

MYTH, FOLKLORE AND THE JOURNEY MOTIF IN JOHN TOLKIEN'S *THE HOBBIT* AND NNEDI OKORAFOR'S *ZARAH THE WINDSEEKER*

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Abstract

Several African and European writers have for several years, largely explored various aspects of myth, folktale, and the journey motif in their creative works as means of portraying the history, culture, belief systems and traditions of their people. Existing studies have also focused largely on the representations of myth, folktale, and the journey motif in *The Hobbit* by John Tolkien and Nnedi Okorafor's *Zarah the Windseeker* respectively. However, there have been few attempts at a comparative study between these two novels from different regions of the world. Thus, this research is a comprehensive and comparative approach to myth, folktale and the journey motif in these two novels. Myth and Folklore serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Two novels are selected from two creative writers: a European and an African writer, a male and female, from different geographical regions based on their thematic relevance and a similar approach to this discourse. The novel selected from the European region is *The Hobbit* by John Ronald Tolkien while *Zarah the Windseeker* by Nnedi Okorafor represents the African region. Critical analysis of the novels reveal several similar elements of myth and folktale inherent in them as well as reveals the historical, cultural and sociological backgrounds and influences of these elements. The journey motif is also largely explored in this research as a significant element essential for the transformation and growth of certain characters in the novels. Myth and folktale serve as a veritable means of understanding the culture, values and beliefs of the people. Hence, these novels serve as a relatable medium for portraying the depth and beliefs of these societies at certain historical periods.

Keywords: *Myth, Folktale, Journey motif, Fantasy, Science fiction*

Introduction

The broad category of speculative fiction, has grown from its ancient roots to various genres like magical realism, horror fiction, superhero fiction, alternative history, science fiction, science fantasy, and fantasy, stray strongly from reality. The distinctiveness of this essay is in its approach to myth, folktale and the Journey Motif in *The Hobbit* by Tolkien and *Zarah the Windseeker* by Okorafor-Mbachu. Although works have been done on *The Hobbit* and *Zarah the Windseeker* individually, none has attempted a comparative study of these two novels. As regard the fusion, this study attempts to portray the elements of myth, folktale and fantasy in the shaping of both novels. For this research, myth and folktale are the adopted theories. This is because both texts have deep roots in myths and

folktales.

Theoretical Framework of Myth and Folktale

Oluwatoyin Jegede in *Basic Topics in Oral Literature* defines Myth as a kind of oral narrative which explains matters that concern the beliefs, philosophies, and metaphysical phenomena in human life (65). Idowu affirms further that it is a story which attempts to provide answers to the questions posed to man by the world in which he lives. Stating further, Jegede posits that it is in myth that Africans explain their beliefs about the existence of God, creation, life after death, gender, sun, sky, ground and other things in his environment.

Myth, according to Abrams and Harpham:

...signifies any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance. However, a myth is one story in a mythology. Most myths are related to social rituals-set forms and procedures in sacred ceremonies-but anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. If the protagonist is a human being rather than a supernatural being, the traditional story is usually called not a myth but a legend. If the hereditary story concerns supernatural beings who are not gods, and the story is not part of a systemic mythology, it is usually classified as a folktale. (230)

Folktale on the other hand, includes tales of talking animals, tales that tell why (pourquoi), tales of magic (fairy tales), cumulative tales and tales of exaggeration or legendary tales (tall tales). Common folktale motifs include stories of wishes granted, monsters, magical objects, use of trickery, a poor person becoming rich, a variety of unwise characters, the youngest sibling becoming successful after others in the family fail, and so on. Folktales are usually about ordinary people and everyday life and the stories include setting, characters, and a problem. While the characters are often flat, they are usually very good or very bad with most exaggerated characteristics. The hero and heroine are usually young. While the heroine is charitable and caring, the hero is honourable, courageous, and unselfish. Both the hero and the heroine usually have special abilities representing one particular trait such as cleverness. Hyperbole is always found in tall tales (legendary tales). For a folktale formula, the plot begins quickly, characters are one-sided, plots move along well-trod paths, and all questions are answered before the story ends. The setting of a folktale is described easily and briefly and it fits the typical geography of the culture. Sometimes, it is not mentioned but assumed. Time is in the past (usually long-ago) embedded within the history of the culture. The time is fantasy time ('once upon a time' sets the stage and 'They lived happily ever after' closes the tale.). The themes of folktales are usually universal truths, lessons, and values related to people, their action, and/or material goods that are valued by the group that creates the folktale. Often, the tale tells what happens to those who do not obey the traditions of the group, problems of young adults, security, fear of leaving home, fear of not being loved or giving love, conflict of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, happiness, friendship, loyalty, good triumph over evil, among others.

