

**THE INTERSECTION OF FREUD’S PERSONALITY CONCEPT AND *CHI* IN IGBO  
TRAGEDY: A STUDY OF NWABUEZE’S *WHEN THE ARROW REBOUNDS* AND  
IROBI’S  
*THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MASK***

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study is an exploration of the convergence of the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud’s tripartite personality theory, as reflected in Emeka Nwabueze’s When the Arrow Rebounds and Esiaba Irobi’s The Other Side of the Mask. Rooted in the fields of literature and psychology, the research seeks to unravel how cultural narratives and psychological frameworks intersect to shape the portrayal of human nature, internal conflicts and tragic outcomes in society and in literature. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach that involves character analysis, cultural contextualization, and psychological exploration. A close examination of the actions and experiences of the major characters of the texts studied using Freud’s personality theory and the Igbo concept of chi reveals a nexus between the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud’s tripartite personality theory as well as intriguing connections in the analysis of human action and literary exploration. Both the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud’s personality theory demonstrate that certain themes in literature are universal. Whether it is in Igbo culture or Western psychology, the clash between individual desires and societal norms is a recurrent theme that transcends cultural boundaries. These two perspectives projected in the texts through the lives of the characters of Ezeulu and Jamike, shed light on the complexity of human nature. The Igbo concept of tragedy shows how individuals’ actions can have far-reaching consequences within their community, while Freud’s theory delves into the internal conflicts within individuals. Together, they emphasize the intricate interplay between personal desires, societal expectations and inner psychological struggles.*

**KEYWORDS: INTERSECTION, FREUD’S PERSONALITY, CONCEPT, *CHI* IN IGBO  
TRAGEDY, NWABUEZE’S, *ARROW REBOUNDS*, IROBI’S, *MASK***

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**INTRODUCTION**

Tragedy as a literary form evidently enjoys a robust presence in African literature. Like most human creations, it arises from “a pan-human universal experience unlimited by national or ethnic barriers” (Anyokwu 1, cited in Ignatius, 2019). In the realm of literature, the exploration

of tragedy and the intricacies of human psychology have been recurring themes that traverse cultural boundaries. The Igbo concept of tragedy according to Diala (2014), “could be appreciated as humans’ presumptuous persistence in spite of the antithesis between the human will and the disinclination or disability of chi to affirm” (66). Thus, the conflict between human will and the limitations imposed by one’s *chi* is what characterizes human tragedy. However, one cannot discuss the Igbo concept of tragedy without recourse to its association with the Greek form of tragedy. Ancient Greek tragedy has caught the imagination of West African writers over the years. As a literary concept, tragedy is traced to the classical Greeks, but later became identified in varying perspectives among other world cultures. During its divergence, tragedy acquired diverse interpretations in response to the many attempts to stretch Aristotle’s analysis of the genre to apply to later tragic forms (Abrams, 1999). In these attempts, the Greek-Aristotelian sense of tragedy was either rigidified, misinterpreted, modified or challenged in line with new conceptualizations that conform to the critical climate and praxis of each age.

Ugwu (2014) further asserts that among the diverse senses of the tragic or tragedy are the Greek, the Roman, the Medieval, the Renaissance, and the Neoclassical concepts. The bourgeois, the sentimental, and the modern tragic senses are also noteworthy. This study focuses on the Greek and Igbo models which fall under the modern tragic sense, since they are both directly related to the objective of this work. Many classical literary works, especially drama by Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripedes, portray the tragic universe composed of men and gods. The gods operate from a supernatural realm, supervise the affairs of the living and determine their destiny. Any attempt by man to circumvent this fate meets with ill-fortune (Ugwu, 2014). The concept of tragedy in classical Greek plays, where the gods play a significant role in determining the fate of humans, is akin to the Igbo concept of tragedy in terms of the influence of higher powers, such as gods or deities, on the lives and destinies of individuals.

In both Classical Greek tragedies and Igbo tragic stories, there is a common theme of higher powers, whether gods or spirits influencing the lives and destinies of individuals. In Greek tragedies, the gods are powerful and often capricious, and attempts to defy their will often result in tragedy. Similarly, in Igbo culture, beliefs in deities and ancestral spirits shape the life of the people, and going against them or resisting this influence has tragic consequences. While there are differences in specific beliefs and cultural contexts between ancient Greece and Igbo people, both traditions explore the complex relationship between human agencies and divine intervention, portraying the clash between human desires and the forces that determine fate.

