, aside being Adichie's breakout novel, is a significant contribution to contemporary African literature and provides insights into Nigerian society and the psychological effects of religious and political authoritarianism. From this novel, I was introduced to one of the best applications of the first-person POV. As a teen from a semi-conservative family, I related deeply to it and that has been reflected in my writings.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun.* 4th Estate, 2006.

Half of a Yellow Sun is set during the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, in the late 1960s. The novel follows the intertwined lives of several characters: Ugwu, a young houseboy; Odenigbo, an eccentric pan-African professor; Olanna, the daughter of a wealthy Nigerian family; and Richard, a British expatriate. Through their perspectives, Adichie offers a nuanced exploration of the devastating effects of war on both personal relationships and national identity. The heart of this novel is full of themes of loyalty, trauma, love, and the complexities of postcolonial African politics. This novel is impactful to me because it touches on a very sensitive subject that I and my

people have had experience with. The ability to use storytelling to reiterate a past event in a way that leaves a mark is inspiring to me.

Hughes, Langston. *Harlem.* Henry Holt, 1951.

In this short but powerful poem, Hughes explores the emotional and social consequences of deferred dreams that was the current reality of the African American race. I like the simplicity yet rawness of this poem. And as someone who comes from a country that seems to be stuck in a deferred dream, I can relate. The Harlem Renaissance is one of my favorites points in black history and it inspires me a lot.

Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road.* Anchor Books, 1993.

My first introduction to African Mysticism and magical realism. In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri blends magical realism and African folklore to tell the story of Azaro, a spirit child navigating life in a Nigerian village. As a spirit child, Azaro lives in the liminal space between the world of the living and the spirit world. The novel is richly symbolic and explores themes of political corruption, poverty, and the struggle for survival in postcolonial Nigeria. Okri's use of poetic language and dreamlike imagery merges the gap between reality and fantasy, making *The Famished Road* an iconic work in African literature and magical realism. This book emboldened my belief that African spirituality and magic can receive the same accolades or even further recognition like their western counterparts. Very influential novel!

Okigbo, Christopher. *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder.* Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971.

In Okigbo, I found a voice like mine. *Labyrinths* is a collection of Christopher Okigbo's poetic works, including his final sequence, *Path of Thunder*. Known for its rich, symbolic imagery and complex structure, *Labyrinths* focuses on themes of identity, spirituality, and the tension between tradition and modernity in postcolonial Africa. *Path of Thunder*, written shortly before Okigbo's death in the Nigerian Civil War, carries a prophetic tone, lamenting the political instability and violence that threatened Nigeria during this period. His dense, allusive style draws on both indigenous African and Western literary traditions, making his work significant for scholars of postcolonial poetry. As an early poet, when I wrote, I channeled Okigbo. His works were my first bold steps away from Western poetry into cultural poetry.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes.* A.C. McClurg, 1914.

Tarzan of the Apes tells the story of an English nobleman's son, John Clayton, who is orphaned as a baby in the African jungle and raised by intelligent apes. Known by his ape name, Tarzan, he grows into a strong and resourceful wild man, mastering both the jungle and his human heritage. The novel is a classic example of early 20th-century adventure fiction, featuring themes of nature versus civilization, identity, and human evolution. As a boy, this novel was my introduction to the popular adventure troupe and as an outdoor lover, I adored it. However, I can see the political and colonialist overtones and its portrayal of Africa and its indigenous peoples reflecting the racial and imperialist attitudes of its time, hence my dive into the world of criticism. It impacted me so much; on one hand, I fell in love with adventure, on the other hand, I despised the social commentary.

Soyinka, Wole. *The Lion and the Jewel*. Oxford University Press, 1963.

The Lion and the Jewel is a comedic play by Wole Soyinka that dives into the clash between traditional African values and modernity in a Nigerian village. The story revolves around a love triangle between Lakunle, a Western-educated schoolteacher; Sidi, the village beauty; and Baroka, the village's crafty chief. Through witty dialogue and satirical elements, Soyinka critiques both the blind embrace of Western ideals and the rigid adherence to tradition. Like many of my firsts, this play introduced me to themes of gender roles, power dynamics, and cultural identity. Soyinka is a genius playwright and I've long enjoyed his works. This particular one had a great impact on me because it was the first African play I burrowed into.

Sofola, Zulu. *Wedlock of the Gods*. University Press Ltd., 1972.

My mother's favorite play. *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola, one of the first female Nigerian playwrights, is a powerful drama that exposes the tension between traditional customs and individual desires. The play tells the story of Ogwoma, a young widow forced into an arranged marriage, who defies societal expectations by pursuing her love for another man, Adigwu. The play examines themes of fate, tradition, gender roles, and the right to personal freedom. Through this work, Sofola critiques the rigid social structures that govern marriage, the patriarchy, and the individual choice in African societies. I fell in love with this play because of its powerful descriptions and enchanting expositions. It greatly influenced what I'd like to call my "writer's ambiance."

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice.* Edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, Simon & Schuster, 2009.

The Merchant of Venice is one of Shakespeare's most renowned plays, recognized for its complicated depiction of justice, mercy, and prejudice. The story is set in Venice and follows Antonio, a trader, as he borrows money from Jewish moneylender Shylock to support his friend Bassanio. Shylock demands a pound of Antonio's flesh as collateral, setting up a dramatic courtroom scenario in which issues of vengeance, mercy, and religious discrimination are discussed. Growing up, my mom would make me repeat all of Shylock's courtroom lines every Thursday evening after dinner. Further down the line, this play influenced my decision to become a thespian.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings.* Houghton Mifflin, 1954-1955.

Behold the grail! *The Lord of the Rings* is a work of high fantasy, encompassing an epic trilogy that includes The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, and The Return of the King. Set in the richly detailed world of Middle-earth, the story follows the quest to destroy the One Ring, a powerful trinket created by the Dark Lord Sauron. Through a diverse host of characters, including hobbits, elves, dwarves, and men, Tolkien explores themes of heroism, friendship, power, and the struggle between good and evil. The world-building, linguistic inventiveness, and its influence on modern fantasy literature are eternal. There is just something The Lord of the Rings does to you. I am still heavily influenced by the description style and world-building. I started my fantasy book three years ago, and I hope for my world-building to have deep depths just like Tolkien.

WRITING SAMPLES

Expository Essay.

Fortune Ogulere

Professor Gildow

ENGL 212 02

September 29, 2023

Food Insecurity in Nigeria

Living in today's modern America, it is hard to see the problems that other countries in the world are facing. One of the major problems that is occurring in Nigeria today is food insecurity that many of its people are struggling with. With a rising population expected to reach 400 million by 2025 the amount of resources needed to keep up with the population is lacking. To understand why and how the problem is happening it is important to understand what food insecurity is. While part of the definition is not being able to afford or have access to food, there is more to its meaning. Food insecurity is also not having access to food that is both nutritious and healthy. food meet people's needs. While many of the causes of food insecurity can be blamed on the horrific history that Africa has had, there are still many current issues that are still not letting many Nigerians become food secure.

One of the causes of Nigeria's current food insecurity is the political/governmental instability that is causing access to food to become scarce. Boko Haram is an Islamist group that is trying to overthrow the Nigerian government. They are attacking people and destroying agricultural land and that is causing food production to slow down exponentially. In chapter 14 of the book *Food Security and Food Sovereignty Challenges in Africa* written by Lere Amusan published by Ethics International Press, Amusan states "Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria, farmers and marketers lost many lives and properties worth billions of naira with their lands destroyed and confiscated by the insurgents" (Amusan 240). This is causing people to flee the area and go to safer places for them to live. This is causing the places with a large influx of refugees to not have enough food productivity to match the population. Along with the violence the people who choose to stay

are rightfully too scared to continue farming. These factors are causing inflation as less food and high demand is raising the prices of food to rates that many people are struggling to afford.

There are not only outside forces causing political trouble in Nigeria. There is currently a conflict between herders and farmers that is causing food shortages. The two agricultural people are fighting for space for farming and their animals. There was an agreement between the two where the government provided space for the herders. The article *Understanding the Herder-Farmer Conflict in Nigeria* published by accord.org states, "It seems that the government has abandoned the grazing reserve system created by the Northern region government in 1965" (Accord 7). However because of the government not sustaining the system it forced herders to seasonally change fields but it becomes hard for them to do that when much of the land has become industrialized. These problems are known to the Nigerian government but as the problems worsen it becomes harder and harder to solve the problem of food insecurity.

Another reason food insecurity is a problem in Nigeria is its ongoing climate change. As a result of climate change, there has been an increase in extreme weather that is causing excessive amounts of rainwater. In the article *The Geopolitical Impact of Conflict on Food Security in Nigeria* written by Charis Riebe they state, "Excessive rain or mismanagement of water reservoirs can lead to flooding. Flooding will destroy crops and land, causing a decline in the supply of food available" (Riebe 11). Additionally, this flooding can also cause damage to transportation routes which can lead to limited access to food. Another effect of climate change is the extreme weather conditions. With the extreme heat and freezing temperatures happening it becomes harder for crops to grow. These extreme temperatures make it harder for food to be preserved and shipped as the food can spoil before reaching its destination. Another effect of climate change is stated in the article *Food Insecurity in Africa: Drivers and Solutions* written by Caroline Delgado, Kristina Tschunkert, and Dan Smith. "Climate change also increases the likelihood of locust plagues, which pose a serious risk to food security and livelihoods" (Delgado 5). With droughts that have become more frequent, it makes it harder for people to have access to clean water to drink and farm with. As mentioned before people are also migrating because of these issues which again is causing strains for resources and that eventually leads to making the problem worse. Unfortunately, most of the people at high risk of food insecurity are children. In the article *25 million Nigerians at high risk of food insecurity in 2023* published by unicef.org, it states "Children are the most vulnerable to food insecurity. Approximately 6 of the 17 million food-insecure Nigerians today are children under 5

living in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Sokoto, Katsina, and Zamfara states" (Unicef 5). Eventually, if children are not adequately nourished they can die young or not be able to sustain themselves enough to work for the food they need.

