

**Charles University**

**Faculty of Education**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**DIPLOMA THESIS**

Identity Development in *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior* by Nnedi Okorafor  
Vývoj individuality v dílech *Akata Witch* a *Akata Warrior* od Nnedi Okorafor

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis, “The Identity Development in *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior* by Nnedi Okorafor”, exclusively by myself under the supervision of PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, PhD. and that in the process I have used only the sources cited. I declare herewith that I have not used this thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2021

František Váňa

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I would like to thank my supervisor PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, PhD. who guided me through the process of writing and many times offered valuable suggestions, advice, and help. Her support was essential to the completion of this thesis.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vývoj individuality v nigerijských knihách pro mladistvé, *Akata Witch* a *Akata Warrior* od Nnedi Okorafor. K dosažení tohoto cíle jsou užity literární koncepty spojené s literaturou pro mladistvé a hrdinským putováním (monomýtem). Tato práce se snaží dokázat, že strukturu hrdinského putování lze aplikovat na literaturu pro mladistvé, a to primárně na vývoj identity v ní, a z toho poté vyvodit míru korelace mezi těmito dvěma typy narativu.

Na základě popisu literárních konceptů jako například “the Other”, který byl popsán Robyn McCallumovou, a individuálních konstitutivních elementů hrdinského putování, je v teoretické části provedena analýza výše zmíněných děl z úhlu pohledu obou typů narativu. Následně je na základě této analýzy vytvořena korelace mezi koncepty hrdinského putování a literatury pro mladistvé. Obě díla jsou analyzována z pohledu konceptů literatury pro mladistvé a všech dvaceti šesti kroků hrdinského putování, založených na práci Josepha Campbella a dalších literárních teoreticích.

Na základě této analýzy je dosaženo závěru, že mezi těmito dvěma typy narativu existuje korelace. Zjevná podobnost je nalezena mezi vývojem individuality jejich protagonistů. Přestože korelace mezi těmito narativy existuje, některé prvky nemají své ekvivalenty. Oba koncepty se shodují v tom, že je hlavní hrdina na začátku příběhu považován za dítě, které se tím, že vede dialog s fikčním světem, postupně stává dospělým.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Literatura pro mladistvé, individualita, dospívání, hrdinské putování, monomýtus, Akata, Nnedi Okorafor, Joseph Campbell, Robyn McCallum.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the development of individuality in Nigerian books for young adults, *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior* by Nnedi Okorafor. For that, the literary concepts of young adult literature and the heroic journey (monomyth) is used. This thesis aims to prove that the heroic journey framework may be applied to young adult literature, primarily concerning the formation of identity resulting a certain correlation between the two types of narrative.

Based on the description of concepts of literary theory, such as the Other, described by Robyn McCallum, and the individual constitutive elements of the heroic journey, in the theoretical part, the analysis from both vantage points and subsequent correlation between them is described in the practical part. The two books that are analysed are described from the point of three major concepts of young adult literature and all twenty six steps of the heroic journey, based on Campbell and other literary theorists.

Based on this analysis, it is concluded that there is a certain correlation between the two narrative frameworks. It is especially similar concerning the growth of individuality of its protagonists. Despite there being a correlation among the two types of narrative, young adult literature and the heroic journey, certain elements do not have their respective counterparts. The main similarity lies in the treatment of the protagonist, who is treated like a child becoming an adult by engaging in a dialogue with aspects of the fictional world.

## **KEYWORDS**

Individuality, young adult literature, maturation, the heroic journey, Akata, Joseph Campbell, Nnedi Okorafor, Robyn McCallum.

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## **The Introduction**

During my studies, I took several courses dealing with didactics of literature. We encountered the fact that students have a hard time relating to canonical literary works. Our lecturers expressed that young adult literature is usually more relatable to secondary elementary school students than canonical literary works, so it is only natural that they prefer to read the works of young adult literature instead.

Young adult literature is also becoming a more and more prominent group of literature. Books in this particular group are created all over the world to satisfy the ever-increasing demand. We as teachers need to consider this phenomenon when teaching, especially adolescents, since it may serve as a stepping stone to more complicated and elaborate texts (Renadya 142). This approach provides an opportunity to train the students to apply knowledge of literary theory to young adult literature, which will help them acquire the skills for analysis of more complicated texts. However, we, teachers, sometimes find it difficult to access young adult literature in a way that has an overlap into literary theory or another interpretative point of view.

I felt there are not enough instruments for theoretical analysis of young adult literature that could be used in the present-day classroom. Therefore, I decided to seek more. Eventually, I stumbled upon the narrative framework called “the heroic journey”. This framework is applicable to many different canonical literary works, for example, Shakespeare or Homer, as well as pop-cultural artefacts, so I decided to explore whether it proves itself a useful and universal tool for teachers and students in studies of young adult literature. I analysed the possibility further, and I wrote several essays regarding this topic giving promising results; this led me to exercise this idea in-depth and analyse it in this diploma thesis exemplified in a fantasy book series for young adults.

My first choice for the analysis was the very well-known, best-selling series of fantasy novels, *Harry Potter*. However, I subsequently rejected the idea, as it would not fit my aim to prove the universality of the narrative since a western thinker introduced it to western culture. To really prove it, the work to be analysed had to be a literary artefact of non-European origin. When I was introduced to post-colonial literature while studying at the Department of English Language and Literature, I decided to consult PhDr. Topolovská

PhD., who taught the course, for possible recommendations on this topic. She introduced me to the book series by Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor—*Akata*—which I decided to use for my analysis since the alienness of the Nigerian culture to a European reader better contributes to this part of the hypothesis. This thesis analyses the first two instalments of the urban fantasy series, *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior*.

I hypothesise that the narrative framework of “the heroic journey” can be applied to works of young adult literature and that there are specific transformations of constitutive elements of the heroic journey in this particular group of literature. Since the heroic journey focuses primarily on the protagonist’s character development, it is one of the primary areas analysed in this thesis. As suggested above, all of these aspects are exemplified in the book series *Akata*.

The first chapter aims to defend the selection of the author, Nnedi Okorafor, and her book *Akata* as being good representatives of a non-western literary movement, which is vital for proving the universality of the narrative. To describe Okorafor’s impact not only in Nigeria—as her work transcends the Nigerian literary environment, making her a trailblazer of Nigerian culture—I decided to include a selection of her plentiful literary achievements, to describe her critical reception, and awards she received for her work. Okorafor herself stated that she wants to set her works in different countries and regions of Africa and include as many different African influences as possible (D’Arcy), making her an ideal author for this thesis.

To illustrate a correlation between young adult literature and the heroic journey, I first decided to define young adult literature as a group of literature. I will focus on how young adult literature works with the construction of an adolescent’s identity. For that, I will present observations from two prominent literary critical works, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* by Robyn McCallum, which contains the concept of the Other described in the chapter, and *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* by Karen Coats, which expands upon the concept and adds the abject hero prototype. Next, I will describe fantasy literature for young adults and its subgenres. As there are not enough theoretical instruments to work with the genre, I will introduce the tropes commonly used and observed in young adult fantasy literature as stated by literary enthusiasts to fill in the gaps.

With the necessary terminology as well as literary concepts described, I will be able to apply them to the *Akata* series, prove or disprove *Akata* is a work of young adult literature and find the concepts and tropes that may correlate to heroic journey.

*Akata* constructs its fictional cosmos on Igbo and Nigerian mythology. Mythology is a crucial aspect for constructing fictional cosmos in young adult fantasy literature (Ekman 463). To provide a frame of reference, chapter 3 expands on the relevant aspects of it. This description is necessary for later analysis of the books and to form an understanding of how the mythology is used and adapted in the construction of the cosmos.

As stated in my hypothesis, the heroic journey is constituted by prototypical elements. I want to prove there is a possible translation of these elements into young adult literature. To support this claim, the heroic journey is described in chapter 4, based on not only the publication *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell. While Campbell is well-known for his framework, I will find other literary critics who also described the heroic journey, such as Vogler or Propp. I will incorporate their views and opinions on the type of narrative to expand Campbell's view. Their findings will help me find the necessary translation patterns between the heroic journey and young adult literature if any exist.

The practical part aims to achieve a correlation between the heroic journey and young adult literature based on their definition and relate the literary concepts described in the theoretical part of this thesis to Okorafor's book series. Firstly, to provide a frame of reference, the fictional cosmos is described. Secondly, I will attempt to prove that *Akata* is a work of young adult literature as well as to explore the presence and the use of the literary concepts tied to young adult literature. It will focus on the construction of identity with references to the different aspects of young adult literature described in the theoretical part and to different narrative devices and tropes present in young adult literature. Thirdly, I will analyze *Akata* in terms of the heroic journey, with emphasis on realizations of the parts of the narrative framework and the different archetypal characters. I will especially consider how the elements differ from typical realisations or whether they are present in the narrative in the first place. The final part of the practical part will attempt to contextualise the concepts of young adult literature and the heroic

journey within each other to find a correlation between the two interpretative points of view and to summarize it.

## **Theoretical part**

### **1 Nnedi Okorafor as an author and her work**

Nnedimma Nkemdili “Nnedi” Okorafor is an American-Nigerian author of fantasy and Africanfuturism. She was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1974. When she was 13, she was diagnosed with scoliosis (*Nnedi Okorafor Biography, Age, Early Life, Family, Education, Books, Net Worth And More* ). Her condition worsened, resulting in her undergoing an operation at the age of 19. The operation left her paralysed from the waist down and led her to become a writer.

Today, several of her novels have been published; she is preparing scripts for television series and movies adapted both from books of other authors as well as based on her own narratives, and she has become one of the primary writers of the *Black Panther* comics for Marvel (Borrelli). Okorafor says she writes because she enjoys writing stories and that she has many stories to tell which were told to her by her relatives and others, and, most importantly, she wanted the stories to be told and seem them told for them to be read and heard (Okorafor, *Hugo Nominee Nnedi Okorafor: 'I Love Stories — And So I Write Them'*).

As stated above, the majority of Okorafor’s work may be classified as Africanfuturism. In his article *The Journey to Wakanda: Afrofuturism and Black Panther* (2015), Aaron Reese defined Afrofuturism, also called Black sci-fi, as artefacts of literature, art and pop culture which are set in Africa, are focused on Africans and black people and feature futuristic technology and magic (Reese). Okorafor says that she writes Africanfuturism, and she explains the difference between Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism as the works of Africanfuturism not being hybrids of Western culture or pop culture and African culture. However, they are set in “...recognizable, future Africa, with African lineages...” (Borrelli) with traditional sci-fi and fantasy tropes, such as witches, aliens, and superpowers. Okorafor abstains from stereotypical tropes associated with African fiction, such as cannibalistic zombies and witchdoctors (Okorafor, *The People Could Fly: An Interview with Nnedi Okorafor*).

Moreover, she emphasises that Africanfuturism concerns Africa as a culturally and geographically diverse continent, and not one socially and culturally homogenous part of the world, the way it is treated in a large portion of the outside world (Okorafor,

*Africanfuturism Defined*). Okorafor herself said in a Ted talk that "...[the] idea of leaving but bringing and then becoming more is at one of the hearts of Afrofuturism, or you can simply call it a different type of science fiction." (Okorafor, *Sci-fi stories that imagine a future Africa*). In the same Ted talk, she adds that similarly to the evolution of different species in nature, sci-fi has the same elements but evolves differently based on the culture they come from (Okorafor, *Sci-fi stories that imagine a future Africa*).

Okorafor's decision to set her stories in Africa and Nigeria was motivated by her visits to Nigeria and mainly the first ones in the 1990s. Okorafor said that "... [she] wrote mainly magical realism and fantasy inspired by [her] love of Igbo and other West African traditional cosmologies and spiritualities..." (Okorafor, *Sci-fi stories that imagine a future Africa*). A self-proclaimed "Nigamerican", she claims to live on a border between being an American and a Nigerian, and that is what makes her write fantasy and sci-fi. Many African public personalities and authors exclaimed that Africa is not prepared for sci-fi or fantasy and that they consider these genres low and childish. In their opinion, Africa should focus on contemporary African issues, such as war or hunger (Serrano). They support this claim by the general unpopularity of famous sci-fi artefacts of literature and pop culture such as *Star Wars* in Africa. Okorafor opposes this notion by pointing out that science fiction has changed the world since many present-day inventions were inspired by sci-fi literature (Okorafor, *African Science Fiction is Still Alien*), and therefore, she may be considered a pioneer.

Okorafor writes mainly in the style of the two genres listed above, and the majority of her works could be classified as young adult literature. Her first two novels, *Zahrah the Windseeker* (2005) and *The Shadow Speaker* (2007), definitely belong to Africanfuturism and feature aliens and technological advancements and various forms of magic. Her later works, such as *Who Fears Death* (2010) and the trilogy *Binti* (2015), also belong to this genre (Okorafor, Nnedi). Besides being one of the writers of *Black Panther* comics, Okorafor wrote instalments of the *Black Panther* spin-off *Shuri* comic books (Borrelli) for Marvel and managed to write and publish her comic book series *LaGuardia* (2019) (Okorafor, Nnedi).

*Akata* is an urban fantasy book series for young adults about a girl with magical powers. Despite the author's hatred of labels and the vast cultural differences, *Akata* has been called the African Harry Potter (Borrelli). To compare and claim that this book series is a reiteration of Rowling's bestseller "...negates the rich history of black women writers, Nigerian writers, Afro-futurists, magical realists, and others. (...) and reduces [Okorafor's] work to a mere reflection of a single pop culture phenomenon." (Jensen). The *Akata* book series belongs to her later works, and it has already three instalments, the first published in 2011 and the second in 2017, with the third, *Sunny and the Mysteries of Osis*, released in 2018. *Akata* seems like a digression from her more prominent work, usually of the sci-fi genre, or sci-fi with fantasy elements, sometimes described as post-apocalyptic, while *Akata* is a pure urban fantasy (Wolfe). The author herself labelled this book series on her official Twitter page "Africanjujuism", a subcategory of fantasy (Okorafor, @Nnedi). *Akata* is interwoven with Nigerian mythology, magic, and secrecy (Alter). The usage of mythological creatures and deities in *Akata* stirred up controversy in Nigeria because the folklore used is too close to some Nigerians.