Indeed, both Classical Greek tragedies and Igbo tragic stories share key elements of Aristotle’s concept of tragedy. They often feature a significant hero with a tragic flaw or hubris that leads to the down fall of the hero. The examples of Sophocles’ Oedipus in *King Oedipus* and Achebe’s Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* bear this out. These examples projected through theatrical performances, aim to evoke catharsis in the audience, eliciting feelings of pity and fear. According to Pickering (2010), the tragic hero of the Greek mould is:

Originally mythological: a demi-god who had qualities and performed deeds that set him apart from normal mortals. To some extent, this concept extended to drama, but in plays, the

hero was a character of greater stature than other characters, though also fallible. The hero of a play was the character whose action and fate evoked the pity and fear that Aristotle considered essential to the experience of witnessing tragedy and by that process, the audience sensed catharsis. The classic hero was not only of noble or princely status, but also imbued with noble potential, which made his ultimate fall all the more poignant (36).

Similarly, the tragic heroes in Igbo tragedy are imbued with some characteristics such as nobility, tragic flaw as well as internal and external conflicts that contributes to their downfall. Moreover, they often grapple with moral dilemmas or ethical choices that are central to the tragic narrative, fate and divine influence, hubris or overreaching ambitions and catharsis all of which are the characteristics of tragedy. While the specific characteristics and cultural contexts may vary, Igbo tragic heroes are significant figures within their stories, often embodying universal themes of human struggle, morality and destiny within the framework of Igbo culture and beliefs. Despite the cultural and contextual differences, the fundamental elements of tragic storytelling, as outlined by Aristotle, are present in both traditions. The Igbo cult of personal accomplishments through human endeavour, *ikenga*, is the affirmation of the human will: human striving is therefore “ordinarily believed to be endowed with the capacity to accomplish required goals” (Diala, 2014). When, however, humans are inhibited in their desires, “then they should be willing through prayers, propitiation and sacrifices at the individual or communal level to seek divine beneficence” (66). According to Diala, “the Igbo are well aware that the gods are not obliged to participate in the negotiation of destiny that humans ritually initiate, but their typical response is hardly acceptance” (66). Igbo discourse is therefore in this regard replete with the people’s chastened awareness, even horrified apprehension, of the working out of tragic fate rooted in the concept of *chi ojoo*, ‘bad chi’” (Diala, 66).

Metuh (1973) calls *chi* “the spark of himself that the immanent Supreme Spirit, God, sends into men, natural phenomena, and things” (9). Similarly, Achebe (2000), whose fiction explores extensively Igbo attitudes towards human destiny and the divine, refers to *chi* as “Chukwu’s agent, assigned exclusively to an individual through his or her life...” (14). Echeruo (1979) admits “the complexity of *chi* as the Igbo theological concept that explains both the universe and individual fortune, “good and evil, tragedy and good fortune, order and conflict, character and destiny, free will and metaphysical order” (20). Noting that a good *chi* brings prosperity and that a bad *chi* is a source of tragedy, Echeruo (1979) observes nonetheless that “a bad *chi* is neither necessarily absolute nor necessarily a consequence of sin. Prayer is thus, an exhortation of *chi* to action, just as sacrifice aims to appease the spirit forces that interfere with that fulfillment” (21). However, when humans disregard the guidance or alignment with their *chi*, attempting to impose their will despite the resistance from their destiny, tragedy could arise. This interpretation underscores the intricate relationship between personal aspirations and the cosmic forces in the Igbo understanding of tragic events.