This is seen in the case of Umaru Tudan-Matawalle, a Nigerian farmer whose family heavily relies on agriculture. In the video *Food shortage in Nigeria: Farmers in north face ongoing threat* published by Al Jazeera English, Tudan-Matawalle was interviewed about his personal experience regarding the loss of land because of terrorist groups. He grew up farming and it is the only job that he knows how to do efficiently and well. He relies on farming every year to be able to keep his family alive. Unfortunately, because of terrorist groups, he was forced to migrate his family to a safer place to live. The video states how he used to harvest 50-60 bags annually for his family to survive. Now he can afford/harvest about 5% of that amount. If terrorist groups and bandits were to stop attacking farmers, then he would be able to have the safety and access to more arable farmland to feed his family. Over 80% of Nigerians are farmers and about 60% percent of the population will go hungry due to the insistent violence that people are facing.

Food insecurity will continue to be a problem that the people of Nigeria will have unless real changes start to happen. The first step to solving this problem would be to identify the leading causes of food insecurity. As stated above, climate change and political instability are some of the major causes of the problem. While it may be difficult to solve these problems there could be some possible solutions. Food insecurity is a problem that can/will affect the future generations of Nigeria and it is a problem that can eventually lead to more severe problems to occur. It is not something that should be taken lightly as millions of people every day suffer from malnutrition caused by food insecurity.

Works Cited

Amusan, Lere. "Chapter 14." *Food Security and Food Sovereignty Challenges in Africa*, Ethics International Press, United Kingdom, 2022, pp. 240–268.

Delgado, Caroline, et al. " - SIPRI." *SIPRI*, sipri.org, Jan. 2023, www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2301_sipri_rpp_food_insecurity_in_africa_1.pdf.

Jazeera, Al, director. *Food Shortage in Nigeria: Farmers in North Face Ongoing Threat. YouTube*, YouTube, 9 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnTOk0JXYHw. Accessed 28 Sept. 2023.

Madhok, Rajat, and Joe English. "25 Million Nigerians at High Risk of Food Insecurity in 2023." *UNICEF*, unicef.org, 16 Jan. 2023, www.unicef.org/press-releases/25-million-nigerians-high-risk-food-insecurity-2023.

Riebe, Charis. "Sit Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad SIT Digital Collections." *Digital Collections*, digitalcollections.sit.edu, 2022, digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4551&context=isp_collection.

Persuasive Essay

Fortune Ogulere
Engl 212
Jason Gildow
November 13, 2023

Writer's block: Mental Block or Laziness

Writer's block is a cankerworm that eats deeply— it's a malignant combination of creative famine and writer's wanderlust brought about by external factors. Picking this topic was not an easy one because I had to do a vast research, retrospect, and gather thoughts on this very problem that every writer both born and unborn will experience at least thrice in their lifetime. Some of the research works proved a strong case and opinion and I will be endorsing their works here. Before I dive in, what is Writer's Block?

Writer's block, according to writing expert Mike Rose (2006), can be defined as: "the inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment". It is the sheer disintegration of any ideas; the inability to invoke that substance that makes one a writer. This problem rolls across various fields and occupations, so it's not just a problem for fiction writers or storytellers. As the title of this paper suggests, is Writer's block a mental block or simply laziness? Tons of scholars all over the globe have either supported one position or the other but I'm standing on the ground that Writer's block is brought about by external factors and is not a stroke of black-and-white paint. Davidson in his academic research suggests that writer's block is composed of a series of related problems. In an article for the journal *Written Communication*, based on interviews with sixty subjects (forty of whom were 'blockers'), cognitive researcher Robert Boice breaks negative self-talk into seven categories:

- work-apprehension (work perceived as difficult)
- procrastination
- dysphoria (self-talk reflecting negative emotional states and groundless worries)

- impatience (self-talk concerned with achieving more in less time)
- perfectionism
- evaluation anxiety (self-talk about evaluation by others)
- rules (self-talk about the 'correct' form or nature of writing).

This analysis goes par to par with the analysis and ideas I have of my own. Even scholars of the opposing notion would agree that mental block doesn't just come into play out of the ordinary. It is brought about by a change or lack of change in something. I sometimes say that writer's block is the body's way of asking for a change in creative style and routine.

Lack of recognition of these factors leads to "laziness"— which to me, is not a description of Writer's block but a lingering factor. Davidson's central idea of a solution to Writer's block is to let go of extreme pressure and the perfectionist idea of quality. Writing is psychological so unwinding the clogs (re-connecting to mental blocks) helps to break through.

Another writer Kelly Lock-Mcmellen attributed daily writing to her reversal of writer's block. But more importantly, she recommends a break in routing— a spontaneous fresh air from the mundane lives people have been accustomed to. Daily Positive affirmations, finding beauty in ordinary things, and spinning imagination from thin air no matter how minute, were part of her advice to writers. In her words "This archetypal journey fills ancient and modern literature: a woman sets out on a journey, finds herself alone in a new land, meets people along the way, listens to their stories, tells her own, and learns something about herself, which allows her to see with new eyes. As a result, if I was to break the writer's block, I had to let go of mundane experiences and venture down into the belly of my writer's block so that I might reemerge as the writer I wanted to be." Once again she strongly proves my point that Writer's block is brought about by external factors.

Noor Hanim Rahmat, an academician, highlighted in his article based on studies and research conducted that there are many definitions of what blocked writers are. He went on to state that the problems in writing are not in the lack of competence of the writer, but lack of competence in composing. Some origins of Writer's block according to Rahmat are

- Fear: Most writers struggle with fear. They fear putting themselves and their ideas out there. Fear of others judging or not understanding them or even criticizing their work. Fear of being rejected by publishers or their readers.

- Perfectionism: One of the most common blocks for writers and creatives of all walks is perfectionism. Many writers use perfectionism as a protection mechanism, to protect themselves from harsh critique or failure. Unfortunately, trying to write the perfect sentence, paragraph, or novel will lead most writers to never write a single word.
- Self-criticism: Excessive self-criticism is often what holds writers back from actually writing. Most writers compare their work with that of other, more successful writers or even to their own earlier work.

An interesting thing to see is the fact that all these factors are consistent in the case of Writer's block. Rahmat suggested some ways to overcome writer's block including exercise, change of scenery, free writing, striving for progress, not perfection, and lastly switching tasks.

Adding to these already mentioned remedies, I'll say reading different genres, watching loads of creative movies, painting (a hack which I do), helps eliminate writer's block. Also I take time to experience the world around me; I often find myself cruising downtown watching the serene commotion of people and even eavesdropping on some conversations— something random like that boosts my dialogue expertise in writing. Another tactic I use is the reverse writer's block. Instead of focusing on why I can't pen down anything, I focus on why I have so many stories to tell in the first place.

References

Davidson, R., Houdini, L., & Horning, R. (2014, September 5). *Feature: Rjurik Davidson.* Overland literary journal.

Kelly Lock-McMillen, "*journey to the center of a writer's block* " (1.2). ASSAY. (n.d.). https://www.assayjournal.com/kelly-lock-mcmillen-journey-to-the-center-of-a-writers-block6527965279-12.html

Rahmat , N. H. (2020, April). *Exploring writers' block through rhetorical situation* - researchgate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340418213_EXPLORING_WRITERS'_BLOCK_THROUGH_RHETORICAL_SITUATION

Research Based Paper.

Fortune Ogulere
Dr. Tanya Cochran
COMM 333
December 16, 2024

Sméagol: Villain or Victim? A Dramatistic Perspective

> "Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it."
>
> — J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Gandalf's words encapsulate the moral complexity at the heart of Tolkien's narrative. This epigram challenges the audience to confront the difficulty of passing judgment and invites a deeper exploration into empathy, redemption, and the struggle between good and evil. It serves as the foundation for this analysis of Sméagol, whose tragic story demands that we ask: *Is he a villain shaped by his choices, or a victim of forces beyond his control?*

Sméagol is a five-hundred-year-old, hobbit-like creature who first appears in J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and goes on to become a key figure in the climax of the last book in The Lord of the Rings trilogy *The Return of the King.* Also known as Gollum, he is a complicated figure in the history of literature and film, as his actions and motives overlap between villainy and innocence. Years before Sméagol would have the evil One Ring of the Dark Lord Sauron, he was a fellow from the river folk community and was spiteful to others (Bashir 1), leaving him with only his cousin Déagol for a best friend. On Sméagol's 33rd birthday, the One Ring of Sauron is discovered in a river by Déagol, whom Sméagol then kills to gain possession of the evil trinket. This was to be the first of his mortal sins. Enticed by the ring and shunned by his village, he fled into the dark of the misty mountains, where 500 years later the ring abandons him and is stolen by the Hobbit Bilbo Baggins. This genesis of Sméagol's corruption marks the beginning of what

would be his end by the book's final chapters. The dramatic events of his pitiful life is a perfect case study for Burke's Dramatistic Perspective.

Dramatistic Perspective

Burke believes that humans have "the unique ability to choose to act" (qtd. in Sellnow 77). He proposed that human actions can be understood as part of a dramatic framework, where the individuals are actors playing roles within a larger scene. By analyzing actions using the dramatistic pentad and considering elements like identification and guilt, Smeagol's' motives and complex nature are laid bare.

The Pentad and "My Precious"

"It came to me, my own, my love... my... preciousssss." Sméagol hissed as he stared with obsessive eyes at the One Ring a few moments after killing Déagol in the opening of the third film *The Return of the King* (Jackson, 00:07:00). This recurring phrase encapsulates the central role that the One Ring plays in Sméagol's life, serving as both a symbol of his greed and his downfall. It is not simply a possesive term; it reflects the deep psychological and emotional hold the Ring has over Sméagol.