Okorafor's work, despite being Africa-centred or at least written from the African standpoint (Borrelli), resonates with a larger, worldwide audience. A part of her appeal is her exploring a continent that has been largely ignored by sci-fi and fantasy for a very long time (Borrelli). Perhaps it is her unique description or view of Africa presented in her books, which describe the continent in a magical way that is so novel and appealing to a wider audience. Her work has been described as imaginative, including different and fantastic creatures, plants, and objects, which spring from Okorafor's love of nature (Okorafor, *The People Could Fly: An Interview with Nnedi Okorafor*). Her popularity may be to an extent attributed to the widely popular *Black Panther* movie and comics and general interests in Africa that followed them, but also to a general shift in the conversation about diversity and young adult literature (Okorafor, *Between the Covers Nnedi Okorafor Interview*), she, herself, says that fantasy and sci-fi would have to eventually become more diverse anyway (Okorafor, *Hugo Nominee Nnedi Okorafor: 'I Love Stories — And So I Write Them'*). Nnedi Okorafor received numerous awards for her work. One of the most important is the Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa, which she received for her story *Long Juju*

*Man* (2009) in 2008 (Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa 2007/8). Another important award she received is the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa for *Zahrah the Windseeker* (Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa Winners). She was also recognized by other awards, both for literature and comic books, but those are not as prestigious as the ones above.



## 2 Young adult literature

The main body of Okorafor's work consists of young adult literature, and *Akata* is no exception. So, it is integral to this thesis to define young adult literature. Adolescence constitutes an integral part of an individual's development, an era of life everyone must undergo. As suggested above, many people, not only young adults, read this particular group of literature (perhaps even literatures, since it includes prose, poetry, and drama) for various reasons, for instance, due to escapism or relatability of the plots and characters (Kalkat). This chapter focuses on different aspects of this particular literature with emphasis on the formation of individuality.

Historically, young adult literature is complicated to define (D. Stevenson 179). The definition of both a child and a young adult changed throughout different historical periods, so it is hard to pinpoint when the current definition emerged. In the Medieval and Early Modern age, genres primarily intended for young adults were mainly fairy tales and fables, genres with a strong didactic aim, often with a religious focus. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first novels aimed at young adults appeared (D. Stevenson 190).

In the present, young adult literature is a broad term, which first found common usage in the 1960s (Cart). Young adult literature is defined more by its target audience: people between the ages 12 and 18 (though other literary theorists argue that it may be from the age of 10 to 19 or even from the age of 13 to the age of 25) (Stupková 6), than similar poetics, genres and other literary features (Coats, *Growing Up, In theory* 316), since it covers everything from poetry to comic books. Cart adds that "...the term "young adult literature" is inherently amorphous, since all its constituent terms "young adult" and "literature" are dynamic..." (Cart), which means it changes with progress in culture and society. Despite this broad definition, certain topics can be found in most works of young adult literature, for example, morphing from childhood to adulthood. Typical features of young adult books include fantasy and science fiction elements, romance, a grand destiny, education, and sometimes even controversial topics related to growing up (e.g., violence, sexuality, drug abuse) and life in general; thus, they are often labelled as "coming of age" stories.

The number of works published for this particular audience significantly increased (Cart). At first, this group of literature was considered dismissed as a genre, consisting of very little, often monotonous works. Nowadays, it includes artistic, experimental, and innovative works of art. This shift is evidenced by the foundation of the Michael L. Printz Award, presented annually by YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) to the best author of young adult literature of the year, as well as several critically acclaimed authors of young adult literature (Cart).

Young adult literature is often criticised for being silly and simple (Kalkat), and, as Cart notes, it is often dismissed and mocked. Despite a large amount of young adult literature being produced, only a small number of books for young adults receive wider public recognition, and many get forgotten, often because of them being knock-offs of more popular and imaginative titles (Felton).

## **2.1 Construction of identity in young adult literature**

The central theme of young adult literature is becoming an adult (Cart). This transition creates an identity crisis, which may be called “adolescence” (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 137). Adolescence is a period of life, the goal of which is acquiring one’s “subjectivity”, in the sense of getting agency in one’s life, becoming a subject in life, acquiring one’s self. This subjectivity results in the capability of one’s own “thought and action” in the face of outside pressures (Tomanová 20). It stands in opposition to the extreme self-absorption of the childhood self. In McCallum’s and Coats’ view, the subjectivity is constructed dialogically with what they call “the Other”. The Other can be represented by society, language, or other people and relationships established between them. The Other plays a large part in self-realisation, “since only from the position of the Other is one able to see one’s self” (Tomanová 19). Coats adds that a protagonist is confronted with something to which they must become a subject (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 5). She presents becoming a subject as a negotiation of “a passage from the Real to the Symbolic” (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 137). Coats suggests a plurality of Others in one narrative that reflects the child’s multiple possibilities for the construction of their identity.

In her publication *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (1999), Robyn McCallum presents diverse forms of narrative which contain the concept of the Other. She calls one of them “the quest”, which represents “the commonplace notion of “finding one’s self” (...) as a quest for a stable identity” (McCallum 68). The difference between the object of the quest and its narrative realization implies a dialogic nature of gaining the stable self. McCallum states that the quest narrative displays three main strategies. First, a doppelganger is used to externalize internal dialogue, representing “intersubjective relationships between self and other” (McCallum 68) and internal fragmentation of the subject, thus creating the split subject. Second, the character is seen “to experience temporal, cultural and psychological displacement or marginalization” (McCallum 68). Selfhood is directly established in specific contexts; the character, displaced from their familiar surroundings, is inclined to be shown as “undergoing some form of identity transformation or crisis” (McCallum 69). Different representations of subjectivity related to the functions of characters and the setting, along with the discursive strategies. Inserting the protagonist onto the margins of society provides means for exploration of the interaction between subjectivity and agency and how culture and society affect the construction of the subject. Thirdly, breaking any rules or social norms of the culture can construct a position from which a character can examine and interrogate the limits that a given society or culture's cultural and social discourses and practices place on experience, action, and subjectivity (McCallum 69).

Social or cultural displacement plays a large part in many young adult narratives, and McCallum describes three aspects of this feature of young adult literature. Firstly, the character is taken out of their familiar environment, which undermines or affirms their essentialist notions of selfhood. Secondly, this displacement offers ways to explore how this new environment affects the character’s cognition and the dialogical formation of subjectivity, especially “... where a character is depicted as learning, decoding and interpreting alien social codes and discourses...” (McCallum 100). Thirdly, breaking any rules or social norms of the culture can construct a position from which a character can examine and interrogate the limits that the cultural and social discourses and practices of a given society or culture place on experience, action, and subjectivity (McCallum 101).

### **2.1.1 The abject hero**

Coats suggests that the formation of individuality is based on exclusionary logic, meaning the character narrows his collection of experiences, thereby entering the crisis called adolescence (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 137). Formation of identity often has a disruptive effect perceived in identity, system, and order. Abjection disruption may also be called abjection. This is often used in young adult literature as a device for constructing identity.

The protagonist of young adult literature can be often labelled as abject. When creating the abjection, authors often react to "...the psychic preoccupations of contemporary readers on both conscious and unconscious levels to remain viable..." (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 138). This results in the abjection changing often, which is also analogous to the relatively short relevance of young adult literature. The abjection is both psychological and social, and it needs to disrupt the protagonist's identity (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 138). The abject person is an outsider with "an intensely ambivalent relationship" to their limitations preventing them from fitting in (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 138). Socially, this means the abject person operates at the social periphery. In adolescence, it is time to cultivate group identity, which is impossible for socially abject characters. Socially abject figures cannot seem to manage "...either the material conditions and habits or the identifications necessary to sustain a position in a social group." (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 138). The psychologically abject person is more subtle and complex.

The subject must undertake corporeal exclusions, things that must be abject from the standpoint of the character to form total subjectivity. The protagonist needs to organize their boundaries, both ideological and corporal; they must "...expel as abject that which is not part of her "clean and proper" ego." (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 141). Abjection as such is based on physicality, as we abject undesirable physicality to constitute a clean and proper body. On the social level, we abject the pathological, which should result in the establishment of the boundaries of a social group. To achieve identity, the subject searches for a way to subdue the abjection, to keep it in its proper place.

What needs to be abject often functions as a superego to the protagonist, so its realisation may be an authority figure. The hero then needs to refuse this authority figure or resist it, thus labelling it abject. The hero sets himself against the authority and creates the abjection. The hero can also become the abjection if the subject is labelled abject by the community or society. The abjection may be rooted in the governing or influential authority figure, who would label the protagonist a threat or something undesirable. Abject characters might be psychotic or monstrous if they willingly refuse to take up a subjective position, but mainly the conditions of their existence render them abject (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 148). The prototypical abject hero is an ordinary person who refuses to reintegrate into the society under its terms but instead haunts and disrupts its borders (Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands* 149).

The role of abjection is usually to define the protagonist against something vile and unclean to which they need to become subject and get rid of to transcend into symbolic self, or, on the opposite, the hero is abject by a superego whose norms and standards need to be accepted by the hero. The hero needs to establish their boundaries in the context of this superego by accepting its norms and establishing a healthy relationship with it.

## **2.2 Fantasy fiction for young adults**

Much of young adult fiction includes fantastic elements, yet not all books with such elements are fantasy books. In the most basic sense, fantasy literature is any literature containing elements that cannot exist in reality (Fitzgerald 3). However, this definition is insufficient since genres like the gothic novel, sci-fi or magic realism contain elements that do not exist in the real world, yet they are distinguishable from fantasy. Literary theorists agree that fantasy literature usually draws from folklore and mythology and contains universal archetypes, similarly to fairy tales (Stupková 12). In her publication *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), Rosemary Jackson cites Sartre's defence of fantasy, where she states that "fantasy fulfils a definite escapist function" through the fictional world in which it is set (Jackson 10). Fantasy literature fulfils "...a desire for a 'better', more complete, unified reality..." (Jackson 1). This fictional world is seen in relation to the "real" world, or more precisely, how the fictional world reflects the real world or what position or opposition the fictional world is to the real world (Jackson 12). A quest

story is very traditional in the genre; the main characters undergo a journey to achieve a greater goal. For example, the conflict of good and evil is a typical trope, often with the use and consequences of magic. The hero of such stories starts from ordinary or underdog status and becomes more.

Besides the traditional quest, fantasy today takes various forms, for instance, animal fantasy, gothic fantasy or urban fantasy. Urban fantasy is a subgenre specifically important for this thesis, though some would argue that urban fantasy is a genre by itself, as, besides fantasy, urban fantasy is rooted in Gothic horror and romance. Urban fantasy also draws inspiration from mystery, crime fiction, and sci-fi (Ekman 452). Because of multiple sources of base genres, urban fantasy is very complicated to define, and multiple definitions are proposed. A typical aspect is the importance of the city environment, so fantastic (supernatural or paranormal) elements are layered over our recognizable modern world (Holmes), the mundane modern world may also be called “primary world”, while the fantastical may be called “secondary world” (Ekman 463). The city in urban fantasy must be a lived-in environment, not just a backdrop (Ekman 456). Other authors define the setting of urban fantasy as any setting that resembles the contemporary world (Ekman 456). The fictional world is very similar to our present, unlike traditional high fantasy, which is defined by being set in a world different from our reality (VanVels). The magical world exists parallel to ours, like in *Neverwhere* (1996) by Neil Gaiman or even *Harry Potter* (1997) by J. K. Rowling. The city oftentimes becomes a character on its own—its presence is required. Attributes of the two realities are contrasted or clashing with each other, commonly because the fantastical elements are masqueraded from the “normal” world, forcing the hero to hide elements of their life from others. These are not in opposition necessarily, and to put them into a dichotomy with each other would be a wrong assumption. To consider a story to be classified as urban fantasy, some literary critics suggest opposition of mundane and fantastic, which are intersected and interwoven between each other and explicitly exclude stories about sudden appearances of supernatural forces within a city (Ekman 460).

The urban fantasy genre can use different forms. Literary critics agree that “the Unseen” is a characteristic element present in many different works. The Unseen is defined vaguely:

it is anything obscured to the primary world in any way. It can take the form of magical creatures and forces hidden from the mundane world; magical places obscured from vision and others. These elements are usually hidden from the primary world, so the protagonist is put in a position enabling the hero to see them and interact with them. The hero is often expected to keep these elements secret, though in some cases, the fantastical elements in the second world may affect the primary world disruptively. Since these elements are hidden and obscured by secrecy, they can be presented as a part of “secret history” (Ekman 463-464). Urban fantasy books, which draw from gothic horror, conceal the fantastic in subterranean locations. In others, fantastical creatures try to fit in the mundane, so they either conceal themselves among the normal population or are ignored by it (Ekman 465).

Urban fantasy often includes a set of archetypes. One of the characters, as stated above, can be the city the narrative is set in. A current trend is to include a strong female protagonist, a feature multiple literary critics agree on (Ekman 459). The protagonist can be a paranormal investigator or a hunter, and they might be "parahuman", meaning they might be supernatural. Their supernaturality can be based on European folklore, commonly on vampires and werewolves, or they might have other supernatural abilities or magic.

There are two possibilities for building the relationship between the self and the Other in urban fantasy. Firstly, the hero lives in the primary world, which is perceived to be the reality. By introducing fantastical elements, the relationship between the hero and the world becomes destabilised (McLennon). Secondly, if the hero lives already in an everyday supernatural world, they lose their certainty in the world, destabilising the normal relationship between the self and the Other (McLennon).

The genre of urban fantasy is sometimes very hard to distinguish from paranormal romance. Paranormal romance focuses on a romantic relationship between two characters and how the outside forces (for example, one of them being supernatural, one of the lineages disproving of the relationships, the relationship being incompatible because of the supernatural aspect) affect their relationship. The urban fantasy would focus on an issue in the world, but if a romantic entanglement is removed from the story, the story

will remain intact (Holmes). It could be argued that because of similar features of the two, paranormal romance could be identified as a subgenre of urban fantasy since often a paranormal romance is a subplot in urban fantasy (*What is Urban Fantasy? Definition and Examples*).

Urban fantasy can naturally leverage the concept of “fairy tale retelling” (Stupková 35). In a narrower view, the story of fairy tale retelling is adapted from a fairy tale. In this type of narrative, fantastical elements may not be present at all; the story can develop in an unspecified time period and different fairy tale motives might be explained or told by an unreliable narrator. In a broader view, the retelling could concern not only fairy tales but also myths or even religious texts, such as the Bible, so that the mythological and fairy-tale aspects are used to create the fictional world in which the story is happening.