Meanwhile, the Igbo concept of tragedy is in some significant respects allied to the Freudian tripartite personality theory. Irrespective of their cultural and contextual differences, they share common themes related to the interplay between internal and external factors that shape human actions and decisions. Freud's theory which is characterized by the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* shares identical paradigm with the Igbo culture in that the *id*, represents primal desires; the *ego* mediates between desires and reality, and the *superego* enforces moral restraints. The conflict between these aspects of personality mirrors the struggle between instinctual desires and societal norms. The *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*, work together to create the complex behaviours that form a person's personality. These three elements are interconnected in one's mind and work together to function as a whole. The first component, the *id*, includes instinctive, physiological and primitive behaviours. The *id* acts entirely unconsciously and is the only component of personality that is present at birth. This system is driven by what Freud calls the pleasure principle, which strives only to find pleasure and avoid or reduce pain. The *id* seeks immediate gratification for one's desires, wants and needs. The next component, the *ego*, develops from the *id* and operates under the reality principle. The *ego* ensures that the impulses of the *id* are acted on in a socially acceptable and appropriate way. It is the function of the *ego* to test reality, to plan, to think logically and to develop plans for satisfying needs" (Sharf, 2012). The *superego* is related to moral value system. It is developed with the help of parents and other seniors. It also comes under the unconscious. It is associated with self-criticism. The *superego* is developed by experiencing codes and directions, especially "don't" sentences. The *superego* controls the *id* from performing any immoral act and adds a moral value to the *ego*. These three elements work together and there are conflicts also among these. Being a realistic, part, the *ego* maintains the necessary balance between the *id* and *superego* in order to develop a healthy personality. Interestingly, the Igbo concept of *chi* emphasizes that individuals are not entirely in control of their destinies, as *chi* shapes and constrains their lives. Tragedies arise from this tension between personal aspirations and *chi*'s limitations. Similarly, Freud's theory acknowledges that individuals have conscious and unconscious desires, but these desires are limited by societal norms and internalized moral standards. This can lead to inner conflict and psychological distress. Thus, while the Igbo concepts of tragedy and Freud's tripartite theory have distinct origins and contexts, they both provide frameworks for understanding the intricacies of human behaviour, desires and limitations. By examining these concepts together, this study seeks to gain insights into how different cultures and psychological theories address similar themes in different ways. Through a critical analysis of the tragic heroes of Nwabueze's *When the Arrow Rebounds* and Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask*, this exploration uncovers the threads that bind together tragedy, personality and the intricacies of human conditions.

## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study adopts the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud's Tripartite Personality Theory as its frameworks. While the Igbo concept of tragedy provides insight into the cultural and philosophical foundations of tragedy within the Igbo tradition, it involves examining the

elements that contribute to tragedy within the Igbo culture and the worldview that shapes characters' actions and outcomes. This framework can help elucidate the cultural context that informs the portrayal of tragedy in the selected works. The Igbo conception of the human and the universe is in reality amenable to tragic interpretation. Acknowledging human mortality and finitude, and moreover, reverence for the supernatural powers considered capable of influencing human fortune, the Igbo expectation of divine goodwill is nonetheless virtually absolute (Diala, 66). The Igbo cult of personal accomplishments through human endeavour, *Ikenga*, is the affirmation of the human will: human striving is ordinarily believed to be endowed with the capacity to accomplish required goals. When, however, humans are inhibited in their desires, then they should be willing through prayers, propitiation, and sacrifices at the individual or communal level to seek divine beneficence (Diala, 66). For Echeruo, the complexity of *chi* is the Igbo theological concept that explains both the universe and individual fortune, good and evil, tragedy and good fortune, order and conflict, character and destiny, freewill and metaphysical order (20). Thus it could be argued that, *chi* represents destiny in the Igbo thought pattern. The basic idea here is that *chi*, as a divine force, determines the fate of humans. For Metuh, (1973), *chi* is "the spark of himself that the immanent Supreme Spirit, God, sends into men, natural phenomena and things" (9). This therefore means that if a man is experiencing good fortune in life, and destiny, it is traceable to his *chi* and same goes for a man whose life is filled with tragic events. Achebe in his famous novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), underscores this philosophy when he declares that "if a man says yes, his *chi* says yes". Elsewhere, Achebe (1976) contends in this respect that, if one wants to know how fair or unfair life has treated a man, "his hopes, his fears, his joys and sorrows, his grievances, one need only look at the names his children bear" (135-136). This again points back to the idea of *chi* as the embodiment of fortune.

Convinced that a good *chi* brings prosperity and that a bad *chi* is a source of tragedy, Echeruo (1979) observes nonetheless that "a bad *chi* is neither necessarily absolute nor necessarily a consequence of sin. Prayer is thus an exhortation of *chi* to action, just as sacrifice aims to appease the spirit forces that interfere with that fulfillment" (21). However, when humans disregard the guidance or alignment with their *chi*, attempting to impose their will despite the resistance from their destiny, tragedy could arise. Thus, the Igbo concept of tragedy could be interpreted as a result of man's persistence in his endeavours despite the inherent conflict between his own desires and the reluctance or limitations of his *chi* to support those endeavours. For, according to Diala (2014), "the Igbo vision of tragedy is anchored in the complex and mysterious relationship between the individual and his or her *chi*..." (65). This interpretation underscores the intricate relationship between personal will and cosmic forces.