The Pentad–comprising the act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (Sellnow 82)-provides a framework for analyzing Sméagol's obsession with the Ring and the extent to which it shapes his identity. By examining Sméagol's repeated refrain of "my precious" through this lens, his actions, and motivations are deconstructed showing how his internal conflict unfolds, ultimately leading to the tragic and complex character that is Gollum. This section will explore how each element of the Pentad applies to Sméagol's relationship with the Ring, offering a deeper understanding of his transformation from a curious hobbit to a tortured and fractured soul.

Act

Sméagol's most notable acts–killing Déagol to seize the Ring, betraying Frodo and am, and ultimately falling into Mount Doom–paint him as a villain. Tolkien writes of Sméagol's murder, "He caught Déagol by the throat and strangled him, because the gold looked bright and beautiful" (58). Yet Gandalf's epigram reminds us that acts cannot be judged in isolation. The influence of the Ring complicates Sméagol's culpability, raising the question: Is he fully responsible for his actions, or is he a victim of the Ring's power? Critics like Tom Shippey argue that the Ring's corruptive influence diminishes free will, framing Sméagol as more victim than villain (152).

Scene

The Ring exerts a powerful influence on its bearers, creating a moral and psychological environment that distorts behavior. Sméagol's exile, isolation, and the Ring's pull define the "scene" of his actions. Verlyn Flieger describes the Ring as creating a "scene of moral decay," highlighting how external forces dictate Sméagol's decisions (112). Burke's dramatistic theory emphasizes how external circumstances–such as isolation, the discovery of the Ring, and the rejection Sméagol faces from society–shape his motives. To better understand this, imagine the "scene" when Sméagol first discovers the Ring. The water shimmers faintly in the muted sunlight, a haunting stillness pressing on the riverbank. As Déagol lifts the golden band from the murky depths, droplets fall in slow, deliberate arcs, like liquid glass. The Ring gleams unnaturally, its brilliance cutting through the gloom and seeming to pulse with a life of its own. Sméagol's breath catches: his pulse quickens. The world shrinks to the size of that glimmering object—its weight somehow heavier than it appears. A chilling wind whistles through the reeds, as if whispering the fateful promise, "It came to me." This environment, eerie and suffocating, isolates Sméagol from reason and morality. The Ring's allure grows deafening, a siren song echoing in his mind. Flashes of Déagol's hands, reaching toward the Ring, blur into grotesque shadows. Sméagol's decision to kill is not born in silence but surrounded by oppressive sounds—rushing water, harsh breathing, and a pounding heart that masks his whisper: "My precious."

Lastly, Gandalf "in his question" reminds us that Sméagol's environment plays a role in his descent, raising doubts about whether his choices are truly his own.

Agent

Boyd states, "in wanting to possess power one becomes possessed by power." (par.5) This desire for the Ring is what led Sméagol to be caught in an internal state of conflict. He is not purely evil or good, but a mixture of both, struggling to reconcile his inherent desire for companionship and peace with the overwhelming pull of the Ring. Sméagol's dual nature is central to his characterization. He is not merely a villain, as Gollum is often portrayed; he is also a victim of the Ring's corrupting influence. Burke's dramatistic perspective allows us to see that Sméagol's actions are not driven solely by malice but by a deep psychological struggle between his better self and the darker impulses that the Ring feeds. This internal division is mirrored in his interactions with Frodo, where Sméagol shows moments of vulnerability and empathy, despite his darker tendencies. An example of this vulnerability is seen in the moments when Frodo in sheer pity and

empathy reminds *Gollum* of his real name *Sméagol* and of the innocence that once clung to his heart.

Agency

The agency through which Sméagol acts is the One Ring itself. The Ring is not merely a tool for achieving Sméagol goals; it becomes the means through which his agency is corrupted. Burke's theory of agency emphasizes the importance of the tools and means through which actions are carried out. In Sméagol's case, the Ring becomes his instrument of destruction. It is the Ring that fuels his jealousy, desire, and violent actions, driving him to commit murder and later betray Frodo. The agency of the Ring complicates any moral judgement of Sméagol's as it is clear that his agency is compromised by the Ring's influence. Scholars like Shippey argue that Ring "embodies an external force that strips individuals of their autonomy," framing Sméagol as a victim of an overwhelming and inescapable influence (112).

Nevertheless, other critics argue that Sméagol retains moral agency despite the Ring's influence. Birzer highlights Sméagol's initial decision to kill Déagol as evidence of his greed and envy, qualities that existed prior to his encounter with the Ring (93). This perspective suggests that while the Ring enhances negative traits, it does not create them, leaving Sméagol responsible for his initial choices. Similarly, Joseph Pearce contends that Sméagol's failure to resist the Ring's power reflects his own lack of moral fortitude, contrasting with characters like Sam and Frodo, who demonstrate the ability to resist the Ring's corruptive influence (87). These views challenge the narrative that Sméagol is merely a victim, framing his downfall as a result of personal failings.

Another interpretation explores the shared agency between Sméagol and Gollum, representing his fractured identity. Randel Helms describes Sméagol's internal battle as a negotiation of power between his original self and the darker persona created by the Ring. Helms argues that neither Sméagol nor Gollum fully controls their actions, resulting in a duality that defines his tragic arc (72). Colin Duriez similarly observes that Sméagol's humanity and Gollum's monstrosity coexist in a constant struggle, making him both a perpetrator of evil and a victim of it (101). This dual identity complicates the notion of a singular agent and demonstrates how the Ring manipulates its bearers by dividing their sense of self.

Finally, some interpretations expand the concept of agency to include external circumstances. Shippey asserts that Sméagol's descent is not just the result of the Ring but also a product of his environment, including the absence of societal intervention and the broader

historical forces of Middle-earth (125). This systemic view shifts the focus from individual accountability to the external pressures that shape Sméagol's tragic trajectory, presenting his actions as the outcome of intersecting personal and societal forces. For example, Sméagol's initial rejection by his community after killing Déagol is a pivotal moment that highlights the absence of social support or rehabilitation. Rather than providing him with guidance or help, the community casts him out, further isolating him and making him vulnerable to the Ring's corrupting influence. This is in stark contrast to Frodo, who, although burdened with the Ring, remains within the supportive environment of the Shire and later benefits from the guidance of characters like Gandalf and Sam. Sméagol, on the other hand, has no such support structure, and his environment actively exacerbates his descent into madness.

Additionally, the broader historical context of Middle-earth amplifies the forces that drive Sméagol's actions. The Ring, created by Sauron, is inherently corruptive, seeking out those who are already vulnerable. Sméagol, lacking the wisdom or moral strength to resist its pull, succumbs to its power. Unlike Gandalf, who recognizes the Ring's danger and refuses it outright, Sméagol's environment provides no protection or alternative guidance. His susceptibility to the Ring is thus not simply a matter of individual weakness but of external forces that push him toward his tragic end.

These contrasting perspectives reveal the complexity of agency in Sméagol's story, inviting readers to question whether he is a victim of the Ring's power, a morally accountable individual, or a tragic figure caught between internal conflict and external pressures. Through Burke's dramatistic framework, this debate underscores the intricate interplay between agency and identity in the narrative.

Purpose

Sméagol's purpose is singular: to reclaim the Ring and possess it forever. This obsessive goal drives his every action, from his murder of Déagol to his betrayal of Frodo and the ultimate destruction of the Ring. While Sméagol's desire for the Ring is rooted in his personal greed, it is also tied to his deep sense of loss and isolation. Sméagol's purpose is not purely evil; it is a desperate need for something to fill the void in his life. Burke's dramatistic perspective asks us to consider the larger context of Sméagol's actions—his purpose is shaped by his internal struggles and external influences, and not simply by an inherent desire for power. Example of this internal conflict is Sméagol's betrayal of Frodo, particularly when he leads him into Shelob's lair to be

attacked. The Ring's power over him has consumed his sense of self, making his purpose to protect and possess the Ring at any cost. However, even in this moment of betrayal, Sméagol's fragmented identity—the struggle between Sméagol and Gollum—becomes apparent. He calls Frodo "my precious," yet his actions reveal a more desperate need to reclaim the Ring as a means of avoiding the deep isolation he experiences without it. This purpose—his obsession with the Ring—is not purely evil but stems from a fractured psyche attempting to fill an emotional void.

Identification and Division

Identification and division are essential for understanding Sméagol's relationships with Frodo and Sam. Frodo's relationship with Sméagol is defined by a sense of identification. Frodo recognizes in Sméagol the same struggle he himself faces with the Ring. As Frodo becomes more attuned to the Ring's power, he sees in Sméagol a reflection of his own potential future, a future where the Ring's influence consumes him completely. Frodo's empathy for Sméagol is evident when he says, "I have to believe he can come back" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 234). In this moment, Frodo demonstrates the identification Burke describes—the recognition of shared experiences and the possibility of redemption.

In contrast, Sam remains divided from Sméagol, viewing him with suspicion and distrust. Sam is quick to judge Sméagol as a villain, unable to see beyond the creature

Guilt "Redemption" and "Gollum"

Sméagol's story is also a cycle of guilt and redemption, aligning with Burke's theories. His guilt is evident in his murder of Déagol and betrayal of Frodo, but his moments of remorse suggest the possibility of redemption.

"Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it." Gandalf's epigram underscores the tension between Sméagol's guilt and his capacity for good. His accidental destruction of the Ring can be seen as an act of redemption, albeit unintentional. Critics like Verlyn Flieger describe this moment as "a tragic yet redemptive fulfillment of his purpose" (118).