Critical Reception of John Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Zarah the Windseeker*

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) were the sparks that lit the fire for modern fantasy. Eaton asserts that "The Hobbit is a glorious account of a magnificent adventure filled with suspense and seasoned with a quiet humour that is irresistible" In essence, Eaton identifies *The Hobbit* as an adventure novel but does not state the basic ground on which the novel is rooted which is myth and folktale neither does she admit that the adventure was made possible in the novel through the fusion of various myths from different societies.

Closely related to Eaton's assertion, is a comment by Lewis, a close friend of Tolkien who states:

The truth is that this book has a number of good things; never before united, have come together; a fund of humour, an understanding of children, and a happy fusion of the scholars with the poet's grasp of mythology...The professor has the air of inventing nothing. He has studied trolls and dragons at first and describes them with that fidelity that is worth oceans of glib originality.

Lewis' statement is relevant to this study because it stresses Tolkien's broad reading of different stories and events as contributing to his use of mythology in the writing of his text. Mythologies from various sources are presented in the text by Tolkien as authoritative and factual. Eaton in her assertion only commends the humour used in the novel but Lewis goes a little further in emphasising that the author owes most of his plot to various myths. It is claimed that years after the publication of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien himself claimed that the novel was not specifically written for children but had to do with his interest in mythology and legends.

In an attempt to properly explain and understand *The Hobbit*, some critics have viewed Tolkien's text as his own experience or a parable of World War I where the hero, Bilbo, is plucked from his historical home and taken into a far off place for war where traditional types of heroism are shown to be futile. Correspondingly, Croft asserts that Tolkien's literary reaction to war at his time was different from most post-war writers which is evidence with his generous employment of irony as a method for distancing events and the use of mythology to mediate his experience.

A Jamaican born Canadian Fantasy writer, Hopkinson avers that the novel: *Zarah the Windseeker* is a fantastical travelogue into the unknown of a young girl's fears, and the magical world that surrounds her town. Okorafor-Mbachu weaves together folktales with fantasy in this novel. It is vital to note that the folktales weaved together are existing stories in the society, ancient stories which is why Chukwumah avers that critics like Onukaogu and Onyerionwu suggest that the novel is a tale that mingles mythological fantasies with modern science and technology and that it is an offshoot from magical realism and folktale. Although in the novel the country is unnamed, some realistic incidences and leads, one of which is the Abiku concept, pin the work to Nigeria. An element of the impossible in the novel is the land: Ginen, an utopia, with the most populous region being the

Ooni kingdom and its citizens whose philosophy of life does not seem to free them from believing some superstitions. In comparison, while in *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* and *The Palm-wine Drinkard*, the questers are essentially aided by charms, Zarah is ably aided by what she calls Digi-book which assumes the relevance, in technological terms, of charms and talisman... The wide contrast between *Zarah the Windseeker* and any other work in the Nigerian literary tradition partly rests on this scientific and technological object of great aid (135, 238, 239, 245).

Elements of Myth and Folktale in *The Hobbit* and *Zarah the Windseeker*

The plot of *The Hobbit* centers round myths from the Germans, Norse, Greek, histories and archetypes. The extent to which various myths are adopted in this novel is shown through the textual analysis and findings in the plot which exists in various cultures and traditions. These archetypes, folktales, and mythologies are adopted by Tolkien to create his own myth for England. Tolkien's aim of achieving a classical text is realized through his employment of the journey motif and language use which can be described as 'Old English'. The whole plot of the novel is a journey which can be literarily seen as a physical journey from one place to another for the reclaiming of lost treasures or a metaphorical journey from ignorance to realization of the characters. Jones describes Tolkien as someone who spent much of his life studying ancient literature and who believed that legends and myths are inherently true (125). Tolkien wrote in one of his letters, "After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truths'." He believed that we can understand the truths of the real world through fantasy stories like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Jones further affirms that Tolkien applies the motif of the dragon from Beowulf, his favourite poem. In this novel: *The Hobbit*, the dragon is called Smaug. Although dragons are found in mythologies throughout the world, their nature varies widely. In a tribal area in Pakistan (Asia), dragons are positive creature and the mythical ancestors of the Chinese symbolizing divinity, nobility, wisdom, boldness, heroism and the dragon's greed is an element of folk tradition as well as their pride (Jones 125). The dragon hunt is the main plot of this novel and the recovery of the treasure is the aim of Baggins and the dwarves.

...were low in slumber...Above him the sleeping dragon lay, a dire menace even in his sleep...he grasped a great two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry then Bilbo fled but the dragon did not wake... (215-216).