Freud's theory of personality, which is characterized by the *id*, *ego*, and *superego* and the Igbo worldview both involve the interplay between primal desires and societal norms. Freud's model explains this within an individual's mind, while the Igbo worldview reflects it in how people balance their desires with cultural expectations. The *id* is composed primarily of two sets of instincts: life instincts and death instincts. The life instincts include all creative, life-producing drives such as survival, thirst, hunger, self-protection, and sexual desires while the death instincts include aggression, destructiveness and suicide. The *id* being responsible for our basic drive such

as sex and aggressive impulses is amorous and egocentric. Ruled by the pleasure principles, it is without a sense of time, completely illogical, primarily sexual, infantile in its emotional development, and will not take “no” for an answer (Nurhidayati, 17).

The *id* is entirely unconscious, having no contact with reality except through the *ego*. The *id* attempts to satisfy its needs using primary process. The primary process satisfies motives through imagination rather than reality. Maher (2004), affirmed that “We use the primary process when we daydream about having sex, think about eating chocolate fudge cake, or angrily plan how to get revenge on the person who embarrassed us yesterday...” (468). The *ego* is formed because the *id* has to find realistic ways to meet its needs and avoid trouble caused by selfish behaviour. The *ego* learns about the external world through the senses and sees to the satisfaction of the *id*’s drives on the external world, thus it operates by the reality principle. The *ego* develops the high cognitive functions such as perception, learning, discrimination, judgment and planning. (Bootzin, 457). It represents the reality principle and serves to balance the extreme evil, the *id*, and the extreme social conformity, the *superego*.

The *superego* is the morality principle. As stated by Morris and Maisto (2003), “The *superego* is not present at birth ... As we mature, however, we assimilate, or adopt as our own, the judgment of our parents about what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’. In time, the external restraint applied by our parent gives way to our own internal self-restraint. The *superego*, eventually acting as conscience, takes over the task of observing and guiding the *ego*.” (369). There are two aspects to the *superego*; one is the conscience, which is internalization of punishments and warnings. It tells what is right and wrong and forces the *ego* to inhibit the *id* in pursuit of morally acceptable, not pleasurable or even realistic goals. The other is called the *ego* ideal. It derives from rewards and positive models. The *ego* ideal aims the individual’s path of life towards the ideal, perfect goals instilled by society. Ideally, our *id*, *ego* and *superego* work in harmony, with the *ego* satisfying the demands of the *id* in a reasonable, moral manner approved by the *superego*, in order to develop a healthy personality.

The Igbo concept of *chi* emphasizes that individuals are not entirely in control of their destinies, as *chi* shapes and constrains their lives. Tragedy arises from this tension between personal aspirations and *chi*’s limitations. Similarly, Freud’s theory acknowledges that individuals have conscious and unconscious desires, but these desires are limited by societal norms and internalized moral standards. This can lead to inner conflict and psychological distress. Thus, while the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud’s tripartite personality theory have distinct origins and contexts. They both provide frameworks for understanding the intricacies of human behaviour, desires and limitations. This study therefore, applies these concepts to the analysis of the selected texts in order to gain deeper insights into how the Igbo culture (as projected in the selected texts) can reflect western psychology in addressing universal themes in unique ways.

## **THE CHI AND THE FREUDIAN CONCEPT IN NWABUEZE’S WHEN THE ARROW REBOUNDS**

The Freudian tripartite personality theory consisting of the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* can be related to the concept of *chi* in Igbo culture in the following way. The *id*, according to Freud, represents primal instincts and desires. Similarly, the concept of *chi* in Igbo culture can be seen as a personal force that drives one's destiny and desires. Both *id* and *chi* relate to some subconscious influence that plays a role in shaping human behaviour and actions. Emeka Nwabueze's *When the Arrow Rebounds* is a dramatic adaptation of Chinua Achebe's famous novel, *Arrow of God*. The play revolves around Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu of the village of Umuaro, who is arrested by the Whiteman and detained for refusing to be made a warrant chief, a position a lot of elders will kill to have. At his release, he gets embittered and disappointed in his people for refusing to come for his release and or even defend him and decides to punish them by refusing to announce the day for the New Yam Feast. He enjoys watching them suffer for allowing him suffer in detention at Okperi. However, nemesis catches up with him when the god, decides to fight for his people by taking the life of Ezeulu's favorite son, Obika. This leads to Ezeulu's neurosis and dementia. It is worthy of note that the play is set during the colonial era, at a time when the Whiteman invaded African villages and took over their lands. In the course of the play, Ezeulu is summoned by the Whiteman through his chief messenger, Jacob and requested to appear before him immediately, to which Ezeulu disagrees. He retorts:

EZEULU: ...you must return and tell your Whiteman that Ezeulu  
does not leave his hut. If he wants to see me, he must  
come to my house (34).