This also raises questions about whether Sméagol's actions can be justified or absolved. His murder of Déagol, though driven by the Ring's corruptive power, might be seen as the point where free will succumbs to external influence. As his obsession deepens, Sméagol becomes both a

victim and a perpetrator, illustrating the moral complexity of his character. His original innocence and descent into madness are driven by an external agency—the One Ring—that he is powerless to resist. Yet, his eventual complicity in evil acts, driven by his dual personality, blurs the line between victim and villain. The one-time Sméagol got close to redemption was in the second book, *The Two Towers,* Chapter eight. Here Gollum had hatched plans to lead Sam and Frodo to their deaths in Shelob's Lair. When he returns to them, he sees them sleeping soundly with Frodo's head in Sams lap. This causes Gollum to rethink his plan, and according to the book, in that moment, he appeared to be an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years, beyond friend and kin. Gollum then caresses Frodo's knee which wakes up Frodo and Sam, who gets suspicious and calls him a villain. Then the green glint and malice returns to Gollum's eyes. Sam was right to be suspicious, but this moment raises the question of whether an ounce of kindness could have been the key to Sméagol's redemption.

Tolkien's own words "For nothing is evil in the beginning"— reflects his creation of a complicated character like Sméagol. In fact, he had a tough time writing the scene of Sméagol's failed redemption that he shed tears. On Mount Doom, Tolkien writes: "Whatever dreadful paths, lonely and hungry and waterless, he had trodden, driven by a devouring desire and a terrible fear, they had left grievous marks on him. He was a lean, starved, haggard thing, all bones and tight-drawn sallow skin. A wild light flamed in his eyes, but his malice was no longer matched by his old griping strength." (*The Two Towers*, 259). It was inevitable—Sméagol's death. His perishing in the fires of Mordor became his redemption—poetic justice for a character so narcissistic yet so selfless.

Visual Elements

In Peter Jackson's film adaptation, the visual portrayal of Sméagol enhances the understanding of his psychological turmoil. The cinematography and Andy Serkis's motion-capture performance vividly depict Sméagol's dual personalities, often through scenes where he converses with himself. These visual elements emphasize the fragmentation of his identity and the depth of his madness, which the dramatistic approach complements by providing insight into his motivations. The golden hue of the Ring, often highlighted in close-ups, symbolizes its seductive allure and the source of Sméagol's fixation. Additionally, the use of the terrain, such as the dark, cavernous environment of the Dead Marshes or the murky waters of Mount Doom, reflects Sméagol's internal struggle. In literary studies, this is called Macrocosm and Microcosm. These settings are not just backdrops but active elements that shape and emphasize the characters'

emotional states. Sméagol's obsession with the ring reaches its peak when he and Frodo are on Mount Doom. The struggle between Sméagol and Gollum ultimately results in his death by fire and lava. He followed his "precious" to the death. By integrating a visual perspective, one can further appreciate how the Ring's influence extends beyond narrative to become a visceral, almost tangible presence in Sméagol's life.

Conclusion

Gandalf's words, "Can you give it to them?" leave us with a powerful challenge: can we, as readers, judge Sméagol's fate? Through Kenneth Burke's dramatistic perspective, we gain insight into the complexities of Sméagol's motives, shaped not only by his internal desires but by external forces as well. The Pentad reveals how Sméagol's actions are influenced by his environment—his isolation—and his agency, which is not merely an individual choice but a response to circumstances beyond his control. His purpose, rooted in a desperate desire to reclaim the Ring, speaks to a deeper, more tragic need for connection, for a way to fill the emptiness in his life.

By examining Sméagol through the lens of Burke's theory, I've come to realize that his journey is not simply one of villainy. Sméagol is not inherently evil, but a victim of his circumstances. While the Ring clearly corrupts him, we must not overlook the environmental factors that also shape his fate. The lack of social structures to intervene in his life, his isolation, and the historical and cultural forces of Middle-earth all work against him, making it harder for him to escape the path of corruption. I believe that Sméagol's story compels us to think more deeply about how the individual is shaped by forces beyond their immediate control—forces that may explain, but not justify, their actions.

Lastly, I think Gandalf's epigram offers more than a challenge; it's a reflection on our own capacity for judgment. Morality is rarely black and white, and I believe that even Sméagol's most destructive actions can be seen as a tragic consequence of his internal and external struggles. It is a reminder that compassion is a complex, necessary response when confronting figures who appear to be villains. Rather than condemning Sméagol outright, I think we should recognize that he embodies the complexity of the human experience. He's not simply a villain or a victim; he is a character defined by conflicting desires, shaped by forces he cannot always understand, and ultimately, a reminder that our judgments are often clouded by our inability to fully understand the complexity of another's experience.

"Not all those who wander are lost."

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Sméagol from the film trilogy *Lord of the Rings*

Works Cited

Bashir, Nadia et al. "A precious case from Middle Earth." *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)* vol. 329,7480 (2004): 1435-6. doi:10.1136/bmj.329.7480.1435

Boyd, Craig A. "The Unbearable Sadness of Being Gollum*" Newsroom | University of St. Thomas*, Lumen, 7 June 2023, news.stthomas.edu/publication-article/the-unbearable-sadness-of-being-gollum/.

Birzer, Bradley J. *Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth.* ISI Books, 2003

Duriez, Colin. *The Tolkien Companion.* HarperCollins, 2001

Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World.* Kent State UP, 2002.

Helms, Randel. *Tolkien and the Silmarils.* Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

Jackson, Peter, director. *The Lord of the Rings.* New Line Cinema, 2001-2003

Pearce, Joseph. *Tolkien: Man and Myth.* Ignatius Press, 1998.

Sellnow, Deanna D. *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts.* 3rd ed., SAGE Publications, 2017.

Shippey, Tom. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century.* HarperCollins, 2000.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit.* HarperCollins Publishers, 2020. Originally published by George Allen & Unwin, 1937.

---. *The Fellowship of the Ring.* HarperCollins, 2020. Originally published by George Allen & Unwin, 1954.

---. *The Two Towers.* HarperCollins, 2020. Originally published by George Allen & Unwin, 1954.

---. *The Return of the King.* HarperCollins, 2020. Originally published by George Allen & Unwin, 1955.

Creative Writing.

The City That Devours and Dreams

By Fortune Ogulere

New York is mad, but everybody wants a piece. A piece of this, a piece of that. A piece of relic fashioned into modernity, carried through the times by curious passengers. Curiosity killed the cat, but here, it merely cushions the veil that shrouds New York City—the veil of insanity.

My pilgrimage to the Big Apple was one of never-ending amusement, frenzy, and wonder. Wonder at the rot brewing in Rockefeller's baby. No, brewing isn't the word—stagnating is. The rot of New York, like its subways, is buried deep, echoing and sighing as time passes by. It remains untouched, yet like a rolling stone it has no choice but to set into motion the fires of apex consumerism.

Every corner hums with hunger. A gift shop at every turn. A food truck selling hot dogs to my left, another one to my right, boasting even fresher ones. The intrusive smell of cheap pizza sauce clung to the air, and on 7th Avenue a long line of hungry pedestrians sighed patiently at the door of a pastry store—secretly coveted and tightly gatekept.

I know chaos—I grew up in Owerri, visited the frantic cocoon of Lagos. I have seen firsthand the marriage of corporate culture and street language. But in New York even bigger worlds merge, becoming a primal race to a self-imposed finish line. Everyone is a hustler. Everyone is prey and predator depending on the day. "New Yorkers" take pride in their concrete jungle, but it is this same terrain that sprouts vines and strangles them in the busy corners of their damp streets, in their shoebox apartments and their prehistoric bridges.

Yet, amid the madness, there is something unbreakable—the perseverance written on faces, the steadfast chewing of the old man on his tacos, the exhausted smiling woman in an orange T-shirt selling tickets to late-night city tours. Even the smaller buildings struggle for air. Give and take. That is the city's doctrine. It nibbles at a naked foot and soothes it with sea air.

New York is a marriage of contradictions. A place where ghosts of unrealized dreams haunt Broadway billboards, where Brooklyn lures artists with the promise of momentum, where Harlem whispers its rich heritage and the Bronx drifts in limbo, only spoken of in transit. What makes this love affair with the sleepless city so intoxicating?

One answer.

Soul.

The soul of New York is a never-ending tomorrow, forever pregnant with what could be. It is the physical manifestation of an egalitarian dream, a seat at America's table. It is the city that keeps calling, and even miles away in the cabin of my plane I could still hear its crescendo. It knew I was watching.

VENDETTA OF FORGOTTEN GODS

By Fortune Ogulere

Arusi was what they called my grandfather. A name befitting of the bloody carvings of mighty deities whose hungry whimpering caused the weather to swell in anger. But he was no god. No, my grandfather was a lunatic—a mad man, and an irredeemable drunkard. From dusk to dawn he would swim in gibberish wine, swaying from left to right as he made his way home—swallowed by insensibility. His disease seeped into our household and made it desolate. Ekwee, my big sister joined him in his escapades, or what our townsmen called iberiberism—the sheer act of foolishness and docile stupidity.

Arusi died as he had come—hanging himself in our backyard. "He wriggled out of the umbilical cord that brought him into the world," our land's sages joked decades ago. Now he had wriggled himself unto death with a rope of his making.

That day still bleeds into my heart, fresh and repugnant. I remember the way his tongue shriveled, and how his once slim head became an enlarged gore of grey and shadow. His shirt had vomit on it, and from it emerged the aching perfume of stale alcohol. Arusi had gambled away his only inheritance—a barren land, untapped, that sat alone by the river Nwangene. It had been taken by men who resembled walking trees with sacks on their backs and lorries for heels. As for Nne, my mother, I don't speak about her—she was an abomination. I was an abomination.

The road that led to Elele was as long as it was miserable. I had packed just two bags of old clothes, cotton buds, a handkerchief, and a copy of *Where There Is no Doctor.* Elele was not entirely the harsh marsh Obiaju the neighborhood security man had made it out to be. A marsh it was, but it still had life. Not for me. All Elele held was a past I couldn't hide from any longer.

"Be careful o, Elele no be Lagos, they will look you in the eyes and thief your bag." Obiaju hammered, one hand pulling his ashy right ear. He always did that when something was too important to be forgotten.

"Oh please, they don't have two heads," my dry voice echoed back. "If they look me in the eyes, I'll open my eyes wider! Yeye people."