Urban fantasy for young adults needs to feature a young protagonist. This protagonist often practices magic, wizardry or has a supernatural power or even may be born as or become one of the supernatural creatures mentioned above. They usually find themselves in both worlds of the story, so, for example, they are both savvy with present-day technology and they are also familiar with the Unseen in the story.

Every young adult has or had parents and the characteristics and complexity of their relationship with them are typically being addressed by young adult literature<sup>1</sup>. In real life, parents have concerns about the effects of fantasy literature on their children. These concerns are addressed by arguments made by scholars and authors since the elements that cause these concerns often have the opposite, counter-intuitive effect: they are supportive of positive adolescent development in many ways (Fitzgerald 4-5).

### **2.2.1 Tropes of young adult fantasy and sci-fi literature**

Books for young adults include many different tropes, which lack proper theoretical definition. The tropes have been, however, analysed by literary enthusiasts, especially on social media and blogs. Young adult literature is oftentimes considered a low genre (Cart), and scientific publications concerned specifically with these tropes are hard to find. In their publications, literary theorists abstain from talking about tropes and focus on more

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see chapter 2.1.



general and universal themes, such as feminism and its role in current young adult literature or the general popularity of fantasy literature.

As many tropes of young adult literature are sub-genre specific, forming a generalized approach to them is complicated. Following bloggers make collections of commonly used tropes often centred around a specific subgenre of young adult literature, which they usually post in numbered lists. The blogs are introduced, and then the most agreed-upon tropes relevant to this thesis are recounted.

The first blog used is kept up by Ann Dayleview. Ann Dayleview is a young adult fantasy author who, similarly to Okorafor, talks in the internet space about different topics concerning young adult literature, writing in general and current literary releases. This thesis used an article titled *10 YA Fantasy Tropes I Hate* (2020) in which Dayleview voices her opinion on some recurring tropes in young adult literature. She states in the introduction of the article that “none of [the listed tropes] are bad, they are just [those she does not like].” (Dayleview).

The second blog used is the “Writer’s Edit”, an Australian online magazine concerned with literature in general. According to their website, they strive to support writers both new and old not only by the advice in their articles but also by their own publishing house Talem Press focused on fantasy books with female protagonists. The article used for this thesis, *The Ultimate Guide to YA Fiction*, is a guide on how to write young adult fantasy books, in the sense of what to include and what is traditional to use. Besides tropes, the article includes genres used heavily in young adult fantasy. The author of the article, Emma Johnson, is a writer and an editor, which gives her an interesting insight into both.

The third blog used is the Pelican, an independent student magazine with both an online and a printed version, originated in 1929 in Australia. Pelican claims to publish “a diverse range of voices” (*About Pelican*) from the whole student body. This website published the article titled *The Most Problematic Tropes in Young Adult Literature* (2019) by Emma Ruben, who writes reviews for the website.

The last blog used is entitled “Tsundoku Girl Reads”. It is a blog by Rhiana Campbell, a journalist, whose blog focuses on book reviews and articles about general book facts.

She published an article *Top 12 Tropes in Young Adult Fiction* where she analyses different tropes with the focus on dystopian young adult fiction, merging her own opinion and what could be considered a popularizing approach to journalism with her own nearly scientifically structured observations on the matter.

The first trope most bloggers agree on concerns the protagonist. The hero is usually a teenager (Johnson) and an outsider, who later turns out to be “the chosen one”. This hero is often orphaned emphasizing their social outcasting. Being a “zero”, meaning that they are considered a failure by the society’s standards, this hero then rises to become better, and they acquire hero-like qualities or a supernatural ability, which often manifests itself suddenly to an extent exceeding established norm (Dayleview). The hero may for example secretly inherit a title, which changes greatly in their initial circumstances.

The second trope could be described as “typical teenage topics”. It is concerned with aspects of teenage life in young adult fantasy narratives. Despite the story being set in a fantastical world with problems sprouting from its fantastical elements and possible solutions in the supernatural, the protagonist experiences the everyday problems of any teenager. A romance is often present in young adult literature, first love and first break-ups and other love-related plots, such as being involved in a love triangle. This is common when the protagonist is female, so she is forced to choose between two love interests whose characteristics are often contrasting to each other, one being dark and broody and the other being a prototypical “boy next door” (Ruben). Other problems, such as their social standing in their school or their achievement in education are likely to arise. If the character is not orphaned, problems may spring from everyday family life, especially if the family is not aware of the protagonist’s fate or other existence. Both “normal” and fantastical usually share the aspect of rebellion against an authority, such as the government, a bully, a parent, a teacher, or a different authority figure in the story.

The third trope concerns the antagonist of young adult fantasy, who is usually “the evil overlord”. This character is usually one-dimensional, but they are a personification of all evil. This antagonist is extremely powerful, and they usually have minions at their disposal. It often seems that the antagonist’s sole aim is to destroy the world for the sake of destroying the world and nothing else (*14 Popular Fantasy Tropes — And How*

to *Make Them Feel New Again*). Young adult literature in general employs a clear division between values of good and evil.

Narration in young adult literature usually follows the protagonist; it could be described as “protagonist-centric”. Either, the narration style is from the first person, or it employs an omniscient and impersonal narrator who describes only the elements of the narrative, such as emotions, motivations, and events, that involve the hero or heroine directly, while everything concerning the other characters is described indirectly, seemingly from the point of view of the hero. If the narrator is personal and in the first person, it allows us to see the protagonist in more detail and with more insight into their feelings and motivations (Johnson).

Very often, there is a “dark secret”: an event prior to the main story or the hero’s life has happened that directly affects the development of the protagonist. These include a great cataclysmic event that explains a part of the current state of the fictional world, such as war, natural catastrophe and others, or something more personal to the protagonist, such as the death of a relative or even parents (*Top 12 Tropes in Young Adult Fiction*). This trope serves as the partial motivation for the protagonist’s actions or even as the main plot if the story is about avenging that particular relative.

Another trope that ties to the fictional world is the “division into factions”—nations or other groups—which are based on an aspect of the fictional world, such as homogenous race-based nations, function in the fictional world, or they could be completely arbitrary. These factions are often based on a personal trait, such as intelligence, bravery and others (Bushill), illustrative examples of the division into factions are for instance the Houses at Hogwarts from *Harry Potter* or factions in the *Divergent* series, the geographical division may be then observed for example in *Avatar: Last Airbender* or in *The Hunger Games* (*Top 12 Tropes in Young Adult Fiction*).

### **3 Nigerian mythology**

Since urban fantasy and fantasy in general draw from mythology<sup>2</sup> in their fictional worlds, and since Okorafor is Nigerian and uses Nigeria and its mythology, it is important to describe essential aspects of it. Okorafor stated in various interviews that she was charmed by how connected the spirituality of the old and the modern can co-exist in present-day Africa, which motivated her to write about it. The mythology described below does not reflect the whole of Nigerian mythology, but only a part of it, more specifically, the mythology of Igbo, a prominent ethnic group in Nigeria.

While Jamaican woo-doo is very well known, its Nigerian counterpart and predecessor, Juju, is not. “Juju is a spiritual belief incorporating amulets and spells used in religious practice, as part of witchcraft in West Africa” (Dickinson). Spells are divided into good or bad according to the effect they are supposed to bring. It is still believed in West Africa and practised, among others, by religious leaders. Juju includes human sacrifices even nowadays, so in parts of Nigeria, the practice is forbidden.

Juju often works with amulets and fetishes, such as monkey heads (Spell). The fundamental belief is that two objects close to each other contaminate one another with physical contact, so it becomes possible to manipulate one to reach the other. Somebody’s hair, fingernails or even a piece of clothing retain the owner’s energy, therefore it is possible to manipulate that person, as well as being in physical contact with something may grant it similar properties, which is how for example protective amulets work (Spell).

People who create the juju are called “the juju men”<sup>3</sup> and they are usually specialists, namely healers, shamans, and others. These juju men are considered good, so their juju is often used to cure illnesses and injuries and to lift curses. In contrast, other juju men might be sorcerers, who are considered bad, because they use juju to harm somebody, e. g. they curse an object to pollute others with negative energy.

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<sup>2</sup> For further details, see chapter 2.3.

<sup>3</sup> The term “juju man“ is used in the title of one of Okorafor’s stories, for further details, see chapter 1.

An important part of not only the Igbo culture, but the culture of other ethnic groups in Nigeria in general, are masquerades, or Mmanwu. Masquerades are traditional Igbo festivals, held on certain occasions according to the community native calendars (Widjaja). Masquerades are people who dress up in masks, usually made from fabric and wood as well as straw and other materials. People who dress up in these costumes are called masquerade dancers, or masquerades. They are of four basic types: the ones who represent deities and nature spirits, to which sacrifices are made, the ones who represent ancestral spirits, those who placate the spirits, and those who are purely for entertainment.

Every masquerade relates to a different occasion and society member. They are especially important during Igbo yam festivals. Masquerades have such an important role in Igbo society, that if there is “[an] occasion, ceremony or festival where masquerade is not presented, the participants of the occasion do see the event as a mockery or inconclusive.” (Nwankwo 6). Masquerades are accompanied by music and rhythm, which are vital to them. The rhythm is usually created by traditional percussive instruments and dancers are evaluated on their ability to follow the rhythm (Ugobude).

In the past, masquerades were considered agents of the law, they collected levies or solved disputes. “As social control agents, masquerades were unchallengeable.” (Nwankwo 4). Though there have always been masquerades purely for entertainment, there are and were types of masquerades whose sole purpose was to enforce the law or even scare children into obedience. With globalization and Christianisation, the power of masquerades significantly deteriorated, so they are nowadays considered just “humans in masks” among the Igbo as against the traditional interpretation, them being “spirits from the ancestral worlds” (Nwankwo 8).

Traditional Igbo religion is polytheistic, with different deities and gods, the two most important being Ekwensu and Chukwu. Nowadays, Ekwensu is considered Satan, basically a local name for the Christian counterpart to God, in Nigerian mythology called Chukwu (Agboanike). This was not always the case.

Originally, Ekwensu was an Igbo trickster god, similar to Loki in Norse mythology. Ekwensu was also the god of war. He was considered a cunning negotiator by merchants and a great warrior by hunters and warriors, and he was invoked during the event of war

(Agboanike). In some tribes, Ekwensu is associated with yam festivals, and, in other tribes, people are called the name of this benevolent deity to be praised when they committed an act for which they should be praised.

The change from a benevolent god of war to Satan can be traced to the colonial era when Christianity was brought to Nigeria. When Nigeria was colonised, several pagan festivals were adapted for Christian purposes and missionaries used Chukwu and Ekwensu to create Christian binary division between a supreme deity, Chukwu, and the devil, Ekwensu. Today, Ekwensu is perceived as the devil, and to be called Ekwensu means to be evil and dark (Ezeh).

Chukwu, on the other hand, "...transcends the multiplicity of gods in Igbo religion..." (*Deities Of Igbo Religion*). Chukwu translates to "The Great Spirit". He is an all-powerful and all-knowing deity, who created the universe and the other gods. Chukwu is not believed to have human attributes, despite this, it is referred to as "he". He inhabits the sky and is often associated with the sun.

Other deities that belong to the Igbo pantheon are for example Anyanwu and Mami Wata. Anyanwu can be translated to the eye of light and in Igbo mythology, it is the Lady of the Sun, who lives close to Chukwu, the supreme being (Nwa-Ikenga) and personification of the sun. Lady of the Sun was the symbol of enlightenment and knowledge.

Mami Wata is a water spirit, and her name translates from pidgin English to "Mother Water" (Caputo). Her appearance is similar to one of mermaids, half-human and half-fish, with long flowing hair. Mami Wata possesses the ability to charm snakes. She is known for her seductive beauty, but she can be dangerous, and she represents wealth and in it being able to bring both fortune and misfortune. Her depictions change based on the influences of different religions and cultures (Caputo).

Almost any mythology includes its creation myth and Igbo is no different. In Igbo mythology, this force of creation is personified by a spider called Udide or Ududo Okwanka. Hailed "the cosmic spider" and "the weaver of ideas" (Okwanka), the spider is the representation of the creative force of not only the universe but also of masquerades and weaving, with the last bearing similarity to spiders' webs. The possible inspiration

may be the similar visual appearance of the Milky Way and the spider's web. Uhide Okwanka is not the singular occurrence of a Nigerian spider trickster god, another one is Anansi (Okorafor, @Nnedi). Depicted as a human as well as a spider, Anansi (also called Ananse, Aunt Nancy, Anancy and other) teaches about moral, ethical and political values (Asante). Okorafor does not use this deity, because it originated in Western Africa and not in Igbo culture like Uhide (Okorafor, @Nnedi).

Igbo people believe in reincarnation. Reincarnation in Igbo culture relates to social status, which is traditionally given partly by into what family the person was born. However according to the following Igbo aphorism: "No one knows the womb that bears the chief", not much importance is given to this circumstance. Good social status is given by progeny, wealth and receiving good education (I. Stevenson 15). Qualities of good leadership are also a factor: a good and generous leader has more value in this case than a tyrannous leader.

After death, a soul passes into the realm of discarnate beings. Only two concepts of this realm are relevant to this thesis. The first one is that social status loses no importance in it, so dying Igbos are more concerned with their afterlife status than the fact of dying (I. Stevenson 16). The other is the concept of "second burial". These rites "...influence the condition of the discarnate personality by helping him achieve tranquillity in the disincarnate realm and a satisfactory positioning for reincarnation..." (I. Stevenson 16). These second burials usually take place any time between a week and a year from the first burial.

It is believed that people who die young reincarnate sooner than people who die old. This gives them the option to resume their aspiration for improvement (I. Stevenson 16). Some believe that not everybody reincarnates, namely two kinds of people: people who led ineffective and worthless lives, especially those who did not marry nor had children, and those who committed suicide or died accidentally or prematurely.

The Igbo wish is to reincarnate in the same lineage. According to Ian Stevenson's study, *The Belief in Reincarnation Among the Igbo of Nigeria* (1985), many subjects, and the deceased people with whom the subject is identified belong to the same family. It is

also believed that a single person is able to reincarnate contemporaneously into more than one physical body.

Though it is not necessarily a part of the mythology, Leopard people are an important part of Nigerian history and folklore, and they are central to the book series this thesis analyses. A leopard in African mythology is considered “a powerful totem animal that is believed to guide the spirits of the dead to rest” (*The Leopard Men*). According to the entry in online encyclopedia.com, *The Leopard Men*, it is most likely associated with leopard’s connotations to the Egyptian god Osiris, who judges the dead.