However, after discussing with his friend, Akuebue and the elders of Umuaro, Ezeulu is encouraged to heed the Whiteman's call at Okperi. It is this visit that keeps him incarcerated for over thirty-two days.

From the ensuing excerpt, Ezeulu is apparently disappointed in his people for abandoning him at Okperi. Thus we hear him say to Nwodika:

EZEULU: ...I shall come again, but before that, I want to wrestle with my  
own people whose hand I know and who know my hand. I'm  
going home to challenge all those who have been poking their  
fingers into my face to come outside and meet me in combat...  
(50-51).

By "all those who have been poking their fingers..." Ezeulu is referring to Nwaka and Ezeidemili, the chief priest of Idemili who both happen to be Ezeulu's arch-enemies, are envious of him and do not miss any opportunity to show it.

At some point in Igbo cosmology, man evidently reserved the powers to make and to destroy gods and even to judge gods by human standards, thus ensuring the existence of alternative divinities. Diala (2014) opines that "humans in traditional Igbo theology potentially constituted themselves into the highest powers" (116). Echeruo (1979) identifies 'Ala', the Earth goddess, as "the only divinity beyond the capriciousness of Igbo people, noting that if the Igbo ever recognized a supreme divinity, it certainly was Ala" (18). The paradox therefore, was the

simultaneous acknowledgement of divinity and a human self-hood that was infinitely portentous in its claims. Tragedy is thus, inherent in the precarious negotiation of the fine edge between a robust sense of self-being that is potentially capable of making the human individual as self-reliant as can possibly be and an arrogant claim to divinity (Echeruo 2012). Nwabueze adds to this picture in his play, the insight that the medium which mediates between the people and the communal deity is himself the god-incarnate. Therefore, Ezeulu announces that:

EZEULU        I can see things where other men are blind.  
That's why I am known and at the same time I'm unknowable  
(58).

Ezeulu is considered the arrow of the god, Ulu. He is the one who mediates between Ulu and his people and this is obvious at the beginning of the play where Ezeulu makes it clear that he was chosen by the great Ulu to carry their new deity. But by narrowing down the frontiers between the divine and the human, Nwabueze creates the tragic situation in which the human easily overreaches the human limit. The Igbo concept of hubris is indeed epitomized in the plight of the proverbial gazelle which after overfeeding challenged his *chi* to a wrestling bout (Diala, 2014). Ezeulu's assumed role as the arrow of the god accounts for his excessive pride and refusal to announce the day of the new yam feast. He claims he is only an arrow in the hands of his god but apparently, he is acting as the god instead, by punishing his people. He believes that since Ulu will not fight for him, he might as well fight for or as Ulu. In his conversation with Ezeulu, after the latter's refusal to declare the day of the new yam feast, Akuebue, his bosom friend tells him to his face that:

AKUEBUE: ...Umuaro is burning and the people are holding you responsible for that. They say you've been trying to find out how to punish Umuaro now that you have the chance. They say you see yourself as the arrow of god, as the arrow with which Ulu should shoot down Umuaro for doing nothing during the incarceration of their Chief Priest. They think that a Priest like you leads a god to ruin himself. But I told them that a god like Ulu could lead a priest to ruin himself (56).

The last sentence in the above expression is particularly true, for Ulu exemplifies a bad *chi* who according to Echeruo (1979), is a source of tragedy. Echeruo (2003) admits that "where the beings of the former world, gods, spirits and similar entities have power to influence humans, humans too are invested with a power of their own which the gods respect" (18). However, according to Diala (2014), "the abiding temptation of the individual to contemplate himself/herself with his/her *chi* as the ultimate power, or even to covert the powers of *chi*, is a recurring theme in Igbo tragedy" (69). This of course, is what leads to Ezeulu's tragic end as he loses his favorite son to death which in turn, literarily drives Ezeulu crazy at the end of the play.



Characters in Igbo theatrical performances often make decisions based on their interpretation of their *chi*'s intentions. The conflict between personal desires and perceived cosmic guidance influences their actions and decisions. Ezeulu's decision to punish his people by refusing to declare the day for the new yam feast was on the basis of his perception of Ulu as a god of retributive justice, one who punishes people for merely disregarding his priest. Another reason could be that ulu was angry at Ezeulu for supporting the Whiteman against his people over a land dispute, thus, he perceived the silence of the god as approval and support. However, Akuebue, reminds him that: "no man however great, can win judgement against his clan" (57). Ezeulu seems to have lost sight of the wisdom embedded in this reminder, and the consequences are grievous.