I loved Lagos more than anything. The extravagant sensuality of the city's air left me in constant seduction, and despite the suffocating heat from cramped buildings, I couldn't leave it. But I did. Yesterday. I left Lagos in search of my polluted roots. In search of the deities of my father's house.

I'm an Osu. Unloved, shamed, and stained. I wish I could say I wasn't, but the glaring of judging eyes is all I have ever known. Perhaps, everyone knew the heavy burden I bore and wanted no part in it. I had no part in this world. At least not physically.

The yellow bus I was in dragged into what resembled a motor park. It was not like the Lagos ones; it had dust for buildings, and water sachets paraded the entrance. By the side, in a mini shed, a woman yelled on the top of her voice, pointing fingers to the large coolers of rice and fish stew that stood watch on a table in the shed.

"Ofe akwu di Oku! Hot rice! Jollof na Agidi white!"

Like predestined hypnosis, the bus driver walked up to the shed and demanded two plates of hot jollof rice, topped with fish and dried pepper. Our bus conductor pulled open the door in what seemed to be a painful ceremony. It screeched, and I could hear the squirming of the bus's rickety bones. Almost immediately the dense humid air of Elele swept in. Like a lover it caressed our worn-out faces. To some of these travelers, it meant home. To others, business. To me it brought dread, dread from ages long past. I could see the evil within, and it almost felt like the wind had bruised me with warm hands of reproach.

I alighted from the bus. I knew to whom I would go. But I did not know the place. Forty-five years had passed since I fled Elele, on Okoro's bicycle, into the motor park that would take me to Lagos. Donkey years even more, when I saw Arusi take his life at our backyard. I was only but seven. Now at sixty's doorknob, the wind has blown me back to Elele. Mtcheew. Ije uwa.

Mustering my morale, I approached a slouched figure who hummed behind a kiosk by the roadside. His dirty grey hair suggested he had seen life, and not the best of it. A dusty bomber jacket hung over his shoulders, and he tied a green wrapper from the waist down.

"Good evening, sir." I waved at him, my voice the dryest it could have been.

He looked up slowly as if in fear of breaking his neck. When we locked eyes, I saw it.

A familiar fear, that estranged identity. His eyes told stories—tiny jolts of hopelessness.

"Evening," he answered, unenthusiastic. His hands wobbled like they had no weight as he drew closer to me.

“I’m in search of the Osuji family. Have you heard of them?” I scratched my mangy afro, unsure if I had posed the right query.

“Onye na aju, who is asking?” he quizzed, oblivious to my mannerisms.

“Nwa bee Osuji,” I replied, my palms gathering up sweat.

The man’s face transfigured like a storm cloud before descent. His brows furrowed deeper, and the very lines on his forehand became pronounced. For a second I thought I saw his limp hands move.

“One does not simply ask for the Osuji clan,” he blurted. “Only a madman seeking eternal curse.”

“Then I must be an ancient lunatic, for my very existence has been a curse.”

People rarely wear their grief and sorrows on the outside so others don’t see and announce pity. I adorned my shame and trauma like a colonel wears his hat, body to body, armor to nakedness. The man sighed and stared hard at me. Maybe he was searching for a flaw, as all old people do when talking to young men, or he looked for a reason to come with me.

“That way, down the narrow path, just before the river.” He gestured ahead with his face.

“Daalu.” I thanked him and began my trek into genesis.

*

The houses on either side of the road that led to Nwangene River were made of concrete and had enormous eyes. Their colorful aluminum rooftops glistened in the sun as if in a carnival. Everything had changed. Much of the world I grew up in had been eroded by the romancing harshness of time. For instance, there used to be red mud houses with a chalky finish that made them look like river maidens basking in the sun, but now there were strange yellow bulldozers excavating the dry soil and disturbing the peace of dead ancestors. Nothing was the same. Nothing except that Udara tree. The one Arusi swung from, many nights ago. It stood in a cleared space, just beside a hut that had an unfinished zinc roof. It stood out like a sore thumb, like deity to man, relic to modern.

I walked up to the door of net and knocked.

"Onye?" a voice answered from inside.

I needed no soothsayer to tell me it came from an old woman. In that moment before the gaunt-looking woman answered the door, I panicked. I yearned for Lagos and feared whatever pain this chapter would bring. My heart began to race like a marathon runner, and the veins that danced on my wrists were visibly drumming. Dum, dum, drums of paranoia. The door opened, and an old woman appeared. She had no hair, and her teeth were blackened from decay and tobacco. Her throat sagged, and the wrinkles had no end. She held a plate of yellow yam and red oil. She approached; her eyes squinted for clarity.

Pwaas! She dropped the plate of yam and screamed like a mad hyena.

"Chima!," her voice visibly shaken, "is this really you?"

I squinted my eyes too to see her better. One more look, and the wrinkles on her face gave way to reveal someone whom I thought lost and forgotten.

Ekwee, my big sister.

"Ekweee!" I embraced her, minding the bony cage that was her ribs. I couldn't control the tears that escaped the hollow of my eyes—it transcended story, anger and shame. Here we were home, bound in our grief.

"Welcome, welcome." Ekwee hurriedly led me into the dank of a hut. The air inside was moist, and it made my skin crawl. There were no decorations or bougainvillea like I had in my Lagos apartment. All this hut had were old clay pots, a chopped mat, two candles, and a rat that scurried past when she first opened the door.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you, Chima," Ekwee said as she sat on the mat. "We thought you were dead or had been kidnapped by the strange looking men that tilled the land behind us."

"Well, Ekwee, I'm alive and well as you can see."

"Thank the stars." She nodded.

I looked around for a seat. Seeing none, I joined Ekwee on the mat. Time flew by as we caught up on the happenings of the world. I told her of Agege bread, Supa eagles, and the

promiscuous life of Fela Kuti. In turn she narrated how she hid in a ditch for five days during the war, eating nothing but sand and earthworms.

"You know, Mama died from a broken heart." She whispered as if the walls could hear.

"Don't speak of Nne," I said quietly, barely looking at her.

"She was your mother, Chima—"

"And my sister too!" I yelled, tiny tears dropping from my weary eyes. I could feel my anger return. It had been locked away for forty-five years, checked, suppressed and sealed away. Now it brewed, asking to be let out.

Ekwee bellowed, anguish written all over her old face. She squirmed and called on the gibberish names of dead forefathers. Then she moved away from me, closer to one of the clay pots. She opened it and gulped down a familiar liquid. I knew what it was. It had the stench of unforgiven sins. It was local wine. The type that rendered one useless.

"He did this to us." I squeezed my eyes, to stop my tears.

"Arusi did this to us, to you, to Nne, to everyone he knew!"

Ekwee said nothing and garbled down more wine. Annoyed, I flared up and hit the pot off her aged hands.

"Ogini? What is it! Let me drink and die if I am to die! I have lived long enough in sorrow!" she roared at me, with a newly found energy.

I staggered back, but my pain was too much not to let out.

"He made you a drunk, Ekwee! An old drunk! For God's sake, how do you defend someone who raped your mother, his own daughter?" I kicked the pots, breaking three of them and paying the price with a stream of fresh blood.

"God? Did you say God?" She moved towards me, red rage in her eyes.

"Where was God when Arusi raped Mama? Where was God when our ancestor Agwu was pledged to Ifejoku, the yam god in perpetual servitude? Are you blind? Can't you see? We are outcasts! We are Osu! Servants of the yam god!"

Her shoulders began to shrug in laughter. “No one wants us, no one will marry us or do business with us, it is our curse, till the earth kisses us last.”

“You lie! I’m nobody’s servant!” I grabbed her, shaking the very foundations of her person.

“No place on earth will be solace for us. The earlier you accept that, the better your damned fate.” She dropped to the floor, and her snoring enveloped the house. I stormed off in unreconciled indignation. How dare she refuse to see the errors of our forsaken past. For a moment, I thought I sounded like the Baptist preachers along Ipaja road who would scream at the top of their lungs with righteous hypocrisy. An exasperated expression masked my face. Ruin, my life has come to ruin.

It was nightfall before I headed back to the hut. This time, I would apologize and tell Ekwee of my intentions—to break the curse of the Osu. The moon was high and bright this night, and the chill breeze that came from the river Nwangene soothed the abyss of my thoughts. All could be well after all. When I got to the hut, it was silent, and an eerie feeling took hold of me. I dashed into the darkness of the hut, and Ekwee was not there. I ran outside, my legs heavy like old yams.

Looking straight across the Udara tree, past the clearing, and into the path that led to the river, I could see them: The men who resembled walking trees with sacks on their backs and lorries for heels. From their midst I could make out the dangling body of my sister.

“Come back here!” I scampered towards them in primal rage, fear, and agony. As I approached their scent of cold death and migraine, they became one with the air. Vanishing into nothingness. I fell forward, crashing into the wild plantain trees that grew in these parts. My right leg was caught in a metal trap meant for an unsuspecting antelope. I could not scream. My voice seemed to have been muffled by the night itself. My face was awash with fear like one who had been in cohort with evil spirits. I bowed my head. In defeat. In eternal servitude.

*

“Your story is touching, Nna,” Nwa Teacher garbled down more chicken, “but I cannot offer you this job.” He squeezed the marrow out of the chicken bone so that it died a second death. His almost miniature black head muzzled every juice of chicken as he eyed me, his left-hand fanning with a checkered busboy hat. Nwanyi Aba’s bush bar would do that to you. Pinned

in the heart of the erratic city of Port-Harcourt, its yellow, blue walls housed the best roasted wild chicken and hosted the big fishes of the coastal city. I have had my fair share on days when I would drown my unnatural sorrows in a cup of day-old palm wine. Just the way I liked it.

"Why won't you hire me?" I felt my breath quicken. I knew what he would say, and I hoped he was different.

"You're Osu, and here in Elele we don't do business with Osu." He spat into his palms and swung them around his head. "Chineke zoba anyi, my God save me!" Then he straightened up and signaled for Nwanyi Aba.

"Where is this woman?"