Leopard cults existed in west Africa, among others in Nigeria. Their members killed human prey using steel knives shaped like leopard claws. To get initiated into this cult, one had to kill another person, collect their blood into a bottle and drink it in the presence of the members of the cult. They believed that an elixir called “borfima”, made from human intestines, would enable them to transform themselves into leopards and grant them various superpowers (*The Leopard Men*). This cult would kill on the slightest pretences, such as a member growing ill, or crops of a member failing. Then *Bati Yeli*, an executioner, would be chosen to kill a victim chosen by the cult. Bati Yeli would wear a leopard skin robe and they would ideally choose and kidnap a victim, then they would bring the victim into a shrine of the Leopard cult, and they would perform a sacrifice.

Accounts of these cults rising were recorded during World War I and shortly after World War II. In both cases, the members of these cults were either caught or killed and the cults were dispersed. Similar cases to Leopard Cults appeared in other parts of Africa under different names, such as Lion Cults and Mau-Mau. Attacks of these cults were often led towards white people, who were viewed as oppressors.

Africa is a very diverse continent with multiple languages and language groups. There are more than three main groups of languages in Nigeria only. The graphic records of these languages, mainly the Igbo, Efik, and other tribes of south-eastern Nigeria and northwestern Cameroon, have an ancient ideographic script, which shares characteristics of Hieroglyphics, called “Nsibidi” (Nsibidi). This script has been used to convey messages across the cultures of the area. Nsibidi comprises about a thousand symbols, which



represent both abstract and concrete concepts. Its oldest archaeological finding dates to 2000 B.C.

To communicate using these symbols, they could have been traced with hand into the air or drawn, but currently, Nsibidi is mostly enjoyed as frescos on houses, tattoos, and other forms of visual art. Deeper knowledge of these symbols is restricted to the members of the men's association. Nsibidi was almost abandoned because of its association with witchcraft—juju and woo-doo—but is regarded by many as the Renaissance art of Nigeria (Agbo).

## 4 Joseph Campbell's framework of the heroic journey

Young adult literature's main concern is the construction of one's identity<sup>4</sup>. McCallum suggests that this construction can take the form of a quest. Furthermore, Campbell suggests that the protagonist of the heroic journey needs to undergo spiritual development in order to achieve a new personality, which he calls "the spiritual balance". *Akata* certainly exploits spirituality in relation to the formation of identity as a quest of the protagonist. Aspects of young adult literature are presented in the previous chapter; this chapter presents the heroic journey and how it approaches spirituality and individuality. The primary aim of this thesis is to analyse how the narrative framework of the heroic journey interacts and correlates with narratives and tropes of young adult literature, whether it is used and how it is used. Since the structure of a heroic journey has been widely used in a multitude of works from epics to present-day popular culture (McGuire), it is not surprising that this particular structure would be used in one of the currently most widespread groups of literature as well. There are lists of books for young adults supposedly using this structure, yet the analysis of the impact of the heroic journey on the construction of identity on their protagonist is missing.

A heroic journey, or what Joseph Campbell branded as "a monomyth" (Campbell 28) in his publication *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is an important part of human culture. Even before Campbell, scholars have alluded to this phenomenon, notably John Ronald Reuel Tolkien in his publication *On Fairy Stories* (1939), but nobody has attempted to devise a unified framework. This chapter focuses on the main elements of Campbell's framework with reference to other works, namely by the Russian structuralist Vladimir Propp and American narratologist Christopher Vogler, whose frameworks add details or have different takes on parts of the narrative structure.

### 4.1 Prototypical structure of the narrative

Campbell devised a narrative framework alongside a selection of stereotypical characters. According to him, the main parts of the narrative are "the Departure", "the Initiation", and

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2.1.

“the Return” (Campbell 45, 89, 179), which are then divided into subparts. In Campbell’s view, a hero on a heroic journey must fulfil a great destiny.

Campbell exemplifies his theory by multiple folkloristic and classical texts, such as Greek myths, Russian fairy tales and others. His framework has proven itself to be universal and it has been repeatedly applied to an abundance of artefacts of pop culture, which is only proven by the existence of Vogler’s and Propp’s publications. Other works should be also considered, as Campbell states in the epilogue of his publication, this particular narrative structure is ever-developing and ever-different and different approaches to heroic journey were used in many different pieces of art.

#### **4.1.1 The departure**

A crucial element of any heroic journey is a hero, who is usually an unsuspecting person whose qualities may be seldom labelled as heroic ones, living in an idyllic place, a familiar world. Then the first part of the story comes: “The Call to Adventure” (Campbell 45). In this initial part, the hero is confronted with a herald, who summons them from the familiar and everyday world to a new world, where the adventure will take place, for instance, Theseus hearing about the Minotaur. The hero could be carried outside this comfortable world by an outside force or leave of his own volition (Campbell 53). The herald might come in form of temptation, in the form of a potential lover, promised wealth, the occurrence of phenomena, such as attention-drawing words, events or ideas, (Vogler 100) but it can also spring from the hero needing to fulfil something inside themselves, they were not aware of needing at the beginning of the story (Truby 32). Propp suggests the opposite notion, that the protagonist notices a misfortune or a lack, that they need to resolve or acquire means of getting rid of it, which prompts them to become a hero (Propp 36-37), meaning the protagonist decides to take a counteraction. Truby labels this “weakness and need” and describes it as if profoundness is missing from the hero’s life (32). This is very well illustrated in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937), namely the contrast of moods of Hobbiton and the Shire and of what lies outside of it. This familiar world, the hero begins in, may be defined by a way of thinking or by standards and ideas that the hero is used to. The primary function of the familiar world is “to introduce the hero to the audience” (Vogler 90). The audience should identify with the hero and find equality

between them. The Call of Adventure is usually followed by a refusal of the Call, triggered by the hero's unwillingness to give up standards or comforts of their life. This may be personified in a deity or another person, who tempts the hero to stay, Vladimir Propp in his publication *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) exemplifies this on the hero being forbidden to leave home (37). However, the persistence in the refusal may result in a tragedy (Vogler 109).

This is followed by what Joseph Campbell calls "a Supernatural Aid" (63), or in Propp's division "a Supernatural Agent" (43), which may come in the form of an old man or woman, who provides the hero with a magical trinket or an amulet (Vogler 118). Traditionally, it is personified as a withered man or woman beside the road with whom the hero shares food and in return receives something to help them on his way, which represents fate protecting the protagonist from death. A Supernatural Aid might be received for completing a small task of generosity or for defeating a foe and it could come in the form of an object as well as in form of an animal or companion (Propp 39-42), in current literature and pop culture, this function is often realised by a mentor. This character usually provides advice, mentorship and protection and follows the character through the story. Tolkien's Gandalf can be considered one of the best examples of 20<sup>th</sup>-century characters (Durairaj).

#### **4.1.2 The initiation**

The hero has finally departed and reaches the "First Threshold" (Campbell 71) to the new and unknown world. "Crossing the First Threshold is an act of the will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure" (Vogler 127). The Threshold is guarded by a Threshold Guardian, a personification of first steps into a new and unknown world (Campbell 71), which the hero must defeat in a way, e.g., a bandit, a lion, an ogre, an imp, or a wild woman. The Threshold Guardian does not have to be a creature or a person, it can also be a form of character development of the hero (Campbell 82). Overall, the encounter with the Threshold Guardian should serve as an annihilation of the former self and the beginning of creating a new self. Before crossing, the hero may be led to the whereabouts of what the hero wants to find, this particular object could be located in a different part of the world (Propp 50-51).

The next part of the quest Campbell calls the “Belly of the Whale” (83). The hero is finally in the new world, either in the spiritual or the physical sense or simultaneously in both. Then the hero encounters an animal, such as a whale, an elephant, a mythological being or a life-threatening danger, e.g., dismemberment, mummification, to be sent in a basket on a river and other. This ordeal should prove that the hero can use the lesson they learned in the encounter with the Threshold Guardian. Traditionally, the hero willingly enters the Belly of the Whale, often literally, which represents the hero’s personal transformation, or a gaze into the hero’s psyche resulting in a personal development achieved by self-annihilation (Campbell 85). At the same time, the hero is reminded of their mortality, of them being just flesh and blood. Vogler calls this part the “Ordeal” (155) and generalizes it to experiencing the hardest challenge the hero has encountered so far, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of their abilities and personality. Similarly, Vogler suggests that this is not the climax of the story but a major plot point of the narrative (156).

The aforementioned parts should accustom the hero to the new and dangerous world, to transform and prepare them for the task ahead, because next, they embark on the “Road of Trials” (Campbell 89). The hero must undergo various tests while aided by agents, amulets and advice from their supernatural helper or a mentor mentioned above. The tests the hero undergoes might result in them receiving an alliance of other characters (Vogler 136). These ordeals would resemble the First Threshold, but they would be more perilous, though in Vogler’s conception the trials are parts of the hero’s training. Different challenges await the hero on their way, for instance, a monster, a riddle, a fight or a physical trial, a barrier and other. Campbell emphasises that the figures encountered by the hero are often symbolic and that the Road of Trials may take place in an illusionary or a dream-like location, for example, the Underworld in Greek mythology (Campbell 91). On the Road of Trials, the hero should get to know themselves as well as their allies for the journey (Vogler 141).

Campbell suggests that after the hero overcomes all the trials, they become a true heroic soul. This is often represented by a marriage to what Campbell called the “Queen Goddess of the World”. She is the incarnation of the promise of perfection (Campbell 101). She should have all the good qualities traditionally seen in a woman: she should be

comforting, nourishing, young, beautiful and a good mother. This meeting usually takes place in a central location, either to the world or to the story. This meeting should be the final test for the hero, if she rejects him or if she accepts him matters deeply since her approval represents the hero's mastery of life (Campbell 111).

Campbell further suggests that the hero, though possessing the "Mastery of Life" (Campbell 111), is tempted by a cheap and easy solution that potentially solves all his problems. This can be represented by a temptress (for example Morgana or Circe). This is to divert the hero from the journey offering the illusion of a simple and easy life.

The part of the journey, Campbell calls "Atonement with the Father", should confront and be initiated by what holds the strongest power over the hero. Campbell draws a parallel between Freudian psychology and this part of the hero's development: the hero should get rid of primal impulses and shame which hold him back. These may be personified by a figure of authority, such as their father, or by another powerful entity that limits the hero. The hero should open his soul beyond any terror or limitations (Campbell 135) of the fictional world since they completely validate their existence. By confronting the entity, the hero is absolved from the world.

With the atonement, an apotheosis or a more complex insight is achieved, which, paired with the newly attained spiritual purity, should prepare the hero for the climax of the journey. In some stories, this could be symbolized by acquiring a power or an item, for example when King Arthur pulls the Excalibur from the stone.

What follows is what Campbell labelled as the "Ultimate Boon" (Campbell 159). The Ultimate Boon is what the hero wants to achieve by the quest, it is the climax of the story. Usually, it does not involve a fight with a dark and evil entity, which is to be vanquished, Campbell emphasises that the Ultimate Boon should be transcendent, so a brawl does not fit the description, but it may be achieved by means of winning a brawl, such as fighting a monster to receive the Golden Fleece in Jason and the Argonauts, so the thing the hero is questing for could be guarded by a personification. The Ultimate boon might also be called "self-revelation", so that the hero has a major revelation about themselves, either psychological, in the form of insight through his actions, leading up to the self-revelations, or moral (Truby 40).

### **4.1.3 The return**

Having achieved the goal, it is time for the hero to return. The hero acquired what they quested for, and they should return to their familiar original world. The return may be supported by the “Magic Flight” (Campbell 182). If the hero was able to procure help from the goddess, then they are usually helped by supernatural means, in this case, the example of the eagles from “*The Lord of the Rings*” exemplify such return. In case that the Ultimate boon is an item guarded by a guardian, this guardian may pursue the hero and other obstructions may appear. In this chase, the hero may leave a companion or an object behind to delay his pursuers. This may be seen in the Czech fairy tale Pták Ohnivák (“the Flame bird”). Propp suggests that “the Magic Flight” may precede the “Ultimate Boon” and the hero or heroine may be delivered to the place, where they are supposed to finish the quest by magical means (Propp 50-51).

While the hero is trying to return, they have to deal with the fact of getting comfortable in the new world. They are unsure of their belonging to the familiar world, so they are unwilling to go back. This may be symbolized or emphasized by a hero’s injury. The hero may be provided with Supernatural Aid to return. By the act of crossing the border back to the familiar world, the worlds merge into one, not because of the hero’s actions, but because both worlds have always been one. The shift in the hero’s comprehension of the two worlds allows them to see it now. The hero thus becomes a master of the two worlds based on the hero’s perception only. We may as well consider Campbell’s parallel to Nietzschean psychology (Campbell 212); the hero achieves a balance between the spiritual and the material, where the familiar world represents the material and the new world the spiritual. In doing that, the hero reaches a “new equilibrium”, a permanent change within them based on self-revelation. If the hero is able to achieve self-revelation, a new level of spirituality is acquired, if not, or if the self-revelation is negative, the hero is destroyed (Truby 42). The new understanding of the united world creates a possibility for the hero to achieve the freedom to live. Campbell proclaims that the hero is ever developing. Often the hero feels out of place and different from everyone else.

## **4.2 Stereotypical characters in Campbell’s Monomyth**

Campbell's publication uses folklore texts from numerous different cultures which are generalized and used to form a framework. This framework does not only contain tropes of a story but also includes archetypal or stereotypical characters that appear in countless different myths, stories, and folklore tales. Vogler describes Jung's suggestion that these archetypes: "...ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race..." (Vogler 23) are a necessary tool for understanding the purpose of characters in a story. It is important to say that these characters can be doubled, tripled, or even multiplied in a story, for example in *Star Wars* both Obi-Wan and Yoda are mentors to the hero and the character of the mentor is expanded to the whole staff of Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* series. One character can also accumulate multiple roles in a story, for example, they can be the Shadow, the Rogue as well as the Mentor, if the story calls for it. Vogler even suggests that the functions may be realized by an object in the story. *Akata* has been called "the African Harry Potter", so, presumably, there are similarities between the two narratives<sup>5</sup>.

In his publication *The Writer's Journey—Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (1992), Christopher Vogler suggests that the archetypes, described by other authors, do not constitute whole characters but only a function in the narrative. This means that, firstly, one character can accumulate more than one function, and secondly, with a character's evolution their function can shift or evolve into a new function, for example, a mentor can evolve into an ally or a shadow or can be both mentor and ally right from the start. This is in line with the cumulative notion suggested above.