Freud's tripartite theory of personality states that the *id* is the unconscious part, the pleasure principle, hence it dictates our urges, needs and instant gratification. Ezeulu's decision to punish his people is a manifestation of the *id*. More so, he is equally offended at both Nwaka and Ezeidemili, who five years ago, had secretly held a meeting with a plan to unseat him should Ulu fail to fight for them in their war against Okperi over a piece of land. Ezeulu, therefore chooses this medium to show his irritation, as he mutters to himself:

EZEULU: When the rain comes it will be five years since this same man told a secret meeting in his house that if Ulu failed to fight in their blameful war, they should unseat him. We are still waiting, Ulu and I, for him to unseat us. What annoys me is not that an overblown fool dangling empty testicles should forget himself because wealth entered his house by mistake. No, what annoys me is that the cowardly priest of Idemili should hide behind him and urge him on (57).

Clearly, from the above statement, Ezeulu is angry at both men and by extension Umuaro, for spiting him; and he chooses to show it, using his position as the chief priest of Ulu. Despite Akuebue's pleas to let go of the bitterness and do the right thing, that both men are merely jealous of him, Ezeulu is insistent on doing what pleases him:

EZEULU: ...What I'm telling you, my friend, is that I've my own and I shall follow it...you can't know the thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances (58).

The above statement is a proof that the pleasure principle is beyond reasoning and anyone who is influenced by the *id* hardly ever listens to the voice of reason which ultimately, leads to a tragic end as we later find in the play. Because it operates on the pleasure principle, the *id* seeks immediate gratification of desires and instincts without concern for consequences or reality. It is impulsive, demanding and irrational. Freud described the *id*'s functioning as a source of unconscious desires and drives, often in conflict with societal norms and expectations as seen displayed by Ezeulu.

As the Chief Priest of the god Ulu, it is part of his role and responsibility to conduct ceremonies and ritual rites while maintaining the connection between the community and the divine. This, we see him carry out at the beginning of the play. These rituals are a crucial part of the villagers' lives, as the people believe that these rites ensure the well-being and prosperity of the community. However, as the story progresses, we see how Ezeulu's role and actions become more complex, leading to conflicts and dilemmas that challenge his position and the community's faith in him.

It is then safe to say that there are connections between the Igbo concept of tragedy which hinges on fate, moral lessons, and cultural beliefs and Sigmund Freud's tripartite personality theory, which explores the internal conflicts within individuals' minds based on their desires and moral norms. These connections can be seen in how characters' actions and choices are influenced by cultural beliefs and how these choices reflect psychological aspects of their personalities. While the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud's tripartite personality theory have distinct origins and contexts, they both provide frameworks for understanding the intricacies of human behaviour, desires and limitations.

### **THE CHI AND THE FREUDIAN CONCEPT IN IROBI'S THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MASK**

Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask* attempts an illumination of the Igbo traditional mystical life as well as the tragic view of life through sculpture. According to Diala (2014), *The Other Side of the Mask* arguably Irobi's finest play, is a sustained meditation on arts, its motivations and delights, its nature and demands, and the tribulations and travails as well as the triumphs of the artist" (127). Irobi's sculptor-protagonist of the play, Jamike, is a first-class graduate of Mass Communication, an intellectual and a University lecturer in Fine Arts. Through his older brother Kamuche's rapturous recollections of Jamike's exceptional career, Irobi draws attention to his unusual academic brilliance. There is obviously in many of Irobi's plays the recurring motif of how the frustrated creative energy of exceptionally gifted individuals unyieldingly leads to violent outcomes. Thus, "when the creative juice is neglected, it percolates and ferments. And when it ferments, it evaporates into the vehicle of violence" (61).

There are times when Jamike is seen wearing a pair of shoes with different colours and then sometimes, he goes from extreme happiness to feeling deeply sad and even contemplating suicide. He declares to Prof. Njemanze:

JAMIKE: I am a genius. A neglected genius. Look at my work. Every piece of sculpture here is an ultimate master-piece" (66).

It is this presumption that makes Jamike angry and disappointed at the likes of Dr. Animalu and the Association of National Sculptors whom he believes deliberately deprive him of his laurels in spite of his significant and outstanding sculptures. Jamike's outburst to Professor Njemanze to emphasize the significance of hands portends a disturbing level of violence, which aligns with his apparent madness after killing Animalu. His

explanation for murdering Dr. Animalu, which involves the idea of transcendence, comes across as irrational and bizarre, coupled with his several attempts to strangle Prof. Njemanze:

JAMIKE: Imagine now that I wanted to strangle you (points) ..... (110).