"Customer, I'm coming o," the faint voice of Nwanyi Aba answered from across the bar. She was serving a group of tall men who had just walked in. I could tell they smelt of opulence and Arabian perfume. Their long hats had patterns of blue, red and purple, but the deep stench of forest wood followed them.

"Who said I was an Osu?" I stammered, sweat building in my palms.

Nwa Teacher readjusted his belt and sneered at my direction. "Word travels fast here. Count yourself lucky that I ate on the same table as you."

His words fell faint as soon as they had come. I had heard them before, from several others. Afterall I was an Osu, unloved and outcast, the undeserving and the destitute. Like a reverb underwater, I heard the echo of my heart drumming, and my chest tightened like cold starch. He should not have said that.

I launched at Nwa Teacher, my hunched posture fidgeting stabs into his belly full of chicken. His blood slithered through the pocketknife to my hands, like Red Sea to Moses. It was warm, ugly, and alive. He dropped like a bag of locust beans—man to dust, dust to dust.

I rubbed my eyes in disbelief—I had killed a man. Not just any man but Nwa Teacher, the principal of Grammar Boys Secondary School.

"Ewooo!" loud voices crept up at the scene. They were closer now, for my legs had been pulled down by the men there. It was madness. The women cursed and spat, as slaps descended

on my face from all around me. I was ashamed. Ashamed that I felt no guilt for what I had just done. I felt nothing. I was evil, pity reincarnated. I knew this because Arusi's wicked blood flowed through my veins. My eyes, murky with my own blood, began to drop. But before they did, I saw them. The men who resembled walking trees with sacks on their backs and lorries for heels. They had been here all along—they were here for me. After all, I was a chip off a much older block.

A Demonstration.

This is the first draft of some prompts that I didn't read much meaning into, from Creative Writing Class with Professor Peckham.

The ideas mostly came to me during the winter storms when there was nothing much to do but listen to music and watch snow. It was originally in the present tense, and with no title.

7.1

1) Write a Short, simple sentence.

I watch snow block my door

2) Write a long sentence. Delay the subject with an introductory clause.

Although its sugary appearance cascaded down in massive quantities, I still had to make an appearance at school.

3) Write a long sentence. Begin with the subject and include a list.

The students in history class looked like they had played "building igloos" as white fluff dripped all over their clothes, towards the carpet floor of the dick building.

4) Write a long sentence. Delay the subject with a prepositional phrase.

After class i trailed the white carpet outside, back to my apartment, washed three dishes, turned the music on and out the heat on blast.

5) Write a long sentence. Begin with the subject and include a list.

The music emanating from my apartment created the best ambience ever, with a soulful, jazzy, almost warm voice soothing my cold from the speakers.

6) write a sentence fragment.

Soul and jazz.

7) Write another long sentence. Delay the subject with an introductory clause.

While my apartment felt soulful and like a cheerful melody, it was malady to my neighbours that lived downstairs.

8) Write a simple sentence

Soulful sound made me some enemies.

Revised Edition.

Below is the final polished form. From the suggestion of my peers in workshop class, I came up with a title. Then my professor revised it, and we agreed that past tense was a much better fit for it.

Igloos & Winter Blues

By Fortune Ogulere

I watched snow block my door.

Although its sugary appearance cascaded down in massive quantities,

I still had to make an appearance at school.

The students in history class looked like they had played "building igloos" as white fluff dripped all over their clothes, toward the carpet floor of the dick building.

After class I trailed the white carpet outside, back to my apartment, washed three dishes, turned the music on and put the heat on blast.

The music emanating from my apartment created the best ambience ever,

with a soulful, jazzy,

almost warm voice from the speakers soothing my cold.

Soul and jazz.

While my apartment felt soulful and like a cheerful melody,

it was malady to my neighbours that lived downstairs.

Soulful sound made me some enemies.

Graded Essay written for a course.

Fortune Ogulere

Dr. Tanya R. Cochran

Comm 333, Rhetoric

September 17, 2024

The Power of Balance: How Avatar: The Last Airbender Shaped My Worldview

Growing up, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* was unlike any other animated series; it told a story that significantly influenced my perspective of self, growth, and perseverance. The show's unique ability to merge humor, action, and deep emotional issues, despite being a children's show, hooked me in from the beginning. As I followed the protagonists on their adventure across the Four Nations, I discovered insights that would stay with me long after the book concluded. Aang's battle to master all four elements while retaining inner calm mirrored my own road of self-discovery, and Zuko's transformation from villain to hero served as a strong lesson in the significance of discovering one's real purpose.

Magic and beauty attracted me to *Avatar: The Last Airbender.* The concept of bending—people with the ability to control the elements of water, earth, fire, and air was mind blowing to me as a child. I used to pretend to be a waterbender while in the shower—I still do. As the series forged on, I realized what captivated me the most were the emotional and philosophical journeys of the characters, particularly Aang. As the last Airbender and the Avatar, Aang had the responsibility to bring balance to a world torn apart by war. Yet, he was just a kid, struggling with the weight of expectations placed on his shoulders. At the time, I too felt overwhelmed by the pressures of growing up, especially when it came to meeting the expectations of my family as the first child and first-born son, school, and friends. Aang's reluctance to embrace his role and his

quest to find balance between his duty and wants resonated with me. Like Aang, I often wondered how to balance my own responsibilities while staying true to who I was.

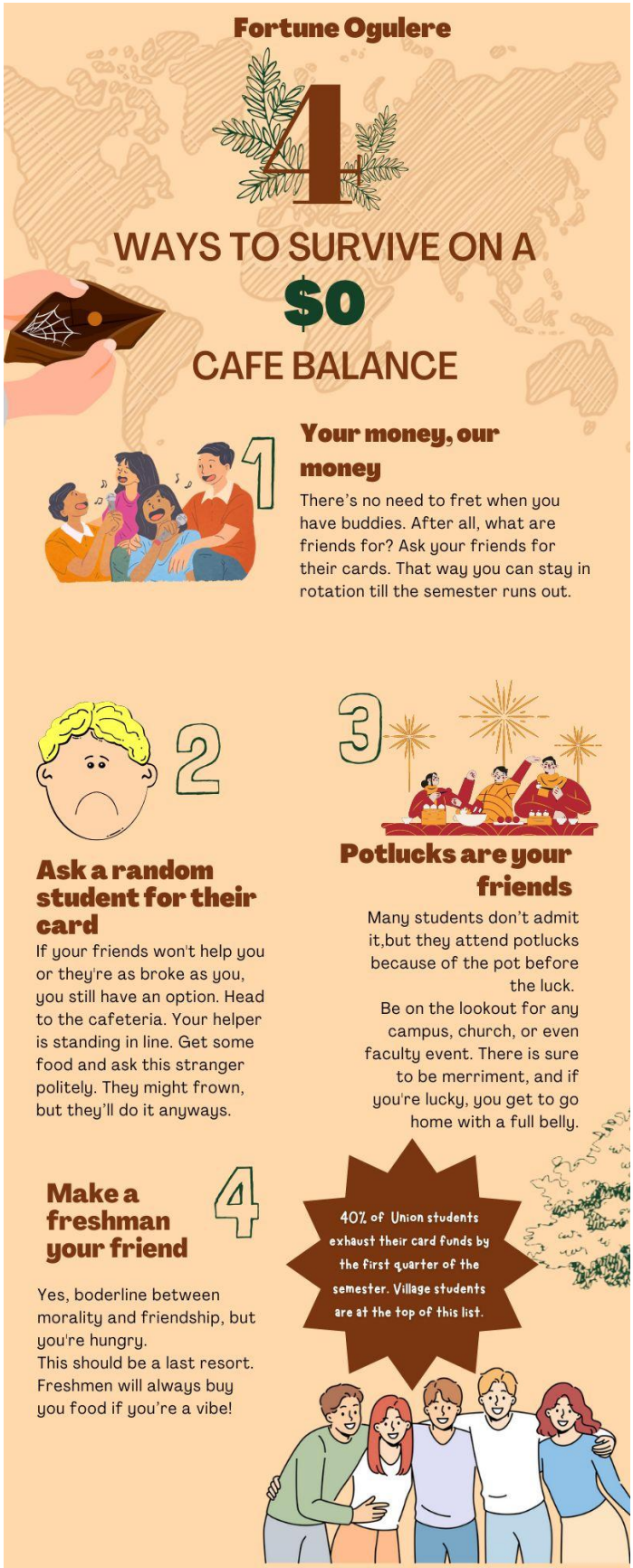
As I grew older, Avatar started to serve as a source of personal wisdom in addition to helping me relate to Aang's problems. The series' themes of development, forgiving others, and resilience found unexpected ways into my life. I learned from Aang's quest to master the four elements and bring harmony to the world that true strength comes from harmony inside oneself rather than from hostility. I found this message to be extremely helpful in overcoming difficult personal situations. For instance, I took comfort in Aang's teachings about inner peace and balance during my high school years, while I faced increasing academic expectations and personal difficulties. I discovered that the best way to handle situations was to think things out calmly, just like Aang did while he was trying to become an Avatar. The series also instilled in me the idea that patience and persistence are key in achieving one's goals, a lesson I continue to apply in my academic and personal life. Zuko's story, on the other hand, taught me about the power of change and redemption.

Initially introduced as an antagonist, Zuko's journey from a banished prince obsessed with restoring his honor to a hero who rights his wrongs is worth a thousand applauses. His struggles to break free from his father's influence and discover his own sense of honor taught me that growth is not linear, and mistakes are part of the process. This lesson became important in my life as I learned to forgive myself for failures and accept that personal development is a constant evolution.

Even now, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* serves as a lens through which I view many facets of life. Aang's ability to seek peace, even when it seems impossible, has inspired how I deal with issues in my personal life. Whether it's handling academic pressures or personal squabbles, I attempt to find solutions that promote harmony rather than creating conflict. Zuko's path of self-discovery has reminded me that transformation is always possible, and that discovering one's real purpose is a lifetime effort.