The archetypes the hero encounters along the way "represent possibilities for the hero, for good or ill" (Vogler 25). The hero accumulates traits of the characters they meet on their journey and learns from the experiences with other characters, which makes them a more complete person. In other narratives, the archetypes may be symbolic of representing different human qualities. Vogler adds that "...every good story reflects (...) the universal human condition..." (Vogler 26).

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 1 for further information.



Also, this thesis does not aim to list all universal or stereotypical characters that occur in the monomyth, only those relevant to this thesis.

#### **4.2.1 The hero**

The hero is central to any story. They are the person central to the problem in the story (Truby 47). In a monomyth, the hero typically develops from an unheroic character. Propp adds that “one of the family members is absent from the hero’s home” (Propp 26), usually from the older generation, and that the protagonist is often the third or youngest sibling. At the beginning of the story, the hero may appear complete, but they lack something; for example, a personal trait or something may be taken away from them (Vogler 91). As suggested above, the protagonist undergoes a thorough spiritual transformation through many trials to become a proper hero. In his publication, *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller* (2007), John Truby says that one of the hero’s characteristics is a character change, which springs from weaknesses in their character and from the struggle the character accomplishes to overcome (Truby 25).

Spiritual transformation may be visualized by changes in the physique of the hero. A new appearance may be affected directly by the “Supernatural Aid” by “a magical action of a helper” in Vladimir Propp’s view (62), so the hero may receive a new appearance after a spell, it may manifest as a change of clothes, which may be gained by deception, or the hero can build himself a beautiful palace, where they then reside (Propp 63).

The hero is comparable to Freud’s concept of ego, constraints of which they must transcend. The hero considers themselves separate from their group; that is why the hero needs to leave their family or tribe, similarly to “a child’s sense of separation from the mother” (Vogler 29). In this sense, this archetype represents the search for identity and wholeness.

The hero should be presented as a character the audience can identify with. This is reflected in their personality traits and motivations being something everyone can identify in themselves. These qualities should be universal, so that they may apply to many readers; examples include revenge, anger, despair, idealism and others.

The hero should also be active. To transform themselves spiritually, the hero needs to perform decisive actions in the story that require them to take risks or responsibility.

This makes the hero sacrifice something of value. “Sacrifice is the true mark of a hero” (Vogler 32).

#### **4.2.2 The mentor**

The mentor is traditionally a wise old man or woman in a story who helps the hero along the way and often introduces the hero to the second world of the journey. A part of the mentor’s function is “to motivate the hero to take action and commit to the adventure” (Vogler 42). Another function of the mentor is what Vogler calls “planting”: The character would present information or objects that prove important in later stages of the narrative. Currently, the mentor archetype may be realised by a young character whose traits may not be wise or capable of teaching or this character may not be identifiable in a single character but “every story calls on the energy of this archetype at some point” (Vogler 47).

The “mentor function” can be internalized. Instead of a person guiding the hero, they have an inner code they live by it may come in a form of sudden realization and change in behaviour or a form of an object, such as a book or a scroll. Commonly, the hero refers to a personality from their life that represented a mentor and now it is just a disembodied manifestation (Vogler 47).

#### **4.2.3 The ally**

The hero cannot undertake the journey alone, so he is usually accompanied by an ally. The ally function is often realised by multiple characters following the hero on their journey. The ally’s function is to help the main character to achieve their goal. The allies do not feel essential themselves, but they often are vital for the story. Though they often perform mundane tasks, their primary function is to humanize the hero: to externalize the hero’s doubts and feelings, to show conscience or even to balance out the hero’s personality trait (Vogler 71). In current literature and pop culture, these characters can even get their own smaller heroic journey as a side plot line or in the main plotline itself, such as Aragorn’s story in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Doctor Watson from *Sherlock Holmes* is a truly proverbial example of an ally. This particular realization of the ally function helps the readers to orient themselves in this fictional world (Vogler 72). The ally also may function as a support to the hero, someone who the hero trusts immensely and who is a lifelong friend of the protagonist.

#### **4.2.4 The shapeshifter**

The shapeshifter, also called the rogue character, is someone whose alliances are not clear. This character often acts as an ally at least for a part of the journey but they often have ulterior motives. The very nature of the Shapeshifter is “to be shifting and unstable” (Vogler 59). In the end, the shapeshifter may both remain on the side of the hero and help the hero to achieve the Ultimate Boon, or they may turn to the other side and betray the hero.

The shapeshifter's character resembles what Carl Jung calls animus or anima (Vogler 60). These terms refer to repressed dreams and acts we may want to do but we abstain from doing. These then manifest in the shapeshifter, who may take the form of those characters, who allow us to express this unconscious force within. “An encounter with anima or animus in dreams or fantasy is (...) an important step in psychological growth.” (Vogler 60).

Vogler describes a concept he calls the “mask of a shapeshifter” (Vogler 63). It means that even the hero may become a shapeshifter; they may adopt the function for a while to fool a foe or to get out of a dangerous situation. The shapeshifter is in itself a very flexible function, but most prototypically it can be associated with what can be called a femme fatale or an homme fatale.

The shapeshifter consequently acts as the catalyst for change. The hero or heroine after encountering the shapeshifter changes their attitude towards something, Vogler associates this often with attitude towards the opposite sex, though in general this may be related to coming to terms with “...the repressed energies that this archetype stirs up.” (Vogler 61).

#### **4.2.5 The shadow**

The shadow or also the doppelgänger is a character who mimics the hero's progress in a way. The shadow's fate could be similar to the hero's own, but it has changed to the complete opposite, or it has ended tragically and not heroically. The shadow's function may be the antagonist of the story or the enemy in the story (Vogler 65). Truby describes an antagonist, or an opponent, as a character, that to be a true opponent “... wants to prevent the hero from achieving his desire...” and “...is competing with the hero for the same goal...” (Truby 37).

The shadow may represent repressed emotions that hold power over the protagonist. These hidden or denied emotions can turn into something monstrous. The shadow is a personification of psychoses that have the potential to destroy the protagonist, so that the protagonist may be internalised in the hero or heroine (Vogler 65).

If the shadow fills the role of the primary antagonist of the story, they can make their presence known, according to Propp. The first function of this revelation is to find out information about their foe or their victim (Propp 28-29).

## **Practical part**

### **5 The fictional world of *Akata***

The heroic journey is reliant on the fictional world divided into two parts, the familiar world, and the new world, and presented in contrast. Young adult literature needs to construct something the protagonist can interact with, the Other, which the hero is abject to, which must be anchored in the fictional world. This chapter introduces the fictional world of *Akata* and relates it to young adult literature and the heroic journey.

The use of mythology for building the fictional cosmos is an important feature of urban fantasy. Okorafor builds her fictional world on Igbo mythology, but she transforms it to create a cohesive fictional world for her story to play out. She also uses the culture of Igboland to form the first, or normal, world for the heroine's journey.

Okorafor emphasizes individual idiolects of the characters as well as how different characters are clothed and what their heritage is. Almost at every chance, the character's apparel is described, to the extent that it has almost symbolic significance. In congruence with characteristics of urban fantasy, realities of the fictional world resemble the standards and the situation of contemporary Nigeria, so some signs are in pidgin English and many characters speak with their tribal language.

In the following paragraphs, individual aspects of this fictional world are described.

#### **5.1 Construction of the fictional world**

The fictional world in *Akata* is divided into three parts, all of which exist on top of each other and create layers of the fictional cosmos. Firstly, there is the Lamb world, which in its construction mimics the real present-day Nigeria and the world. "Lambs" is the Leopard people's label for non-magical people, similar to "muggles" in the *Harry Potter* series. Several Lambs fall prey to the Black Hat Otokoto, the serial killer who is central to the plot of *Akata Witch*, whose acts seem very reminiscent of the real Leopard cult killings, which occurred in Nigeria after World War II, described in chapter 3 since he collects blood of the children, he kidnaps (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 309).

A large portion of the story takes place in the Lamb world since it is the place where most of the characters live with their families. Everyday aspects of life are present; Sunny, the main protagonist, goes to school and restaurants, she spends evenings watching Nollywood movies, studying or cooking with her mother. The Lamb world is governed by mundane rules everyone is familiar with, so people need to work to sustain themselves, they experience normal human emotions and others. Okorafor suggests, that Nigeria connects the spiritual and modern, which is present in the book, for example, Sunny's mother exclaims at the end of *Akata Witch*, that they needed to move back to Nigeria because she had a feeling that "...something bad was going to happen to [Sunny] in the United States..." and that she was "... wrong (...), that something needed to happen to [Sunny] here in Nigeria." (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 342). This shows that the Lamb world is not "a spiritual wasteland", but there is a spiritual overlap between the different layers of the cosmos. Contemporary issues of Nigeria are exploited. Sunny's brother Chukwu needs to deal with a confraternity, an issue currently plaguing Nigerian universities, on occasions, the characters deal with everyday problems such as traffic, criminals threatening them, and prejudices held in present-day Nigeria.

Secondly, there is the Leopard world. The Leopard world is not described as a world per se but rather as a society or a set of societies with their own rules and traditions and places where the society meets. Such places are hidden from the Lamb world with magic. The Leopard world is inhabited by Leopard people, who drastically differ from the cults from the first part of the twentieth century<sup>6</sup>. The Leopard people are proud practitioners of magic living in all different countries across the world. Only in Western Africa they are called Leopard people; in other parts of the world, they may be called wizards, witches, sorcerers and others (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 80). *Akata* does not explore parts of the world, where Leopard People would be called Lion People or completely differently. The story suggests that even Jesus was a Leopard person and, because of his death, Leopard people lost much influence in the world, and they do not want to show their abilities because ordinary people would fear them (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 59), which is stated as a fact. Even in the case of a Leopard person marrying a Lamb, the Leopard person cannot show

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see chapter 3.

their abilities to them. Leopard people are not aggressive, but they are very proud, especially of their knowledge, which is of utmost importance to them: their leaders are called Librarians. Greed for money, Chittim—Leopard currency—and power is shunned upon to the extent that it is suggested the Black Hat Otokoto became a vile, evil person because he allowed himself to be corrupted by greed. This constitutes the largest contrast between the first two worlds. While in the Lamb world, work would lead to the acquisition of money, which could be exchanged for goods and services, in the Leopard world, the important part is to think and do the extraordinary to gain currency. When such a deed is performed, the currency falls on the ground from thin air. This aspect is contrasted even in that the value of different metals is reversed, copper being the most expensive and gold the least expensive.

A strict policy not to use juju or not to reveal Leopard people to the Lamb society exists, but the two worlds are closely intertwined. Leopard society also celebrates different festivities, such as the Zuma festival, which was thoroughly explored in the series. Leopard people have their markets, where they buy not only aids for their magic but also normal merchandise, such as ingredients for cooking. In Leopard Knocks, the main hub for Leopard people in the area, there are restaurants where Sunny and her friends have lunches and dinners like normal teenagers do. Leopard people often partake in similar activities as Lambs would; there are present Christian and Islamic groups among them, they go to wrestling and play football, they also use cars, even though they run on juju. They come from different parts of the world and speak with a clear accent, mimicked in the way their direct speech is written; some even live among Lambs (like Orлу, Chichi, and Sunny).

Thirdly, in the fictional cosmos, another world called the Wilderness exists, though it is suggested its name is actually “the spirit world” and the Wilderness is only a slang name for it (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 21). The Wilderness is the place where masquerades live. It is not explored much in *Akata Witch*, but it is further explored in *Akata Warrior*, in which Sunny is learning how to get into and back from the Wilderness and how to see it. The Wilderness is a world by itself, but also a plane, which can be seen by a higher level of perception, which Leopard people possess. To enter this world, one must die, yet Sunny

can enter it, which means that not only she is half-dead, as mentioned by other characters in the story, but also that she defies death. The Wilderness creatures, which are omnipresent in the normal world, usually look like basic insects and animals with a trait changed, such as colour or size, and often are invisible to Lambs, look differently in normal worlds and the Wilderness. The Wilderness is where all spirits, masquerades and gods live. The Wilderness is not strictly separate from the “normal” world, there are places that overlap with the Wilderness, places where the Wilderness is visible and accessible to everyone. In general, the Wilderness is on top of the “normal” world, and some characters can see both. Places where the Wilderness is visible play a large role in the second book because its climax takes place in Osis, a city that exists in both the material world and the Wilderness.

The Wilderness also represents the afterlife. It is stated in the series that after death the spirit goes to the Wilderness. Leopard people have their spirit faces, this creates a duality in their person<sup>7</sup>.

The Leopard society and the spirit world fulfil the role of the Unseen<sup>8</sup>. The Leopard society has a secret history, concealed from the primary Lamb world, and, per its rules, it requires the protagonist to conceal a part of her identity from others, as the other members of the Leopard society do the same. Leopard people deliberately make themselves the Unseen to divide themselves from the Lambs. Furthermore, Lambs cannot see the Wilderness creatures, so they are literally unseen, to the extent that Sunny’s father cannot see them even when they are sitting on his head.

Sunny’s realization of the existence of the Leopard world and the Wilderness destabilizes Sunny’s identity as well as Sunny’s perception of reality. That creates the possibility for Sunny to interact with it as if it were the Other.

Urban fantasy often layers the fantastical on top of the real or more realistic part of the world. *Akata* uses this concept very extensively. On top of the Lamb world, which is

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<sup>7</sup> Spirit faces are discussed further in chapter 5.2.3.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed description of the Unseen see chapter 2.3.



the part of the cosmos closest to the real present-day world, there is the Leopard society hidden by juju, and on top of that, there is the Wilderness. These three worlds represent three distinct spiritual levels of the fictional world to which the heroine, Sunny, may expand. Spirituality is reflected by the individual inhabitants of the worlds, Lambs having only their beliefs, Leopard people having a spirit face, and the Wilderness being literally inhabited by spirits and gods.

## **5.2 Role of Nigerian mythology in construction of the cosmos of *Akata***

As mentioned above, Nigeria and Nigerian mythology, or more precisely Igbo mythology are very important aspects of the fictional world. Both are present in the fictional world of *Akata* and they are used to create the supernatural and fantastical aspects of it. It is therefore essential to describe relevant parts of Nigerian mythology. In the previous chapter, the general features of Igbo mythology were analysed already, and the following chapters aim to describe how Okorafor transformed it for the creation of the fictional world of the books. This analysis should prove that the series is urban fantasy as well as provide terminology used in the following chapters.