It is not surprising that “the kinship between genius and madness is an ancient one in Igbo thought and both are indeed in the domain of the same deity Agwu” (Diala, 2014). As the repository of all arcane and esoteric knowledge, Agwu is associated with divination and inspiration, but as Agwu is equally linked with lunacy and aberrant behaviour, lunatics, deviants, heretics are considered to be under the influence of this deity. Regarded also as a primary cause of misfortunes, Agwu clearly is central in the Igbo conception of tragedy” (Diala, 201). Even though Irobi does not explicitly mention this deity’s name, he drops subtle hints throughout his work about its powerful and troublesome nature. Agwu, like the evil spirit, Ekwensu, is portrayed as a mischievous and meddling force that can disrupt human aspirations and goals. Thus, when Jamike is deeply troubled by the unending sense of hopelessness in his life, Irobi uses him to symbolize the idea that there are malevolent spirits that can disrupt and hinder a person’s life’s path:

JAMIKE: Why is it that every work I carve becomes a knife that laughs into the flesh of my life? Every song I sing becomes an arrow that turns back in flight to find the eternal target of my heart. What unforgivable evil is it that I chose a chisel as the instrument with which I will reshape the face of the world and leave it more beautiful than I found it? (53).

The above expression is a testament to the fact that despite Jamike’s efforts, toil, and hard work in carving the best of sculptures, he turns out a failure and goes unrewarded. This of course, leaves him bitter, enraged and incensed. Thus, Agwu is not just responsible for his failures but is equally responsible for his lunatic behaviour which drives him to murder Animalu and eventually, himself. This affirms the Igbo proverbial saying that “who the gods want to kill, they first make mad”.

Although Echeruo (1979) posits that a bad *chi* is a source of tragedy (21), he equally believes that it is not absolute as the god can be appeased in order to show mercy on his subjects through prayers and sacrifice. Jamike actually makes sacrifices apparently as “the embodiment of the Igbo conception of the visioning artist as a priest and prophet” (Diala, 2014). However, this prayer and sacrifice are made after he had committed the abominable act of murder. Like his grandfather and father before him, Jamike is both a sculptor and a guardian of the family deity, Amadioha, a sacred tradition passed down through generations. Amadioha, according to Iwe (1989) “is regarded in Igbo land as a divinity of vengeance against the wicked and evildoers... Some call him Amadioha, God’s Minister of Justice” (14).

However, worshipping Amadioha requires caution and careful self-reflection, as the god can only be invoked by those who are morally upright. Even a false belief in one’s innocence can

have dire consequences in this worship. It is therefore surprising that Jamike, who of all people, who should know the rules, having inherited the priestly role of tending his father's god "Amadioha", ends up as a victim of the very god that he tends. This shows that Amadioha is indeed a god of retributive justice that recompenses to the victims, their just rewards regardless of their position, affirming the legal maxim that, "he who comes to equity must come with clean hands".

Jamike, like Ezeulu took advantage of his position as the priest of Amadioha to seek justice, forgetting that he had already stained his hands with blood, Animalu's blood. Both he and Ezeulu felt like the victims - people unjustly treated - and thus, deserving of justice. Hence, they both thought it wise to play the role of the gods by fighting on their behalf. The consequence however, turns out to be a tragic one. Irobi aims to reaffirm the traditional African wisdom, that a mortal's claims to the grandeur of the godhead are not only invariably tragic delusions but are often also indicative of lunacy. But to this theme, he brings a peculiarly Igbo perspective (Diala, 2014:132).

For people who are supposedly custodians of the law and consequently, arrows of their respective gods, it is expected of them to know that "sacrifice is the obligatory human gesture of recognition of, and homage to the gods, the "tariff par excellence for human existence" (Echeruo, 2003); instead, we find them embodying the role of their gods by taking laws into their hands in the quest for justice. Jamike's death on that night, when he identifies himself as a victim of Amadioha, appears to support the judges' perspective and suggests that he was indeed mistaken in his beliefs. This therefore, reaffirms the recurring theme in Igbo tragedy, which is "the abiding temptation of the individual to contemplate himself/herself with his/her *chi* as the ultimate power, or even to covet the powers of *chi*" (Diala, 2014).