The above excerpt explains the theft of the cup carried out by Bilbo Baggins on his first visit to the cave. Smaug awakens when he discovers that his golden cup has been stolen by a being. He could not recognize Baggins because he was invisible and his smell is not familiar to him. Dragons are usually not familiar with dwarves. This theft causes the dragon to rampage and wreak havoc on people not responsible for the theft. This event is similar to what happened in an old English poem called Beowulf. An excerpt from the poem reads thus:

For three hundred winters this waster of peoples
Held the huger treasure-hall under the earth
Till the robber aroused him to anger and rage,

Stole the rich beaker and bore to his master,
Imploring his lord for a compact of peace. (Line 72-76)

Then the worm awakened and war was kindled (Line 81)
The worm's mood was kindled to battle and war (Line 92)

In this poem Beowulf, as suggested by the above lines, the thief of the dragon's hoarded treasure is a downtrodden slave fleeing a harsh master. The dragon only awakes when the thief leaves because he recognizes his smell which prompts the dragon's revenge on the kingdom of the Geats resulting in the death of Beowulf. Tolkien twisted traditional material of Beowulf to suit his own ideological end because while Beowulf kills the dragon and later dies from the injury inflicted on him by the dragon, Bilbo Baggins does not kill the dragon because heroism explored in this novel is different from the traditional kind of heroism. Tolkien was trying to portray true heroism in this novel by Bilbo not killing Smaug unlike Thorin who kills Smaug and Beowulf who kills the dragon.

According to Burton in "Invisibility in Mythology and Folklore," the ring that Bilbo uses to hide himself at crucial times from his enemies is said to be based on the ring of invisibility. In Greek mythology, 'the Cap of Invisibility' or 'Helm of Darkness' is a helmet or cap variously worn by Athenians, Hermes, and Perseusians to make themselves invisible to gods, heroes, monsters, and men. In book II of 'The Republic', Plato discusses the Ring of Gyges, which according to legend, makes its bearer invisible. The ring was once given to the shepherd Gyges who uses it to seduce the Queen of King Candaules and thereby usurp the throne of Lydia. In order to fight the Titans, Zeus is granted the thunderbolt, Poseidon is granted the trident; and Hades is granted a helm. The helm of Hades is a helm that turns its wearer invisible to mortals and immortals and Poseidon wears this helm when he ventures to slay the Gorgon Medusa. The helm allows Perseus to remain undetected by the Medusa and thus, insulating him from Medusa's fatal stare. Similarly, Bilbo finds a ring hidden in a hole in the rock in Gollum's tunnel which he picks and hides. The ring is a ring of invisibility owned by Gollum which he calls "My precious" and "My birthday-present" (81). Gollum makes use of the ring when he is very hungry and tired of eating fish because this will make him invisible so he could prey on other animals.

Of course they soon came down after him, hooting and hallooing; and hunting among the trees...They could not find Bilbo with the ring on, slipping in and out of the shadow of the trees, running quick and quiet, and keeping out of the sun; so soon they went back grumbling and cursing to guard the door. Bilbo had escaped. (90)

The statement above explains the chaos the invisibility of Bilbo causes. It causes disarray as his pursuers begin to look for him in order to kill him. Through the ring, he escapes from the tunnel he is put in.

The motif of the riddle contest is widespread throughout folk literature, showing up in both narratives and song now regarded as a myth. The riddle game that Bilbo and old Gollum play is a traditional way of passing the time. One of the riddle goes thus:

Thirty white horses on a red hill,
First they champ,
Then they stamp,
Then they stand still. (74)

To this riddle, Old Gollum answers ‘chestnut’ and then “Teeth”. Gollum calls it ‘chestnut’ initially because of how old the riddle is then he gives the answer “teeth”. This riddle occurs in other cultures and languages as well. The Welsh version of this riddle ask: “What is a row of white cattle and a red bull in the middle?” (Teeth and tongue).

According to Jones, the motif of this riddle contest that Bilbo and old Gollum engage in when they ask each other five riddles each is found in a number of Old English and Norse texts including the Old English Dialogs of Solomom and Saturn, the Norse Saga of king Heidrek the Wise, and the poem Vafxruxnismal. In Vafxruxnismal, Odin asks Vafxruxnir;

Tell me this one thing if your knowledge is sufficient...from where the earth came or the sky above”. Vafxruxnir’s response is: “From Ymir’s flesh earth was shaped, and the mountains from his bones; and the sky from the skull of the frost-cold giant, and the sea from his blood (145)

Baggins’ responses to some questions asked by Smaug are mythical in this novel and archetypes of other literary works. The excerpt below is a response to the question of his identity asked by Smaug.