### **5.2.1 Juju**

As opposed to the concept of juju in Nigerian mythology, in the fictional world of *Akata*, juju is the general name for magic. Juju is divided into several levels. Basic juju can be done by almost anyone, but there are levels of mastery reminiscent of academic degrees in the American school system: when a young Leopard person is around twelve years old, they are initiated into the society and become “Ekpiri”, after that, around the age of sixteen, they become “Mbawkwa”, which is similar to high school diploma or bachelor’s degree, afterwards you can become “Ndibu”, which is equal to a doctorate, and finally, they can become “Oku Akama”, which means that they are a true master of juju, so it is equivalent to a professorship (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 80-81). From this distinction, it is apparent that the second level, Mbawkwa, is obtainable by most, and it is even suggested that Sasha and Chichi, who are extremely fast learners, achieve it before the majority will. The other levels are rarer, Oku Akama being achieved by very few people. The book says only eight people in the whole of Nigeria achieved it (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 80-81).

Jujus can be performed with the help of juju powders and juju knives. Each Leopard person has a juju knife, and the knife chooses the person, so when Sunny is to get her knife at the Zuma festival, she is introduced to the Junkman, who lets her put her hand into a cardboard box full of juju knives until she pulls out one. Each juju powder has a different purpose, and it is made from a distinct mineral. The casting of juju is usually accompanied by flurries created in patterns with the juju knife, with which it is necessary to cut into a supernatural pocket, from which the caster pulls out the magic.

The first juju the reader encounters is when Orlu performs a ritual on himself, Chichi and Sunny, so none of them can reveal the truth about juju and Leopard people. The ritual consists of a symbol drawn in chalk on a level surface, an incantation and the three teenagers taking a juju knife and cutting in their tongues (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 33-34). Juju in the book is gritty in general. A sacrifice or something that may be considered barbaric by a European reader is frequently involved in casting juju.

In *Harry Potter*, even may have unforeseen consequences with the possibility of seriously hurting the user, though the instances of this happening are often described humorously (for example puking out slugs). These can be mostly undone or fixed. On contrary, in *Akata*, there are no fail-saves, so even a soup recipe involves the possibility of the characters dying. Facing punishment for a use of unsanctioned magic is shared in *Akata* and *Harry Potter*. Characters are often seen breaking this rule, but in *Harry Potter*, the punishment is either not delivered or it is very light, even played out as comical. In *Akata*, the punishments are corporal and harsh. Only once the punishment is forgiven, but generally, there are not many ways actions can be forgiven or solved light-heartedly<sup>9</sup>.

Nature is an important part of juju. Okorafor's characters emphasize humility towards it. Even summoning light, a spell mentioned in other urban fantasy novels, for example, *Harry Potter*, is considered simple, here it is much more complicated, as it consists of begging a firefly to provide this service.

Okorafor did not change the basics of juju very much. Based on various interviews and her TED talks, she wrote her concept of juju so the magic would reflect

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<sup>9</sup> Both punishments and transgressions are described in other chapters, namely, 6.5, 7.2.1 and 7.2.2.

the African standpoint and not conform to any European or American idea of what magic is supposed to be. Because of that, the magic in this book series may seem to a European reader unusual or not traditional, but we must consider the difference in culture between for example *Harry Potter* and its Britishness and the difference of culture between it and *Akata*. Juju, therefore, reflects the culture in which the narrative was generated.

### **5.2.2 Powers of Leopard people**

Magic in the book series in question does not comprise only of juju and the aids, juju knives and juju powders. In addition to these, each Leopard person has their own special powers. These powers are determined by flaws in their character, physical traits and deformities. This is very well presented on Sunny and Orlu.

Sunny suffers from albinism; this means she has to walk around with an umbrella in order not to get burned by the sun. Because of that, the number of activities she can do during the day is limited, and she is called a ghost girl by other Lamb characters. She finds out that this relates to her own ability—invisibility. By exploring her power, she is gradually less vulnerable to the sun, though she still carries her umbrella as a cover, and she becomes more confident in herself. Invisibility in *Akata* means that Sunny can turn herself into mist. She also can go to the Wilderness, and she has friends there thanks to her spirit face Anyanwu. Because of Anyanwu, she has a vision of the end of the world, the first clue she is not a mere Lamb, which is congruent with her having a grand destiny as described by Campbell. This is very important for her personality since when she plays football, she is very fast, she is quiet, and she has respect for various creatures of the Wilderness.

Orlu was diagnosed with dyslexia very early in his life, he could not make out anything while reading. It turned out that his power is to undo things and mistakes which is related to his special need in education, which innately “undoes” language. He uses it to undo juju, but it also helps him to repair old electronics, for example, radios, and, in the climax of *Akata Witch*, he manages to use his power to undo death. This power is formative of his character—he is very careful, humble and he likes rules, but in the end, can undo even death.

Other powers linked to deformities and physical abnormalities are presented, for example, Sugar Cream, who suffers from severe scoliosis, can turn into a snake, an old blind woman, Abok (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 307), has the power to see the future. Chichi's and Sasha's power is the same—a photographic memory—which means that most juju they read they can perform, which makes them more adept as well as careless with juju, resulting in Orlu undoing many of their failed attempts.

The story would not work without the powers of the individual characters, but rather than all characters having the same powers, each character's traits are underlined and enhanced by these powers as well as complemented by them. Since the approach to physical appearance and learning disabilities is widely different in the present-day society and the Leopard society, the contrast of the two worlds may be used either to emphasise the difference or to show that Sunny belongs to the Leopard world.

The concept of the powers in the world is showing the readers how one's flaws can be one's strengths instead. The fact that the powers stem from characters' flaws and disabilities may serve as a transcendent metaphor for self-acceptance, something that all teenagers need to go through.

### **5.2.3 Reincarnation and Spirit Faces**

Each Leopard person has a spirit face. Spirit Faces in *Akata* resemble tribal masks and they represent a second personality for Leopard People, which supposedly provides them with their access to magic, or juju, and their powers. Spirit faces are spirits from the spirit world, or the Wilderness, a discarnate realm, where spirits and masquerades live<sup>10</sup>.

Spirit faces reflect the personality of each leopard person and are tied to their powers described in the previous chapter. Sunny's spirit face resembles the sun, and her spirit face name is literally the name of the Igbo Sun deity<sup>11</sup>, which is ironic due to her vulnerability to the sun. Whenever it is mentioned that Sunny is powerful, the power is associated with

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<sup>10</sup> This is described in greater detail in chapter 5.1.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about Anyanwu, see chapter 3.

her spirit face<sup>12</sup>. Sasha is very cocky and defiant, and his spirit face resembles a parrot. Further instances of spirit faces reflecting the personality, or the power of a character can be found in different parts of the narrative.

Multiple Leopard people can get the same spirit face, they can also get a spirit face a previous member of their family had. This correlates to the concept of reincarnation in Igbo mythology<sup>13</sup>. The spirit faces have their significance in the spirit world, Chichi's is royalty, Sunny's has a strong connection to the sun and knows other spirits in the spirit world, so that she can organize resistance against Ekwensu.

If a Leopard person gets detached from their spirit face, or doubled, they die. Sunny gets doubled, but instead of dying, she becomes something more. Instead of her being disconnected, both Sunny and Anynawu can move freely and can connect whenever necessary but disconnect and exist on their own if needed. Sunny realizes that her power does not come from her spirit face but from her. This makes Sunny an exceptional heroine, it gives her an exceptional power no one else has, a typical trope of both the heroic journey and young adult literature.

#### **5.2.4 Masquerades**

Masquerades are a part of the tradition in Igboland, as well as other parts of Nigeria. Lambs consider masquerades as they are in the real world: people in a mask, who perform dances during celebratory occasions. They have superstitions surrounding them and they are used in the same fashion as they are being used<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast to that, for Leopard people masquerades are spirits, who live in the Wilderness, a reality parallel to ours, which occasionally leaks to ours. Masquerades wear masks and rules which apply to real masquerades apply here: if one takes the mask of a masquerade off, it dies. Masquerades resemble real masquerades, so they usually have a mask, and

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<sup>12</sup> This is important to the concept of hero in the heroic journey and young adult literature, for more information see chapters 2.4, 4.1.1, and 7.1.1.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> For further details, see chapter 3.

their bodies are covered with cloth, their body may resemble straw or may be composed of insects. When they appear, rhythmic music starts to play, the stronger the masquerade, the stronger the music. When Ekwensu appears for the first time, her movements are described almost like dancing accompanied by music (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 323-325). Masquerades must be summoned by juju, or they may also be summoned by a sacrifice (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 5).

Other spirits, gods, and even spirit faces resemble traditional masquerades. Masquerades were originally representations of ancestral spirits, including gods. Okorafor wanted to make a clearer separation between good and evil fantastic creatures, so she differed between masquerades and spirits, the former being evil and the latter being good. Masquerades do not fulfil the function of law enforcement, and though not all masquerades are evil, many that are encountered in the books are.

### **5.2.5 Ekwensu and Chukwu**

Ekwensu was originally a benevolent deity, which, with the rise of Christianity, became synonymous with the devil. Okorafor borrows this deity to create the antagonist of the *Akata* books. She uses the way Ekwensu is perceived by Nigerian society today, but she changes the attributes of this god.

Firstly, Okorafor made this god female, probably to further the contrast between Chukwu, the supreme deity, and Ekwensu. Ekwensu is also not a goddess, but a masquerade, the queen of masquerades. This creates consistency in the fictional world of *Akata* since masquerades are and can be evil, but gods and deities cannot. It is common for young adult books as well as fantasy books to have a clear distinction between good and evil, so it is clear what is evil and what is good, and this duality—a male god called Chukwu versus a female evil masquerade Ekwensu—accentuates this phenomenon<sup>15</sup>.

In the second book, Chukwu appears in person after Sunny defeats Ekwensu for the second time. He is described to be as large as an elephant, but despite being a god, he shares features with masquerades: His body is described to be made from hay and other natural

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<sup>15</sup> For further details, see chapter 2.2.1.

materials, as a masquerade would have, and he wears a mask<sup>16</sup> (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 438). Furthermore, he is not titled with “he” but with “it”. This is revealed only at the end of the book, but Lambs commonly title Chukwu “he”. When Chukwu is called “God”, it is always used with capital G since Chukwu is the supreme god.

### **5.2.6 Anyanwu**

Anyanwu is the goddess of the sun in Nigerian mythology. In *Akata*, Anyanwu is Sunny’s spirit face, the Wilderness part of her. It is suggested that Anyanwu existed before Sunny and that she will exist after Sunny dies and that she is very old. In congruence with Igbo belief in reincarnation, Anyanwu was the spirit face of one of her ancestors.

Sunny and Anyanwu are bound in a very poetic way by their names: the “Lady of the Sun”, or “Anyanwu”, and “Sunny”, the name of the protagonist, which is derived from the word “sun”. The adjective “sunny” means cheerful and optimistic, though at the same time exposed to the sun, which is impossible for Sunny most of the time because of her albinism. This is contrasting to her condition, but it also externalizes her character development, as her vulnerability to the sun disappears by her becoming a Leopard person and at the same time, she becomes more confident in both Leopard and Lamb worlds. Anyanwu represents spiritual enlightenment, and thus Sunny is unlike the rest of her Lamb family. She is familiar with the ways of Leopard people, but she is different to them as she can travel to the Wilderness<sup>17</sup>.

### **5.2.7 Nsibidi**

There is a difference between the real ideographic script and its counterpart in *Akata*. In the books, Nsibidi is a script that is described to be moving on the pages. It is very hard to read, and it cannot be taught. When one reads it, they find themselves inside the text, which allows them to experience what the producer intended for them to see. After reading Nsibidi, the reader feels very exhausted and has a terrible headache.

There are Nsibidi texts throughout *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior*, more prominent in the latter. The first text Sunny encounters is Sugar Cream’s autobiography, explaining

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<sup>16</sup> For more details on Chukwu, see chapter 3.

<sup>17</sup> More information about spirit faces, in general, is in chapter 5.2.3.

her origin and where she grew up. The text serves to understand Sugar Cream's character and to introduce the places where the Wilderness and the material world overlap. The second text is a letter from Sunny's grandmother, which guides Sunny to defeat Ekwensu in the finale of the second book.

Nsibidi is important to the story of *Akata*, especially the letter by Sunny's grandmother. It moves the story forward, and since it is spiritual as a concept, it is extremely important for Sunny's character development.



## 6 *Akata* as a book series for young adults

*Akata* is a book series for young adults, so many aspects of young adult literature would be logically present in the book series. The following chapters apply different aspects of this group of literature based on the features described in chapter 2 of this thesis and relate them to the plot of the two books discussed. Particular emphasis is put on the heroine's—Sunny's—development, since it is a crucial feature of young adult narratives.

### 6.1 Cultural displacement in *Akata*

Cultural displacement can, according to McCallum, provide an Other, the protagonist needs to become subject to by exploiting the unfamiliarity of the new environment they find themselves in, which results in gaining identity<sup>18</sup>. Both these events represent cultural and social displacement, enforcing her feeling like an outsider in two separate environments—Nigeria and the Leopard society. The new environment leads to Sunny needing to adapt to her new circumstances—values of both Leopard society and present-day Nigeria. Any selfhood Sunny gained in America was lost by moving to Nigeria, and then she lost again when she found the new truth about herself. Okorafor said in an interview that because of Sunny dealing with her cultural issues, her world expands in the process as it is suddenly more (Okorafor, *Hugo Nominee Nnedi Okorafor: 'I Love Stories — And So I Write Them'*).

In the narrative of *Akata Witch*, Sunny is confronted with both norms of Nigeria and Leopard people. The following paragraphs describe Sunny's struggle with these norms and its enrichment for the character of Sunny.

Sunny is never truly depicted as struggling with the social norms of Nigeria, or with their interpretation, at least not in the literal sense. She is immediately labelled an *Akata* and is at least startled when the teacher asks her to punish her classmates for submitting inadequate homework corporally. Still, it is never depicted as being alien to her. She struggles physically in Nigeria because of the Nigerian sun and her albinism.

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<sup>18</sup> The possibilities of cultural displacement for construction of identity are described in more detail in chapter 2.1.