Having examined Irobi's tragic hero, Jamike in *The Other Side of the Mask* from the perspective of the Igbo conception of tragedy, it is imperative to analyze his character from the Freudian tripartite viewpoint. Jamike's feelings of being cheated and his impulse to murder one of the judges, Animalu, can be seen as manifestations of the *id*. His desires for recognition and laurels, both at the national and international levels, represent his pursuit of immediate gratification for his accomplishments. The act of murder is a drastic and impulsive response to his frustrations and disappointments, reflecting the unrestrained aspects of the *id*. Jamike once asked Dr. Animalu:

JAMIKE: ...do you realize that when the creative juice is neglected, it falls like a fruit and ferments. And when it ferments, it evaporates into the vehicle of violence? (53).

The above statement is symbolic of Freud's notion of the repressed unconscious psyche. Freud (1915) once wrote, "the essence of repression lies in turning something away and keeping it a distance from the conscious" (147).

Breuer and Freud (1895) further posit that “traumatic memories become inaccessible due to motivational forgetting... Repression therefore becomes a question of things which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed from his conscious thought and inhibited and suppressed” (10).

In the ensuing conversation between Jamike and Animalu, Animalu questions why he didn't send in his entry for the year's national award in sculpture. Jamike responds:

JAMIKE: Why should I again? What has happened these six years I have been sending my works? What has happened?... (52).

From the above response, it is clear that Jamike's disillusionment has led to repression for he seems to have lost faith in the judges, though he does not stop carving. In fact, carving more often, seems to be his defense mechanism of displacement which he adopts in a bid to forget, so that when Animalu asks him:

ANIMALU: What, again are you toiling at?

He responds:

JAMIKE: a masterpiece (53).

Not only are Jamike's instinctual drives repressed, but we also find in the play, a repression of his sexual impulses. These ungratified sexual and instinctual impulses become permanent fixtures of emotional life which await circumstances in which to attempt gratification. This explains Jamike's refusal to have anything to do with Elsie, the wife his brother, Kamuche, brought for him. However, he subsequently mates with her towards the end of the play and regrettably so too.

Jamike's role as an artist, sculptor, and university lecturer highlights his *ego*'s functions in balancing his desires and societal expectations. His struggle with the judges and the subsequent quest for justice from Amadioha can be interpreted as his *ego* attempting to reconcile his personal ambitions and grievances with the societal norms and moral values that he might have internalized. Jamike's eventual recognition of Amadioha as a higher authority and his assertion of being a victim of Amadioha can be seen as the influence of the *superego*. In this phase, he appears to acknowledge a moral order beyond his personal desires and actions. His brother Kamuche, who is reassured of Jamike's sanity on discovering that Jamike still tends the god notes:

KAMUCHE: The god of justice. Amadioha! If solicited it can send thunder and lightning to one's enemies” (20).

Concerning Amadioha, Jamike himself says “It settles disputes and dispenses justice through lightning (18).

Expectedly, this is the god Jamike invokes to mediate between himself and the judges who for six years deny him the National Award for Sculpture. The return of his international laurel might symbolize a form of redemption or justice being restored, aligning with societal and moral values.

Overall, Jamike's character undergoes a complex psychological journey from the *id*-driven impulses of frustration and violence to a more *superego* influenced recognition of moral consequences and justice. His suicide at the end of the story may reflect his ultimate attempt to atone for his actions and seek resolution in the face of the conflicting forces within his psyche, thus, seeking a form of personal closure rather than public acclaim.

## **CONCLUSION**

Literature, as a timeless art form, consistently navigates the territories of tragedy and the nuances of human psychology. The themes explored in such enterprises often act as bridges that link the experiences and emotions of people from various cultural backgrounds, thus projecting literature as a universal medium for exploring the human condition. The nexus between the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud's tripartite personality theory as explored in this essay with the two texts as templates reveals intriguing connections in the analysis of human psychology and literary exploration. Through a close reading of the two texts selected for this study with the application of the concepts of Freud's personality theory, the study reveals that both the Igbo concept of tragedy and Freud's personality theory demonstrate that certain themes in literature are universal. Whether it is in Igbo culture or Western psychology, the clash between individual desires and societal norms is a recurrent theme that transcends cultural boundaries. These two perspectives shed light on the complexity of human nature. Whereas the Igbo concept of tragedy shows how an individual's actions can have far-reaching consequences within the community by attracting the wrath of his *chi*, Freud's theory delves into the internal conflicts triggered within the individual's different psychological domains. Together, they emphasize the intricate interplay between personal desires, societal expectations and inner psychological struggles.

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