Smaug ask Baggins “Who are you and where do you come from? May I ask?”
I come from under the hill, and under the hills and over the hills my paths led. And through the air. I am he that walks unseen... I am the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly. I was chosen for the lucky number...I am he that buries his friend alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from water. I came from the end of a bag, but no bag went over me. (222-223) Baggins responds.

Baggins makes use of riddles to answer Smaug’s questions so that Smaug does not guess who he is or, use his name to curse him which was very common among dragons in Old English period.

Gandalf is a character in The Hobbit who decides that Bilbo Baggins is an effective burglar for the dwarves. Some scholars have pointed out that the name ‘Gandalf’ was taken from the twentieth century Norse mythology derived from the Icelandic ‘gandr’ and ‘elf’. The character of Gandalf in comparison with is name is depicted earlier in the novel.

Gandalf in the meantime was still standing outside the door, and laughing long but quietly. After a while, he stepped up and with the spike of his staff, scratched a queer style on the hobbit’s beautiful green front door” (6)

The magical staff Gandalf uses to perform this pyrotechnic in the lines above is significant

to his journey. This action is a sign to the dwarves who come to Baggins' house the next day. They are able to easily identify the right house because of Gandalf's sign. Gandalf does this after Bilbo rejects his offer to be a part of the company needed for the journey. 'Gandalf' is merely one of his names as he is known to the Elves as 'Mithrandrin' (the grey pilgrim), 'Thorkan' to the dwarves among others. Not only his name but also his nature appears to change. The hobbits regard him as a jolly entertainer and a figure whose fireworks and stories make him a welcome and legendary guest. The dwarves appear to respect him as a source of knowledge. Tolstoy in Jones' *Myth and Middle-earth: Exploring The Legends Behind J.R.R Tolkien's The Hobbit & The Lord of the Rings* points out in that Gandalf and Merlin share similar characteristics of magic, wisdom, power, and especially humour and both have a habit of leaving their charges to deal with adventure themselves in *The Quest for Merlin* (75). However, they appear out of the blue to save the day when really needed. Both are fond of distinguishing themselves as beggars or wanderers and exhibiting their pyrotechnic skills. The underlying archetype that unites all these figures namely: Gandalf, Loki, Odin, Myrddin, Suibhne, Lailoken, and Merlin is the trickster. This is Tolkien's adaptation of the archetypal motif.

Even the setting of the novel is significant and mythical. Tolkien sets *The Hobbit* in Middle-earth and the name "Middle-earth" has its origin in the North's mythology derived from the old English 'Middangeard (middle enclosure) which later became Middel-erde (now meaning Middle-earth – the land of men).

The prologue of *Zarah the Windseeker* introduces us the myth and folklore of the people of Ooni Kingdom. These myths are present to give an insight into the West African Cultures. The myth of dadalocks in Ooni kingdom is basic in this novel "... having 'dada' hair has been a traditional belief symbolizing strange powers commanding weird activities to take place..." (Prologue viii). *Zarah the Windseeker* features the village of Kirki in the Ooni kingdom. There is a myth by the younger generation in the Ooni Kingdom that anyone born with 'dada' is evil especially if such an individual is a female. Zarah Tsami is born a 'dada' and this makes her to be regarded as inferior by her peers who have stereotypes about people born with 'dadalocks'. Her feature creates segregation among her and the students in her class.

To many, to be dada meant you were born with strange powers. That you could walk into a room and a mysterious wind would knock things over or clocks would automatically stop; that your mere presence would cause flowers to grow underneath the soil instead of above. That you caused things to rebel or that you would grow up to be rebellious yourself! And what made things even worse was that I was a girl, and only boys and men were supposed to be rebellious. Girls were supposed to be soft, quiet, and pleasant. (Prologue viii)

The people of Kirki are pictured as modernized, yet traditional. They do not like to look too closely or deeply to centuries or millennia ago. When people wanted answers, instead of inquiring from an elderly person in the society who is usually regarded as a repository of knowledge, they look up their questions on the network and get answers which may not be correct. This form of knowledge creates a stereotype about dadas in the kingdom

contrary to what was believed in previous ages.

In the novel, Baba Grip is a representation of the folkloric world. He is an old man who is a village chief and a friend to Zarah's grandfather. Zarah states: "...he was old, and old people tend to have a wide range of knowledge about a wide range of things..." (45). Okorafor- Mbachu's representation of a character as old as Papa Grip suggests that he is looked upon as an instructor of the present generation and a reminder of the folk tradition, culture, and beliefs of the people of Ooni kingdom because old people are often looked at as embodiments of wisdom and story tellers of the past. When Zarah feels bad about how she is treated in school, the only person she agrees to talk to is papa Grip who believes that a person born with *dada* is destined for greatness.