She carries an umbrella everywhere, and she needs to protect her eyes from the sun. When the sun stops hurting her, she symbolically accepts her surroundings, which are hostile to her, in that she finds out that her physical weakness is her strength. The struggle caused by albinism is the most significant indication of her cultural displacement.

Sunny is then initiated into the Leopard society. Leopard society constitutes a new set of values, seemingly opposite to Lamb norms. Sunny's Leopard-dom fits the definition of the Other provided by McCallum, which Sunny needs to internalise as a part of herself, her subject. This subjectivity begins with the suggestion that Sunny's most visible abnormality—her albinism—is praised in the Leopard society. Every Leopard person has their spirit face, even Sunny does, but Sunny is detached from her spirit face (doubled) in the second instalment of the series, which makes her even more unique in the Leopard society. It is suggested that Sunny's abilities as well as her destiny are extraordinary. Sunny and her friends were chosen to carry out these critical and hazardous tasks, so that she may be labelled “the chosen one”.

The only obvious tie Sunny feels towards her Leopard-dom is her grandmother, who died at the hand of the Blackhat Otokoto, so Sunny is motivated to defeat him to revenge her grandmother's murder. Sunny's grandmother is a plot device in the second instalment, where she communicates through a magical language called Nsibidi and shows Sunny what to do<sup>19</sup>.

Sunny is punished twice in the books: once for revealing her spirit face to a Lamb to frighten her, and once for revealing herself to a confraternity member and killing him. Her first offence constituted her getting her mentor later because Sunny's transgressions against Leopard rules made Sugar Cream not to trust her; her second offence constituted her spending three days in a cellar with a vengeful djinn. These transgressions may have resulted from Sunny's lack of knowledge about all the rules and her ignoring them to achieve her own goals. From being punished for breaking the rules, Sunny learns

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<sup>19</sup> For further details, see chapters 5.2.7. and 3.

the value of these rules from the punishments, and it puts her in a position to interpret the importance of their existence<sup>20</sup>.

It seems that Leopard people created their values opposite to Lamb values, so while Lambs cherish material possessions and money, Leopard people put knowledge above all else, even to the obtainment of their currency<sup>21</sup>. All these norms are new and alien to Sunny when she encounters them for the first time; all the punishments and lessons provided by different members of the Leopard society show her the norms, which she needs to interpret and include into her system of beliefs.

This cultural displacement enforces Sunny's stance as an outsider, and despite it being advantageous for the formation of identity and for Sunny, who, as a result of her cultural displacement, loses some of her weaknesses, Sunny does not feel that way at the beginning. Still, she adapts very soon to the new rules, and in the second instalment of the series, she feels like a part of the Leopard society. At the climax of the second novel, when Sunny uses a superstition, the Lambs made up to defeat a Leopard villain, shows that Sunny did not just blindly accept rules and norms as presented to her but that she found a way to merge and adapt the rules she encountered so they would fit her identity, that is part Lamb and part Leopard, or shortly Sunny became a subject towards this Other.

## **6.2 Typical tropes of young adult literature in *Akata***

*Akata*, in its narrative, contains tropes generic to young adult fantasy, which emphasises their universality throughout the world.

Sunny is a teenage protagonist who feels like an outsider. It later turns out that she is the “chosen one”, possessing an extraordinary power represented by her spirit face Anyanwu, who, turns out, is an ancient and powerful spirit from the spirit world. Sunny’s power shows itself very suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere at the end of *Akata Witch* when she banishes Ekwensu. Though the book acknowledges that Sunny is special because of her powers, it abstains from labelling her “the chosen one”. She is, however, part of

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<sup>20</sup> McCallum puts emphasis on punishment, for more details see chapter 2.2.

<sup>21</sup> For further details, see chapter 5 and its subchapters.

the Oha coven, a group formed by the Obi library whose purpose is to bring in the Blackhat Otokoto (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 304). The destiny, or the quest to be fulfilled, is dilated among the four main characters, but the narrative focuses only on what Sunny can see, feel, and sense. This focus makes her the protagonist of the series.

An omniscient impersonal narrator tells the story of the series, but Okorafor centres the narration around Sunny. The reader is shown only the events during which Sunny is present, with the only exception of Sunny's brother Chukwu describing his experience with confraternity (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 104-120), only Sunny's mind, such as her emotions and motivations, is described directly and the other events in the story are described as perceived by Sunny. Sunny notices Chichi's romantic entanglements in the story only from interactions with the two men Chichi had the relations with, such as when they are departing for Lagos, Chichi and Sasha arrive together (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 267), and Sunny's brother Chukwu says about her "...That's what I like about Chichi. Well, and because na dey beautiful, o." (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 256), but describes how and what she can see, as well as her attitude towards her behaviour. Similarly, in the final battle of *Akata Warrior*, the behaviour and acts of heroism performed by others are described to Sunny by others. These examples show that the series is centred around Sunny and not anyone else; thus, the "protagonist-centric" trope is present.

"Typical teenage topics"<sup>22</sup> are present in the story, and Sunny may be seen doing what normal teenagers do. Dealing with the duality of Sunny's life—her Leopard-dom and her being a Lamb—comes to play in various parts of it. The conflict of these two main attributes of hers is sometimes a driving force in the book.

The antagonist of the story is the "evil overlord" Ekwensu. Her goal is to destroy the world for no apparent reason. She has minions and allies that attack the protagonist and her friends, and some of them are minor villains of the story, for example, the lake beast or the Blackhat Otokoto. Sunny's main quest is to defeat her, which she does.

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<sup>22</sup> For further details, see chapter 2.2.1.

There is no “division into factions” according to a personality trait, but though not explicitly expressed, there are different factions of Leopard people differently equipped and named given by their geographical location. Okorafor also introduces a hierarchy similar to academic titles, which may be acquired after completing an exam, which gives the particular person access to more juju spells and resources for casting them, which may be considered a faction in the context of the fictional world.

### **6.3 Aspects of teenage life in *Akata***

Despite the narrative being representative of the urban fantasy genre, the main characters are still teenagers who have teenage struggles. This particular aspect is considered one of the tropes of young adult literature; this chapter analyses it in more detail.

Sunny is a teenager and an outsider raised in the USA, which resulted in her being labelled *Akata*<sup>23</sup> and her being albino leads to her being bullied in school. She then finds out that she is a Leopard person, more precisely a free agent, a person without Leopard ancestry who possesses powers and other traits of a Leopard person, which means that not only is she an outsider in “normal” or Lamb world but also the Leopard world.

Sunny needs to deal with everyday problems, such as studying, school, and her being bullied. Sunny loves to play football, which she calls soccer due to her upbringing in America<sup>24</sup> Football is an important part of Sunny’s character, so a number of significant plot points happen while she is playing football<sup>25</sup>. In some of these situations, she uses her Leopard side to play better, which leads to her learning the rules and norms of the Leopard society. At the same time, she needs to conceal her adventures from her Lamb family, which she does using juju and lying, as she needs to create a mirage for her parents to believe.

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<sup>23</sup> For further details, see chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> The importance of idiolects in *Akata* is described in chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> These plot points are described in chapter 7.

The confrontation of her activities leads to the Leopard aspects and the Lamb aspects of her life clashing. Sunny has two older brothers. It is emphasised on multiple occasions that her parents are worried about her, while they are not worried about her brothers because of her gender. It is revealed that her parents do not understand her, which is caused by her being a girl and a Leopard person having Anyanwu as her spirit face.

As suggested above, Sunny is bullied in the Lamb school. In *Akata Witch*, she has numerous run-ins with a larger girl, who assaults Sunny verbally and physically. She solves this problem by revealing her spirit face, for which she is punished.

Romance is a normal part of growing up and adolescence, and it is present in the books in two forms. Sunny and Orlu share a reluctant relationship, which is suggested to be platonic until the end of *Akata Warrior*. This romance is contrasted with a lustful romantic triangle centred around Chichi, who dates Sasha and Sunny's older brother, Chukwu, simultaneously, which leads to confrontations between the two boys throughout the story. This love triangle is not based on a contrast between the two boys, as in many ways the two are alike, but more on Chichi's recklessness, which is emphasised as her character trait.

At the beginning of *Akata Warrior*, Sunny finds her physique changing. She starts to wear glasses and notices herself to be more muscular. This may be considered a part of the regular process of growing up, as physical changes are a part of adolescence. Her glasses are a manifestation of her albinism, showing the natural progression of her condition.

Lastly, there are many instances of the four central characters behaving like ordinary teenagers. For example, in the episodes when the four main characters eat in a restaurant or talk about regular topics teenagers are concerned with. They take part in common and ordinary events, such as collecting firebugs for one of their teachers or cooking soup as a part of Sunny's lessons with her mentor, Sugar Cream. Sunny contemplates her future profession (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 29) and her role in society, taking into account her gender and her Leopard-dom. When she is asked about her career at school, she is startled, so she says that she does not know.

These aspects are present in the story, especially as it anchors the narrative in reality. The scenes often contribute to the character development and show the relationships and their progression between Sunny and the other characters.

#### 6.4 Leopard-dom as the Other

The concept of the Other is fundamental in the construction of subjectivity and thereby in the construction of identity, which is the primary motif of young adult literature. To achieve identity, a person needs to become a subject against the Other<sup>26</sup>. This chapter covers the Other and analyses the most important one of them—Sunny’s Leopard-dom.

Sunny is a Leopard person, which she finds out at the beginning of *Akata Witch*. Her Leopard-dom represents who she is, but she needs to deal with the realisation of it. Seemingly, Leopard people represent something more than being mature by standards of reality<sup>27</sup>. The only relative, who was also a Leopard person, Sunny’s grandmother, died before the plot of *Akata*, but she is still involved indirectly. McCallum and Coats suggest that the identity can be seen only from the position of the Other, which is demonstrated by Sunny knowing she is a Leopard person when it is revealed to her, but the extent of what it means is yet unknown to her, and she needs to explore it to become a subject to her Leopard-dom. Leopard-dom may be divided into multiple minor Others that Sunny needs to deal with. The first one is Anyanwu, her spirit face, the second one is the norms and rules of the Leopard society, and the third one is her identity as a Leopard person, which is partially intertwined with the former two aspects.

Anyanwu<sup>28</sup> constitutes the first Other Sunny needs to deal with. In *Akata Witch*, it seems that Sunny and Anyanwu must become one since Sunny believes that the power, she possesses comes from her spirit face and not from her, so in unity with Anyanwu, Sunny would become subject. In *Akata Warrior*, Sunny gets doubled<sup>29</sup>. This means that

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<sup>26</sup> For more details see chapter 2.2.

<sup>27</sup> For more details on the Leopard society see chapters 5.1 and 5.2.2.

<sup>28</sup> The relationship Sunny and Anyanwu have is partially described in chapter 5.1.6.

<sup>29</sup> What it means to be “doubled” can be found in chapter 5.2.3.

Sunny and Anyanwu, despite them belonging together, are still separate beings; therefore, Sunny becomes subject to Anyanwu. This allows her to explore her own identity as opposed to having Anyanwu as a second identity inside her. Sunny being her own person also means that Sunny is a subject in general within the fictional cosmos, and she needs to make her own choices, not relying on Anyanwu, further extending her uniqueness and subjectivity.

As stated, Sunny needs to become subject to Leopard norms. The exploration of her subjectivity is contrasted in *Akata Witch* and *Akata Warrior*, since in *Akata Witch*, Sunny abides by the rules, and though she can make her own choices, they are usually labelled as breaking the rules. In *Akata Warrior*, Sunny's agency in her choices increases. In the episode, when she punishes her brother's tormentors, she chooses and has full agency in killing their leader. Then, despite her being guided on her quest to Osi to defeat Ekwensu by her grandmother through the letter in Nsibidi, Sunny chooses her way to defeat Ekwensu, unlike in the first book, where Sunny banishes her by conjuring an unexpected power<sup>30</sup>. This does not mean that the Leopard-dom developed fully in the first book, and in the second book, Sunny is a fully formed adult already; there is just a difference in Sunny dealing with the Other. In the first one, Sunny tries to find a way to incorporate the rules of the Leopard society into her codex of values and morals; in the following book, Sunny is fully aware of these rules, and she tries to find a way to construct individuality within the Leopard society.

Lastly, Sunny explores her own identity as a Leopard person. Sunny's physique develops throughout the series and is linked to her Leopard-dom. Leopard-dom rendered her disadvantage in the form of albinism relatively harmless over time, and it turned it into a strength; this shows her increasing sense of belonging to this group: the less she is worried about the sun and other parts of her albinism, the more she feels confident and as she belongs.

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<sup>30</sup> This particular phenomenon sprouts from tropes of young adult fantasy literature, which are discussed in chapters 2.4 and 6.2.



Sunny's grandmother is another element that binds Sunny to the Leopard society. Her memory and existence reveal to Sunny that her and Chichi's families are closer than it appears since Chichi is a princess of Nimm and Sunny is a warrior of her tribe. This creates a part of the subject that Sunny is to become since it is a link that ties her to the Leopard society, therefore, helps her to become subject to it.

Sunny's Leopard-dom comes with the duty to protect the world from Ekwensu through membership in the Oha coven. This shows the acceptance of at least partial responsibility concerning this Other, meaning that she transforms to subject to this Other as well as within it.

Finally, there are multiple other Others Sunny needs to deal with in the story, but not all of these Others are comparable to Sunny's Leopard-dom. One of these Others is, for example, her family: expectations of her parents and her relationship with her brothers. Her social role is exploited, notably at the Zuma festival.

## **6.5 Sunny, the abject hero**

Sunny needs to establish boundaries to become a subject. In some situations, she needs to become abject towards the Other, resulting in her creating her individuality. In the beginning, Sunny is abject socially due to her physicality, and she is also abject to the sun, which burns her skin. It almost seems that Sunny is abject by everything in her life, emphasised by her being called *Akata*. This abjection makes her an outsider and puts her in a genuinely undesirable position.

Then Sunny becomes a Leopard person. Leopard-dom, in general, may be considered a superego Sunny is governed by which Sunny is abject to in the beginning. This is further exaggerated by Sunny being a free agent, which makes her socially abject in the Leopard society, but eventually, her physical flaw becomes a strength.

Sunny is also abject to the norms and rules of the Leopard society, for which she is punished. She breaks the rules by mistake, or that she feels righteous breaking them. The final episode of *Akata Warrior* is an example of Sunny breaking the rules, but she is ultimately not punished since her heroism transcended the severity of her crime. This shows that Sunny internalizes the values of the Leopard society.