Finally, the lessons of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* continue to affect my worldview, notably the concept of balance and the belief that anybody can do great good. This series is more than simply a childhood nostalgia trip for me; it is a lifelong reminder that, no matter what hurdles we encounter, peace and balance are possible, both in the world and inside ourselves.

Technical Writing.



Published Article.

The Article below was written for Outlook Magazine, a Mid-American Adventist Magazine, and published in their April 2024 issue. The theme was Connectedness and community building. It was received with much warmth, and it helped create awareness for the international student loneliness epidemic especially in the immediate local community.

GLOBAL CITIZEN

The Loneliness of International Students.

"Culture shock shoved the loneliness into me," Dureti Olana expressed with a distant look in her eyes. Her winter-blitzed lips annunciated vague sadness as she uttered those words to me. Loneliness plagued her, and she wasn't the only one who felt this way. Several others did. Those called "international students."

No one really talks about loneliness, especially among Union Adventist University students. It's already hard enough to be individuals from different walks of life trying to navigate the four walls of a university. But what more do students feel who travelled thousands of miles across oceans to a country where they had to start afresh? That itself is terrifying.

International students studying abroad in the United States is nothing new. In fact, exchange students have been around since the indoctrination of the word "school," but recent years have seen a high influx of students from all over the globe into the United States for study.

According to research conducted last year by Statista for Higher Education, international students make up 5.6 percent of the total U.S. student population. Once in the host country, they are faced with a new way of life, different ideologies, and often times, no community to fall back on. One might ask, what makes loneliness for an international student different from the average college student? I'll answer that: the sudden transfiguration of a once controlled life to a fastpaced society with no foundation in the culture. For students like Dureti, the culture shock that comes with arriving in a liberal country such as America is enough to make one feel singled out and backed into a corner. Used to a communal life in her faraway home of Ethiopia, where neighbors were secondary caretakers of her property and welfare, she was surprised to discover the

"individualistic" mentality of her new host country. In her words, "In America, it is out of sight out of mind." She explained that people don't think about you when they don't see you.

Culture shock isn't the only harbinger of loneliness for international students. Tracy, an aspiring occupational therapy assistant from Kenya, has been a student at Union for two years. In that duration of time she suffered reoccurring mental breakdowns. Her stumbling blocks were the severity of her workload and homesickness with no one to run to. Over time she has gotten past that loneliness or has learned how to hide it better. Most international students rarely speak of loneliness and the boring routine of their lives for a single reason: the fear of sounding ungrateful.

In a perfect world with no injustice, hunger, or marginalization, most international students would rarely step off the shores of their country save for personal interests and curiosity. But the quest for greener pastures and a chance to earn a place at the table has propelled these students into the bigger unknown with their fates and the fates of their loved ones back home in their palms. To complain would be a travesty of providence. An Igbo quote says, "Those whose palm kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble." This was the mantra of many international students like Tracy, and as a result of self-silences, they back themselves into the cold arms of loneliness.

Not every international student, however, experiences loneliness in the same magnitude. For Elvin, a Union computer science major from Rwanda, loneliness only visited when he was away from the gym, video games, and arcade games. "You just have to find your tribe, especially people that will motivate you to keep pushing," he stated over a game of checkers.

Finding like-minded individuals and a warm community might sound easy, but it is a daunting task, especially to students who are more reserved in nature. This is where the already existing community can take the reins to spread warmth and welcome international students into the fold of belonging foremost as humans and essentially as Christians. Many times I have received help, guidance, and assistance from wonderful individuals who made sure I settled in quite well the first few months I arrived in the United States. So on days when loneliness would rock my boat, I remained steadfast from the single assurance of a community, no matter how small.

There are various ways to spread warmth and kinship to international students. Care packages addressed to them, Thanksgiving dinner invites, and even a single note of reassurance and kindness would be a monumental display of connectedness. This will encourage togetherness and the type of fellowship spoken of in Romans 12:5: "So we, who are many, are one body in

Christ, and individually members of one another."(NKJV). Through connectedness and community, loneliness is vanquished. A true act of goodwill sparks another.

Film Review.

Fortune Ogulere
Dr. Tanya Cochran
ENGL 375, Screen Studies
March 7, 2025

Critiquing Documentary Short Film

I am ready, Warden is a 2024 documentary short film produced and directed by Smriti Mundra. Recently nominated for the Best Documentary Short Film at the 2025 Oscar Awards, it documents the final days of a Texas death row inmate John Henry Ramirez, who was convicted of murder and sentenced to death sixteen years earlier.

Through sheer explication and usage of documentary-making elements, this film was remarkably effective in stamping its message and blatant rawness. By evoking a raw sense of introspection, it parades the topic of central justice and personal justice, showing the inevitable two sides assigned to them. The film pokes at the bear of society's mind, pointing fingers at the audience and asking them to look at the coin flipped over. What is justice? Where does faith meet state? Who has the power to take life or condemn it? What lines are drawn when it comes to revenge? These are questions that make the audience ponder on the complexity of human nature. The black and whites. No, the grays and moralistic. John Henry Ranirez murdered a man in cold blood, and fled the night, unaware of the pandemonium his actions had caused. A son without a father, a family without the breadwinner. However, justice and contempt brewed after those years, laying low, and in a twist of karmic debt John Henry Ramirez is arrested many years later. Now a father, and husband, he had everything to lose.

Lady justice is blind to pleas and sentiments. But at a certain point on a river, the fisherman must stop to see if his nets are as capable as he thought them to be. Capital punishment as a method of punishment although not widely spread as much in the world, is still very evident in the United States. Numerous debates, bills, and pleas have been championed by the masses who believe the government has no right to invoke the grim reaper on who they deemed a lost cause.

This is thought-provoking, because on the other side of the wall are the victim's families—those who had been touched by scalding hands of grief. Would it be enough knowing that their attacker draws air and is fed on a daily basis?

They demand equal provocation, an eye for eye, the mosaic mandate. And they are well in their right to do so, hence the double-faced confines of societal law. This film laid bare the orifices of morality. People like the District Attorney, and Ramirez's godmother rejected the state's authority to invoke death and instead petitioned that the culprit be sentenced to life imprisonment. Although this request was denied, it reaffirms society unreadiness to come to a stand on Capital Punishment. In the end, lives were taken. Another theme this documentary illuminated was the theme of *revenge which gives no satisfaction.* When Pablo Castro Junior, son of the deceased man killed by Ramirez, heard of his demise, nothing to seemed to have change. He had championed for justice, as was his right, but when justice was served, he realized in some way, he too had become a reason a son will grow up fatherless. Ramirez was gone, and part of him died with him.

The visual components of this film are exceptionally done in the sense that it pulls the audience in and leaves no room to break from its "reality." Being a form of investigative documentary, it makes use of non-fiction subject matters, archive footage as seen in the exposition containing Castro's murder, and interviews with Ramirez and everyone involved in the case. A mix of natural and studio lighting is used in this documentary. Alongside that, the cinematographer likely makes use of the two cameras set up for the video, as the characters were also shown from the sides while they spoke. This polish and style were amazingly effective in pulling audiences into the immediate events. It created a sense of smooth transition and urgency. Hence why it is documentary realism. An excellent choice of camera placement was in the pan and display of the prison cemetery. As if saying "Look! Many deaths commissioned by the government." This was a sublime message, intended to yet poke at the wounded enclaves of a reprimanded society. A striking shot was the focus on Castro's hat during the scene with Pablo Castro Junior. It symbolized a relic from a heavy time—nonliving yet occupying space and time. It perfectly describes the inner workings of Castro junior's mind.

The editing of this documentary takes a non-linear approach and that is what worked best for it. Rather than guiding audiences straight to the climax, it dabbles in the questions of the past with constant showcases of image and videos, and even pre-recorded tapes. It doesn't overly do this but just quite enough to make the audience feel present across all timelines. The snappy cuts

between interviews and current time, fading to black signifying a new day all worked together to deliver a well put documentary.

Even with something as obvious as short film, it still retained the tenets of engagement and adequate time cuts. The transitions ran smoothly and there was no spare second. This blend of cinematic elements helps in painting the full picture for the audience and also enhances the output, the emotions, and the gripping tension. When Ramirez's godmother, the local church of Corpus Christi and the District Attorney all filed the dispute against his death sentence, there was heightened tension of what the outcome would be. The editing especially aggravated with the constant fade to black countdown of his execution.

The diegetic sound of this documentary contributed the most to its realism. The chaotic noise of the crickets in the prison yards, the serene calm of the church, the background noise of Pablo Castro Junior's backyard all heightened the *je ne sais quoi* of this documentary. The addition of tense music at crucial moments in the documentary was the final nail to the board as this announced the heaviness of what was to come. There was no need for excessive music or extravagant scores. A man is about to die. That's as real as it could get.

The documentary was a deeply sad one for me as a viewer. It seeped into my bones, stimulated my mind, and ignited the inner workings of debate. Earlier last year during the summer I took a class with Dr. Taves where Capital punishment as a method of punishment was dissected and debated over and over again. Sad to say we came to no rigid conclusion. How could we? How could the sacredness of human life be reduced to a decision? A gavel on the block? Seriously, is that all?

Questions like this parade my mind and yet I'm filled with pity and sympathy for the victim's family. To lose a father at such an early age to a violent death would drive me insane. Where was mercy? Where was discernment? Yes you were nineteen and reckless, but stabbing someone twenty-nine times is evil, pure wickedness. I wouldn't wish that on the devil. The documentary was very compelling in the sense that they barely got in the way of how the story was being told (unlike some other documentaries) and they used elements of film exceptionally. Ultimately, this documentary stands as a posterchild for social reform and justice. The picture and the sounds can be removed, yet the message is still clear, what is done is done.

Literary Criticism/Critical Theory.