I love Papa Grip. Everyone did. Aside from being like a grandfather to me, he was the reason Kirki did not have any armed robbers, murderers, or groups. He knew how to organize and make sure everyone was happy. He wove peace and understanding with bare hands (3).

The folkloric belief in greatness and wisdom of the '*dada*' was once the belief of the people of the kingdom of Ooni but the present generation and school mates like Ciwanka Mairiga believe that a girl with *dada* hair is devilish, a rebel, and with mysterious powers that make things go wrong. This creates problems for Zarah in school because she is isolated from everyone else until Dari walks up to her one day, starts talking and reading with her until they eventually become friends.

Earth is a myth to Zarah, Dari and everyone in Ooni Kingdom. Zarah and Dari's experience with Nsibidi (who once had '*dadalocks*' but cuts it) in the dark market reshapes their knowledge of this myth of earth not being in existence. Initially in the novel, Zarah tells Dari "Earth is a myth!" (59). However, at the end of the novel Zarah's says "Earth, It's real?" (306). Nsibidi hides her identity from Zarah and Dari until the end of the novel when she tells Zarah and Dari that her mother is from Earth. She hides her identity and her place of origin because of the myth of the non-existent earth in Ooni kingdom. According to her, "Kirki is not ready to know so much about me." (305)

The myth about the Greeny Jungle in Kirki is also widespread in the Ooni kingdom. The jungle is said to be forbidden and anyone who goes in never survives and even if they return to Ooni kingdom, they never remain the same. This myth prompts Dari to go into the jungle accompanied by Zarah and he is smitten by a war snake which puts him in deep sleep that causes Zarah to go to the Jungle in search of the Elgort's egg.

Many of them emerged with odd afflictions. One came out of the jungle with strange green birds nesting in her hair and some even stranger disease that made her skin grow fish scales. Some are even rumored to have returned mad and the many of them didn't leave past thirty years. (121).

Judging from the stereotyped ideology of the people of Kirki about the Greeny jungle, it

is discovered that these afflictions were based on most of the weird experiences they face in the jungle and their vulnerability to pests, insects and even animals. However, with the 'Digi-book' and the instructions therein, precautions are given to future explorers of the jungle on how to prepare before embarking on the journey. The myth of "...Everyone knew that once a person entered the Forbidden Greeny Jungle, he or she was not coming out" is changed when Zarah returns to the town. This effects a minor change in the perspective of the people of Ooni Kingdom because of their sacred traditional beliefs. Zarah states:

Also, just after my return, a group of scientists decided to actually venture into the jungle for research! Since then, they have discovered three plants with amazing medical value and two animals with strange skills, which they are documenting...Not surprisingly, however, a few have fallen terribly sick and had to return to Ooni. None have died yet, though (294-295).

The reaction by the people of Ooni Kingdom is:

"She's dada, maybe she's allowed to pass through, but I know I'm not" (298). Okorafor-Mbachu creates an environment that is modern in lifestyle and familiar to science and technology yet, ancient in beliefs and traditions. A basic tool in this novel is the Digi-book. It is through the directions of the instructor of the Digi-book that Zarah is able to get the Elgort's egg needed to cure Dari. Fantasy and science fiction are the underlying techniques employed by Okorafor-Mbachu in this novel and technology serves as a major anti-folkloric element in this novel. Since is believed to prove everything including folklores (as is the case of the Digi-book), the stories of the old have no influence on Dari.

The tale of the Dark Market and its stories is one of the major folktale in this novel told by parents to their children. Zarah is told by her mother:

The Dark Market is where thieves, evil magicians, and shady people do business. There are things there that you cannot explain: some are fascinating but most are dangerous. Keep your distance from that place, Zarah. That was what my mother had told me years ago, when she first brought me to the market.... (29)

Similar to what Zarah is told by her mother in the above excerpt, most children in Kirki are cautioned by their parents not to go near the Dark Market. This becomes a folklore being passed on from one generation to the other through the words of mouth with a repercussion if the rule is broken. However, Zarah's venture into the Dark Market changes her life completely. It is in this market that she discovers who she really is and meets Nsibidi. Nsibidi and Zarah become friends after the baboons (which interact with Nsibidi) tell Nsibidi of the fate and adventures that await Zarah. Later on, Nsibidi goes in search of Zarah in the Greeny Jungle. Zarah's first step of realizing who she is begins when she decides to disobey her parents by entering into the forbidden market. Her self-realization journey continues as she goes into the Forbidden Greeny Jungle known to only bring death. Dari, Zarah's best friend is a frequent visitor to this market despite being warned of the consequences by his parents. This action by Zarah and Dari shows their neglect of the

folk tradition. The myth behind one's popularity and success is traced down to the story of the believed 'Personal Pepper' which brings goodluck.