Fortune Ogulere
Justina Clayburn
LITR 366
December 10, 2024

Eve and the Fall: Reinterpreting Feminine Archetypes in Jane Eyre

Eve, the first woman in the Genesis creation narrative, has long stood as a symbol of human sin and divine consequence. Yet, she also represents moral agency, as her decision to eat the forbidden fruit initiates humanity's story of self-awareness and redemption. Over centuries, Eve's archetype has shaped the way literature portrays women, often as figures wrestling with temptation, guilt, and societal constraint. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë revisits this archetype, challenging the patriarchal interpretations that cast Eve solely as the root of humanity's downfall. By portraying Jane Eyre as a morally autonomous character who navigates her own "fall" and redemption, Brontë critiques the rigid moral expectations placed on women and reimagines feminine agency within a religious and societal framework.

Eve's Legacy in Literature

Eve's story in Genesis has been foundational in shaping depictions of women in Western literature. The narrative situates Eve as both the source of sin and the first moral agent, tasked with exercising free will. Aschkenasy argues that Eve's duality—as both transgressor and seeker of wisdom—has become a template for women's roles in literature, where they are often depicted as either virtuous or sinful (25). This dichotomy is evident in how Brontë crafts Jane Eyre's journey, positioning her as a figure who grapples with the moral consequences of her choices, much like Eve.

Literary depictions of Eve often emphasize her rebellion as a cautionary tale. Vita Daphna Arbel suggests, however, that Eve's narrative also symbolizes the pursuit of knowledge and self-awareness, traits often overlooked in patriarchal readings (18). Brontë's Jane embodies this tension. Like Eve, she is tempted—first by her attraction to Edward Rochester and later by the

promise of a secure but loveless life with St. John Rivers. Through these trials, Jane asserts her independence and moral agency, reclaiming Eve's legacy as a figure of strength rather than sin. Eve's story also reinforces the tension between societal expectations and personal autonomy. As Laura Stevens notes, the archetype of Eve has historically been used to justify the subjugation of women, associating feminine virtue with obedience and self-denial (132). However, Brontë subverts this traditional reading by allowing Jane to embody moral agency without sacrificing her individuality. Unlike Eve, who is often blamed for humanity's fall, Jane navigates her moral struggles with a sense of purpose and autonomy, redefining what it means to reconcile faith, virtue, and independence.

Jane Eyre's Temptation and Moral Struggles

Jane's time at Thornfield Hall presents her with challenges that echo Eve's moral dilemmas. Drawn to Rochester, Jane is tempted by the possibility of a life filled with passion and companionship, yet she refuses to compromise her principles. When Jane discovers Rochester's existing marriage to Bertha Mason, her decision to leave him reflects her commitment to moral integrity, even at great personal cost. As Jane herself declares, "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane" (Brontë 371). This moment parallels Eve's moral awakening after the Fall—an awareness of right and wrong that transforms both her identity and her destiny.

The parallels deepen when considering Jane's eventual return to Rochester. Much like Eve's redemptive role in human history, Jane's decision to reunite with Rochester comes only after he has undergone a physical and spiritual transformation. Thornfield Hall, consumed by fire, serves as a symbolic cleansing of Rochester's sins, allowing for a relationship built on mutual respect and equality. As Stier-Van Essen highlights, this dynamic reflects Eve's wisdom and agency, suggesting that redemption is not merely about atonement but also about reclaiming autonomy and balance in relationships (89).

Further, Jane's resistance to temptation highlights her unique strength within the Gothic tradition. In many Gothic novels, heroines are passive figures, subject to the moral authority of male characters. However, Brontë empowers Jane to make choices that align with her moral compass. By leaving Thornfield, Jane asserts that her self-worth and principles cannot be compromised for love—a decision that redefines the traditional roles of women in Gothic literature.

Feminine Agency and Patriarchal Critique

Through Jane, Brontë critiques the societal and religious expectations that confine women to Eve's archetype as either sinful or submissive. Laura Stevens argues that Eve's story reinforced patriarchal norms that demanded women's virtue be tied to their obedience and self-denial (132). Brontë disrupts this framework by presenting Jane as a figure of moral independence, who defines her own path rather than submitting to societal or romantic pressures.

This critique is particularly evident in Jane's interactions with St. John Rivers, who represents a rigid, patriarchal interpretation of faith. St. John's demand that Jane marry him and accompany him to India as a missionary mirrors the societal expectation that women sacrifice their desires for the greater good. Jane's refusal underscores her rejection of a theology that denies women agency. Instead, she embraces a faith rooted in personal integrity and emotional authenticity, aligning her more closely with a progressive reinterpretation of Eve's story.

In addition, Brontë reclaims the Eve archetype by allowing Jane to be both morally independent and redemptive. Unlike Eve, who is often cast as the cause of Adam's downfall, Jane's choices lead to Rochester's spiritual renewal. By rejecting the binary of saint or sinner, Brontë presents Jane as a fully realized individual who navigates moral complexity with grace and determination. As Arbel notes, Eve's narrative can be read as a story of growth and transformation rather than simply transgression (21). Similarly, Jane's journey reframes the narrative of female sin and redemption, offering a more nuanced and empowering vision of feminine strength.

Eve, Jane, and Feminine Redemption

Jane's ultimate reconciliation with Rochester reflects not only her personal growth but also a broader critique of how women's redemption is portrayed in literature. Rochester's injuries—his blindness and the loss of Thornfield—symbolize a stripping away of patriarchal power, enabling him to meet Jane as an equal. In this way, Brontë reimagines the redemptive arc as a partnership rather than a one-sided moral reclamation.

By returning to Rochester on her own terms, Jane mirrors Eve's role as a figure who enables renewal and change. As Stier-Van Essen observes, Eve's wisdom and agency in the biblical narrative are often overlooked in favor of her supposed guilt (88). Similarly, Jane's decisions are rooted in self-awareness and moral clarity, challenging the notion that women must submit to societal or religious constraints to achieve redemption.

Conclusion

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë reimagines the archetype of Eve, presenting Jane as a figure who negotiates the moral complexities of her time while asserting her autonomy. Through her struggles with temptation, guilt, and redemption, Jane embodies the duality of Eve—not as a passive recipient of punishment, but as a moral agent capable of shaping her own destiny. Brontë's critique of patriarchal interpretations of the Bible and society underscores the enduring relevance of Eve's story in modern literature. By reclaiming Eve's legacy, Brontë not only challenges traditional gender roles but also offers a timeless narrative of feminine resilience and moral independence.

Works Cited

Arbel, Vita Daphna. *Forming Femininity in Antiquity: Eve, Gender, and Ideologies in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve.* Oxford University Press, 2012.

Aschkenasy, Nehama. *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre.* Penguin Classics, 2006.

Stevens, Laura. *The Poor in England, 1700–1850: An Economical History.* Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Stier-Van Essen, Judith. "Revisiting Eve: Women, Sin, and Redemption in Literary Criticism." *Modern Literary Studies Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2018, pp. 86–92.

Resume.

Fortune Ogulere

Lincoln, NE · oguleref ortune@gmail.com · (402) 840-0773 · www.linkedin.com/in/FortuneOgulere

WRITING INTERESTS

Genres: Literary Fiction, creative writing, non-linear Storytelling, film.
Topics and themes: Nigerian diaspora, identity, belonging, race, immigration, human complexity.

EDUCATION

Union Adventist University — Lincoln, NE
B.A., English — August 2025
GPA: 3.471

St. Paul's International Boys' Secondary School — Owerri, Nigeria
Secondary Education — August 2016

WRITING WORKSHOPS

PCA Conference – 3 days — New Orleans, LA, April 2025
SAC Writing workshop – 1/week — Chicago, IL, October 2024
Royal Arts Academy – 1/week — Uyo, Nigeria
ABS Writers Workshop – 3/months — November 2019, Awka, Nigeria, January – March 2019

PUBLICATIONS

"The Environmental Cankerworm" - *Message Magazine* — Published Summer 2024
"Connecting Through Building Community"- *Outlook Magazine* — Spring 2024
"The Plague of the International Student"- *The Clocktower* — Winter 2022
"Dear Ifeyinwa"- Self-published — Spring 2024
"The Second-Class African Writer"- *Medium* — Fall 2024
"Ozoemena"- *Medium* — Fall 2024
"Achebe's Things Fall Apart as a Subtle Reflection of Today's Society"- *Self-published* — Spring 2021
"Why Adichie's Americanah is an Elegant Flaw of Life's Reality"- *Self-published* — Spring 2020

WORKS IN PROGRESS

"The African Yankee"
An immigrant Nigerian Writer struggles to find his place in a world where his talents are questioned.
"Vendetta of Forgotten gods"
A sixty-five-year-old depressed man traces his roots back to an ancient curse placed on his family by vengeful deities.
"Saguda A Tale of Fire"
Set in the jungles of precolonial Africa, an orphaned outcast must embrace his high-stakes destiny of stopping the end of silent gods in a world of rumbling thunder and malevolent shadows.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Studio for Writing and Speaking Fall 2024— Present
Peer Consultant

- Critiquing
- Revision
- Editing
- Public speaking training

The Clocktower Fall 2022—Winter 2023
Writer

- Article Writing
- Peer to peer research
- Interview conduction
- Journalistic Writing
- Creative Writing

Tribes and History Spring 2021— Fall 2022
Contributing Writer

- Short story writing for weekly blog post

ABS Film Academy Winter 2019—Spring 2019
Screenwriter, actor, cinematographer

- Movie Production
- Script production for movie project *"Clutch"*
- Research on entertainment needs
- Writing

Slam Theater Fall 2017 – Summer 2021

- Resident Writer
- Co-director

SKILLS & AWARDS

Computer Skills: Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint), Final Draft, Zoom, Slack, Content Creation (Canva, CapCut, Adobe Lightroom, Adobe Premier Pro)
Creative: Proofreading, editing, painting, music composition, filmmaking, dancing, singing
Languages: Native English, Native Igbo, Basic French, Basic Spanish
Certifications: *Certificate of Completion, Screenwriting*