If you grew and ate your own personal pepper, you became socially spicy; people laughed more at your jokes, found you more attractive, wanted to be around you more. Basically, you cultivated more popularity. But you had to be aware of eating someone else's personal pepper. (24)

Folktale, as established earlier in this chapter, deals with the food certain people eat and what they drink. 'Personal Pepper' in the Kirki community is a recognized source of happiness by the people of Ooni kingdom and the story of the importance of the 'Personal Pepper' is known by the old and young. This 'Personal Pepper' is a folktale of the people which have also been passed from older generations to the modern one. It is believed to be favourite among politicians, pop stars, and car salesmen because it brings good luck to them. Zarah considers eating of her own personal pepper as an option and opportunity for her to have more friends and bring out her personal spice so that people can be attracted to her. However, she Zarah does not buy the Personal Pepper because of fear.

The extent to which folklore is explored in this novel is dominant especially with the tales of the old people which forms the core of the novel. The Ooni kingdom is associated to have various beliefs, songs, cultures and so on which are peculiar to their tradition. The way in which the novel is structured suggests a traditional storytelling technique which is a folkloric element. Just like moonlight stories, the protagonist begins:

When I was born, my mother took one look at me and laughed. 'She's dada,' said the doctor, looking surprised. 'I can see that', my mother replied with a smile. She took me in her arms and gently touched one of the thick dark clumps of hair growing from my little head. (Prol. Vii)

To further enhance the folktale in the novel, the protagonist: Zarah does not mention her name till page 9 and the use of the personal pronoun 'I' runs throughout the novel which extends the narrative as a folkloric one informing others about her earlier experience. Zarah Tsami is thirteen-year-old. Folktales are popularly told to children and teenagers by adults or people who believe to be older or more experienced and this is so with Zarah who has proven to be more experienced than her other peers through her journey in the Greeny Jungle.

The fashion magazine named Ooni Fashion Magazine's Best of the Year found in the library by Zarah and Dari written by Tunde Olatunde further confirms the elements of folklore in this novel. It reads thus:

My old old grandmother once told me that a few of these dada-born folks were born with the ability to fly. Windseekers, she used to call them. But she also told me that there were little blue men three apples high who lived I the mushrooms that grew in our backyard. (57)

The author foregrounds the adjective ‘old’ by repeating it twice to buttress the influence that age has to do with folktales. While the name “Grandmother” presupposes that the mother is already old, Okorafor-Mbachu is not satisfied until the degree of the ‘old’ is adequately captured so, she goes further by saying ‘old old’. The old in the society are believed to be the repositories of knowledge. It is also through the tale told to Tunde Olatunde by his grandmother traditionally referred to as ‘moonlight stories’ that he gets to know about ‘Windseekers’. The story by Tunde affirms Zarah belief in her ability and she refers to herself as a ‘Windseeker’. Thus, Tunde grandmother’s story brings about self-knowledge to Zarah. However, Tunde Olatunde confirm his speculations about this tale he is told by his grandmother when he says: “I know a friend of a friend who knows two dada-born folks. He said neither of these individuals has ever left the ground without any help. So, maybe my grandmother is not so reliable.” (57). Zarah and Dari are not teenagers who believe so much in folklores and that is why they disregard the warning about the Dark Market and eventually venture into the Forbidden Jungle. Dari pays no attention to the folk stories he is told because he believes there are no reasonable proof to why the Dark Market and the Forbidden Jungle should not be entered into considering the fact that they are great places (because he has ventured into the Dark Market). The reading of so many books from the library shape his ideologies and increase his knowledge. Dari once said “I love the library! It’s the most unbiased place in Ginen” (61). Folktales are integral aspect of people culture and therefore, difficult to forget or break because it has been passed down from previous generations. Zarah states:

Most people still viewed the jungle as a forbidden place, even after all
our talk with the newspapers. Old habits are hard to break, I guess.
(297)

Furthermore, the song that Zarah sings while in the Jungle to escape the Carnigourd that attacked her is an influence of folklore taught by her mother.

A truth that never fails
A life so weak and frail
I know, I know,
You’re scared, it shows
But, I swear you’ll make it there.

Chasing oblivion
Humming a playful tune
Because if I don’t catch it first
It will come steal my sun and my moon

Embracing oblivion
And loving it too
Cause somebody locked all the windows
And doors that led out of this room

Beautiful oblivion
Unbreakably true
But at least for the moment

I'll always be right here with you

Embracing oblivion

It embraces me, too

Well, I suppose it's the

Only thing left for a dreamer to do. (190-191)

When Zarah starts singing this song while she is wrapped around a Carnigourd's vein in the jungle, the Carnigourd, known as a meat-eating plant immediately stops pulling her and begins to savour the pleasure of her voice. The Carnigourd responds to her pleasant sound which distracts it and paves way for her escape. Songs are folkloric element taught by parents to their children. Often, these songs are for specific situations and didactic in nature. This song helps Zarah escape death.

Fantasy is prominent in the text but spiced with elements of science fiction with reference to the Digi-Book. The escapades of Zarah in the Jungle and her interaction with animals who talk, trees that change colours regularly and even gorillas who take care of her in their town, feeding her, clothing her and even interacting with her are fantastic. One of her conversation with Misty the gorilla goes thus:

So do animals ever... attack the village?" Zarah asked as she helped Misty the gorilla to put a clean sheet on her bed. (225). "No need to worry about tonight. We the gorillas have lived in this jungle since time began. Though we are a peaceful people, we have learnt to defend ourselves. All of our young men and women are trained warriors who defend the village when need be..." Misty replied. (225)

Zarah is surprised that the gorillas are doing things human beings do, such as talking and dressing her bed. This is fantastic and imaginary because gorillas do not live like humans (having beds) rather do they communicate in English like this novel portrays. Misty's response to Zarah is even more fantastic because old Misty is a gorilla which is not expected to talk like a human. Misty refers to the gorillas as 'men' and 'woman' hereby giving the animals human attributes. Likewise, Zarah's encounter with the bees and the wood wit depicts fantasy. Most people talk about wood wits but no one exactly knows what a wood wit is. Some say they are things that live in trees and help the tree rather than hurt it. The folktale in the Ooni Kingdom is that trees with wood wits are larger and healthier than other trees. "I see you're looking at my lovely friends", the wood wit said to Zarah (166). The wood wits conversing with Zarah is rather fantastic than true. Therefore, fantasy is dominant in this novel with its extended form of science fiction.

One common narrative technique between *The Hobbit* and *Zarah the Windseeker* is the journey motif coupled with adventure explored by both writers. The journey motif is a classical technique and Tolkien makes use of this because he is writing a classical text though in a modern period. Tolkien and Okorafor-Mbachu make use of this journey motif previously used in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon* (1938), Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). It is a universal technique which is employed by various writers from

different countries. In this technique, it is expected that a character undergoes series of experiences which most times, may be in a place different or distant from the character's original home. On returning after so many obstacles, he or she becomes a transformed being. *The Hobbit* and *Zarah the Windseeker* explore this motif. The main characters: Bilbo Baggins and Zarah Tsami leave their homes to venture in a different world where they experience various events which shape them into better respected and enlightened characters. The journey motif is one of the basic characteristics of the broad genre of speculative fiction because at the end, things and persons are transformed. In *The Hobbit*, Baggins is encouraged to go on the journey by Gandalf- a wizard who is much respected by the dwarves while in *Zarah the Windseeker*, Zarah is encouraged to go by Dari, her best friend. Joseph Campbell identifies the structure of the journey motif in *The Hobbit* as first, Bilbo's call to adventure initiated by Gandalf, his abrupt refusal, and the awakening of his interest after the old man stirs up fond childhood (5).

Gandalf? Good gracious me! Not the wandering wizard that gave Old Took a pair of magic diamond studs that fastened themselves and never came undone until ordered? Not the man that used to make such particularly excellent fireworks! I remember those. (5)

Baggins switches to his Tookish side after making the above statement (because hobbits do not like adventures. They are plain and quiet creatures) and bluntly refuses Gandalf's appeal. Baggins responds to Gandalf's request thus: "Good morning! "He said at last. "We don't want any adventure here, thank you! You might try over the hill or across the water." By this he meant the conversation was ended" (5).

Whereas, in *Zarah the Windseeker*, Zarah was initially afraid of going to the Greeny Jungle but eventually follows Dari, her best friend because she does not want him to go alone. The attempt by the labourers working close to the Jungle to discourage them is futile even after being told several stories of the jungle. Dari convinces Zarah to go. He tells her the jungle will provide enough space to practice her flying technique.

If the hero refuses the call, Campbell says it turns negative and it appears this is where this story ends (6). When Baggins tells Gandalf the 'good morning' farewell but invites him over for tea the next day and shuts his door, Baggins does not refuse the call but accepts it unwittingly and unknown to him. As Gandalf leaves he ask himself: "What on earth did I ask him for tea for!" (6). Bilbo's invitation to Gandalf for tea gives him the opportunity to meet the dwarves who impart the rest of the knowledge needed for the adventure to Bilbo. Thereafter, he encounters the stage of the journey where he receives supernatural aid and fortification from his mentor before embarking. Above all, Baggins is bestowed by his mentor with the knowledge on the mission and what he needs to face the challenges he encounters. Zarah and Dari are encouraged to go to the Greeny Jungle with the aid of the Digi-book which is a product of science fiction and includes everything about the jungle. Dari is Zarah's mentor at their first foray in the jungle. He encourages her and diffuses the stories and beliefs she has about the jungle. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf, Baggins' mentor sees and believes more in the hobbit than the dwarves and they do not hide their dissatisfaction of Gandalf's choice of a burglar. However, he reassures them that: "There

is a lot more to him than you can guess, and a deal more than he has any of himself. You may (possibly) all live to thank me yet". (19). Baggins manages to cross the first threshold through the aid of Gandalf after he is captured by the trolls. Just at the verge of being killed and eaten, Gandalf rescues him and he receives an item (a short-sword) which he keeps to protect himself and gains knowledge about the trolls and how they turn to stones in daylight and can be fooled with wit like they were confused and tricked by the dwarves while Zarah escapes her first threshold in the jungle after her experience with the spiders sized like small children (125). She is only left alive by these spiders because she is deemed inedible. According to her,

...They knocked me down and scuttled up and down my body and my satchel. Their many legs left like stiff brushes scraping the exposed parts of my skin!... But after going up and down my body, they scrambled off and regrouped in front of me...Then they ran off as far as they had come! I remember reading somewhere that some insects and a few spiders taste with their feet. Maybe these thought I didn't taste very good. (125-126)

As the story progresses in its journey, Bilbo and Zarah face other numerous trials in the novels. There are many thresholds to cross and many threshold guardians to overcome. Above all is the dragon Baggins is to steal the treasures from and the female Elgort Zarah is to steal the Elgort's egg from. After the journey in the strange land ends successful with each character achieving their aims, Baggins in *The Hobbit* finally becomes transformed into what he has the potential to be. He becomes a realised Took instead of a Baggins and he attains self-realisation of this when he kills the great spiders that attack him without the aid of Gandalf or the Dwarves. Immediately he kills the spider, he "fell down and remembered nothing for a while" (156) which is interpreted to mean a death, to be reborn. When he is reborn (awakes), he feels different. There is the usual dim grey light of the forest-day about him when he comes to consciousness and the spider lay dead beside him and his sword-blade is stained black. Somehow, the killing of the giant spider, all alone in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or anyone else make a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He feels a different person, someone much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach as he wipes his sword on the grass and puts it back in his sheath (156). Baggins further cements his transformation by giving a name to his short-sword by calling it 'Sting'. Zarah in *Zarah the Windseeker* becomes a completely different Zarah when she returns to Kirki. Everyone is surprised that she makes it out of the jungle alive. She becomes a heroine and is invited for various interviews. Zarah no longer feels inferior about her dadalocks. Furthermore, after the death of the dragon and the recovery of the treasures from the mountain, Baggins is given his own share of the treasure, and he returns home. Campbell suggests that the return journey is one of the most difficult passages during the hero's journey because he has to retain and reconcile the knowledge that he has received in the other world and bring it into the ordinary world. Failing to do so could mean they could not return successfully (10). Baggins and Zarah later becomes masters of the two worlds: the familiar and the unfamiliar, conscious and unconscious and they are also physically able to leave one world for the other without fear or restraint. However, the experiences they Baggins never leaves him the same. Each look forward to yet another exciting journey. This journey motif is evident in John Bunyan's

Pilgrim's Progress. Christian, the main character begins a journey in search of salvation and encounters various obstacles on the way and meets other people such as Pliable, Obstinate among others. The towns, and names of the people he sees are all Christian allegories but at the end of the journey, he is a different person entirely. Likewise, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) by Amos Tutuola and *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* by D.O Fagunwa (1938) are all representations of the folkloric traditions. This journey motif is used within and outside Europe as evident in *The Hobbit* by J.R.R Tolkien and *Zarah the Windseeker* by Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu..

Conclusion

This paper has examined practical instances of myth and folktale in John Ronald Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Zarah the Windseeker*. In these novels, Tolkien and Okorafor combine the oral and traditional narratives of myth, folktale, fantasy, science fiction and the journey motif to demonstrate the African and American culture and history in the old English and the contemporary African societies.

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