Sunny is abject socially because of her gender. In general, she is treated differently than her brothers by her parents; for example, they do not allow her the same amount of freedom as they do to her brothers because they fear for her safety. When her uncle is visiting, she is tasked with serving them a kola nut. There are cases when she is underestimated for being a girl. It is not Sunny that is necessarily abject, but her power and skills that are what is. Sunny does not manage to get rid of this particular abjection since it seems that the instances when Sunny is underestimated are woven into the narrative of both books<sup>31</sup>. This stems from the traditional norms of Nigeria, and it may be used to enhance the realism of the fictional cosmos<sup>32</sup>.

The most crucial part of Sunny's abjection is her becoming doubled<sup>33</sup>. In this case, it seems at first that Sunny has been abject by Anynawu, but when her situation becomes more apparent, she is partially abject to the Leopard society and everyone else, maybe even to life itself since she is different from everyone else. This makes her truly a subject within the universe.

In general, in *Akata Witch*, Sunny is abject in both Lamb and Leopard society, but by learning the ways of Leopard society, she manages to establish boundaries both in the Leopard and the Lamb world, thereby getting rid of this abjection. In *Akata Warrior*, Sunny can transcend the Leopard norms and become more than an average Leopard person because of her being doubled, meaning that she is able to exceed the rules and norms of the abject and become more. The abjection in the Leopard society is analogous to the concept of the Other. Sunny being abject provides another vantage point for the development of her individuality.

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<sup>31</sup> See typical tropes of young adult literature described in chapter 6.2.

<sup>32</sup> For more details see chapter 5.

<sup>33</sup> For the explanation of what it means to get doubled, see chapter 5.2.3.

## **7 The heroic journey in *Akata***

To achieve the correlation between the heroic journey and the young adult literature, exemplified in Okorafor's works, it is necessary to describe the plot and the fictional world of *Akata* from the standpoint of the heroic journey. Firstly, it is necessary to introduce individual characters and the functions they fulfil, emphasising the development of the protagonist of the books—Sunny—as well as other characters, to which the following parts may refer. Then, a thorough analysis of the plot follows with references to the publications introduced in chapter 4. In the last sub-chapter, the duality of the fictional cosmos is explored.

### **7.1 Realizations of stereotypical characters in *Akata***

*Akata* is full of archetypal characters, as proposed by Campbell. Such characters are extremely recognizable for their typical behaviour and sometimes even characteristic appearance in a narrative. Vogler's perception of the characters, characters being realizations of functions, are applied to the narrative, and their allocation to different characters within the book series analysed in this thesis and their deviations from the traditional realizations in folklore and pop culture.

#### **7.1.1 Sunny the hero**

Despite being a Nigerian, Sunny was born in the United States, making her feel slightly foreign to Nigeria, as her first language is English. Furthermore, she sticks out among the predominantly black population of Nigeria due to her albinism. Her origin justifies some to call her *Akata*, which translates to a bush animal, and it is a slur used to label people who are foreign to Nigeria, while her albinism renders her a ghost girl according to an Igbo superstition. Hence, Sunny feels foreign and strange in a place she does not know, though it is a part of her heritage, and she has only one friend at school, Orlu, who plays a more significant role in the book series.

When we meet Sunny, she is not heroic: Sunny's teacher decided that Sunny should punish her classmates by hitting them on their hands. Sunny refuses to do so, so the teacher carries out the punishment herself. If Sunny did punish her classmates, the punishment would be lighter. This results in her classmates receiving a fate much worse, and therefore,

they bully her for it. Sunny is immensely vulnerable to sunburn in the extremely sunny Nigerian weather, so she needs to carry a large umbrella with her everywhere. This is precisely how Campbell and Vogler describe the hero at the beginning of their narrative frameworks<sup>34</sup>.

Furthermore, Sunny is the youngest out of three siblings, and Sunny's brothers are both stronger, bigger, and more confident than her, making her the most unlikely to be a hero out of the three, as Propp suggests in his framework (Propp 49). Furthermore, Sunny's albinism shows there is a lack of safety in her life, resulting in her lack of confidence. This may actually be the reason why she embarks on the quest of self-discovery.

Though Sunny is an unexpected hero, she never refuses her quest outright, only when she thinks she has lost her power<sup>35</sup>. This relates to her sense of duty to the Leopard community and her family, and the responsibility assigned to her, which she accepts with doubt, but without hesitation. Often, she does not have the opportunity to do so, which contradicts the frameworks used, which suggest that the hero should refuse the Call of Adventure (Vogler 99). Obstruction, which according to Propp, may take the form of a relative forbidding it (Propp 38-40), appears in the second book, when Sunny's brother Chukwu tries to stop her from leaving to Osi to finish her quest (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 369) and in various instances, when she is forbidden to leave the house, for example, to study juju. The absence of refusal may be caused by the culture the novels were written in.

Sunny goes through spiritual development, acquiring confidence in her Leopard skills and her heroism, but she also undergoes physical changes. In the second book in the series, Sunny is suggested to grow physically; she becomes taller and more muscular<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, she starts to wear glasses, which is a sign of her deteriorating eyesight due

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<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, it is a very similar description of a prototypical hero in the young adult literature, see chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>35</sup> Refusal of the Call of Adventure is analysed in subsequent chapter 7.2 and its subchapters.

<sup>36</sup> For references see chapter 6.4.

to her albinism, but also wearing glasses is often associated with intelligence. This should account for the gradual acquiring of balance between the spiritual and material, which Campbell suggests is the ultimate goal of the hero's journey (212). Since these changes are described at the beginning of *Akata Warrior*, it shows that Sunny indeed has changed, thereby learning from her previous experiences, and she is prepared to start a new adventure.

Campbell suggests that the hero would conquer death<sup>37</sup>; Sunny is already considered a ghost because of her albinism<sup>38</sup>, which would mean that she did so even before the plot of the book series. However, in the book series, however, Sunny literally meets death or a personification of it, or as it is labelled in the book series, him (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 388). He tells her rather explicitly that she defies his powers, as she can enter and leave the Wilderness, unlike others. This Sunny's ability is revealed in *Akata Warrior* though it is alluded to in the previous instalment.

### **7.1.2 Allies and mentors**

*Akata*, as an urban fantasy, uniquely connects the character function of an ally and a mentor. The primary function of an ally is to help, and the primary function of a mentor is to guide (Vogler 39, 71). Being a free agent, Sunny does not know anything about the world, while all her peers know the basics at least. Okorafor makes the book series more accessible to European and American readers by introducing Sasha, who is from a foreign country, so everyone must explain the basics to him. The ally and mentor functions are primarily fulfilled by Chichi and Orlu, who spend a lot of time explaining trivia about the Leopard society to Sunny and Sasha.

The ally and mentor functions are not attributed together to every character, so Sugar Cream, Anatov and other characters are purely mentors and not allies. This feature also transforms with Sunny becoming more knowledgeable about the world, so allies who

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter 4.1.2 and 4.2.1.

<sup>38</sup> This is stemming from Nigerian superstition and shows the importance of setting furthermore. For more information on the setting see chapter 5.

were previously also mentors turn into regular allies, aiding Sunny along the way, so Sasha in *Akata Warrior* embodies only the latter function and not the former.

What is strikingly different about mentors in *Akata* from their stereotypical realisation is the mentors' appearance (Vogler 39). Mentors in *Akata* are usually described as tall, middle-aged and quite able-bodied; for example, Anatov is described as "...the tallest man [Sunny] had ever seen (...) He was light-skinned with short brown bushy dreadlocks and a small gold ring in his left nostril..." (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 47). This is nearly in opposition to the traditional physical appearance of mentors (Vogler 39); they still fulfil the function of a guide not only to the protagonist but also to other characters in the story. A mentor teaches the character and guides them on the journey. Though the characters are present in the story, their appearances are way scarcer than that of allies, and, partially, this function is fulfilled by the magical script called Nsibidi <sup>39</sup>. There are books and other various texts in the story of *Akata* which fulfil this function, namely the letter Sunny gets from her grandmother and the book written on Nsibidi by Sugar Cream.

### **7.1.3 The Shapeshifter**

No character in the story may be labelled a pure or clear shapeshifter, a character that would make the reader question their loyalties, but there are instances when characters act similarly (Vogler 59). Firstly, there is the Blackhat Otokoto, about whom it is revealed that he initially was on the side of good but turned evil because of his greed. This is not a pure example of a shapeshifter since this is not exploited in the books but only explained by other characters as a part of the past and origin story.

Instances, which may be considered as fulfilling the shapeshifter function, may be observed in Chichi's behaviour, which would hint that her alliances are not to one side only. In the first book, Chichi recklessly summons a masquerade during the festival, and Orlu must undo her foolish acts. In *Akata Warrior*, Chichi dates both Sasha and Chukwu simultaneously, which makes her dangerous to the existence of the Oha coven.

The best example of this particular character is Sasha. When Sasha is introduced, the first fact communicated about him is that he was sent to Nigeria to punish his reckless

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<sup>39</sup> For more details on the historical and mythological origins of the Nsibidi script see chapter 3.

behaviour. Sasha lives with Orlu, who complains about being forced into undoing Sasha's reckless juju. Sasha is depicted both by direct characteristics and by how he acts as a reckless and aggressive character, contrasted to Sunny and Orlu, who are conscientious and cautious people. Despite that, Sasha genuinely cares about people who are important to him, for example, when he signed up Sunny for the football match or when he saves Chichi from a masquerade in Osisi.

Sasha and Chichi should not be called a shapeshifter; they fulfil the function of an ally. Both put on what Vogler calls the "mask of a shapeshifter" (63); while they behave like a shapeshifter occasionally, their loyalties are evident throughout the majority of the story.

The nonexistence of complete fulfilment of the rogue archetype may be attributed to the genre of young adult literature since it may be a ploy for Sunny to have a comfortable environment, which may provide the opportunity for her spiritual improvement rather than for questioning someone's loyalty. It may as well sprout from the culture in which the text was generated.

#### **7.1.4 The shadow**

There is no complete realization of a shadow character in the series since there is no character whose story arc would fully match Sunny's, though several characters partially embody this particular function (Vogler 65-68). Firstly, this function may be attributed to Anyanwu and, secondly and more importantly, to the Black Hat Otokoto.

Anyanwu may be considered a part shadow: she is the second part of Sunny's character, who shares a part of Sunny's fate and characteristics, yet her story is different and contrasting to Sunny's since she is an old character spiritually bound to a teenager. Anyanwu is on the journey with Sunny, and she is also present in all essential parts of the story. Anyanwu may provide a reflection to Sunny, but she does not necessarily show Sunny her errors directly. Anyanwu proves to be an ally of Sunny's. It is suggested that Anyanwu lived through something similar in the past, but whether she succeeded or not is not said.

A better example is the Black Hat Otokoto. He is partially American, like Sunny, and he was a free agent, but he was swayed by greed and Ekwensu, so he became an evil character. He was an apprentice of Sunny's grandmother, as Sunny partially is through

Nsibidi. He is an underling of Ekwensu, and he is actively trying to summon her<sup>40</sup>. Unlike Anyanwu, the Black Hat Otokoto's story matches Sunny's partially with a negative ending. It is not completely explained why he does what he does except for being corrupted with greed; nevertheless, he seems like the most complete realisation of the shadow character.

As the shadow should provide a mirror for the character, it could be argued that its function may be partially replaced by abjection<sup>41</sup>. Abjection in *Akata* is primarily represented by the rules of the Leopard world, which Sunny needs to include in her codex to realize her own identity.

## 7.2 Sunny's heroic journey

### 7.2.1 *Akata Witch*

At the beginning of the book, we meet Sunny as an unassuming girl who lives an ordinary life in Igboland. The reader is also told that Sunny saw a vision of something she believes is the future, which may mean the end of the world. This alludes to what Campbell attributes to the hero as a destiny the hero must fulfil. Sunny is then bullied because of this by her classmates since if she carried out the punishment, she would not hit her classmates as hard as the teacher did. This underlines her complete "ordinariness" but at the same time good heart, and maybe even heroism, since she stood up to the teacher.

Very soon after, she went to meet her classmate Orlu, where she met Chichi as well. Together they perform a spell called the trust knot, which prevents her from talking about Leopard people, as what Chichi and Orlu present themselves. This is her first glimpse into the Leopard world. Campbell would call this "the Call of Adventure" (Vogler 99). The goal of her journey is not revealed yet. The Call, according to Campbell, should be followed by "Refusal of the Call" (54). This is not present in *Akata*<sup>42</sup>. Sunny was forced

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<sup>40</sup> This is a core characteristic of the shadow, for further details, see chapter 4.1.5.

<sup>41</sup> For more details on abjection see chapters 2.1.1 and 6.5.

<sup>42</sup> Reasons for the Refusal of the Call not being present are described in chapter 7.1.1.



into initiation to her Leopard-dom and introduced to Sasha. Together they start their training in the ways of juju and Leopard people by Anatov. Sunny is revealed to have a spirit face called Anyanwu. She and her friends go to the Leopard Knocks, a Leopard city central to the book series, for the first time. She is also introduced to Chittim<sup>43</sup>. This may be considered “Crossing the Threshold” (Campbell 71). This Threshold is guarded by the river beast, who acts as the “Threshold Guardian” (Campbell 49), and crossing it moves Sunny spiritually, spatially, and story-wise, since she discovered a part of herself, she grew as a person, and she moved into the Leopard world. She became more aware of the world and herself, and she became more self-assured as well.

She starts her training. Sunny often needs to sneak around her parents or perform a juju to get somewhere. During one of such escapades, Sunny needs to get to an evening meeting; she knows that her parents would not let her, so she devises a plan using juju, which reveals that she has the power of becoming invisible tied to her condition. This is a big step for Sunny because her physical drawback or imperfection suddenly constitutes her greatest asset, at least Leopard-people-wise.

She and her friends then go to the Zuma festival. There Sunny receives her juju knife, which may be labelled as the “Supernatural Aid”. Supernatural Aid (Vogler 165) should help the protagonist in a crucial point on the journey; the juju knife is a step in her spiritual development, showing Sunny’s progression and growth of her spirituality externally, since acquiring a juju knife shows her inclusion into the Leopard society.

Sunny wants to partake in a football match at the festival, but she is refused for being a girl. She convinces others to let her play by showing her skill at playing football. Sunny’s team does not win, but they manage to tie, for that they receive Chittim.

At the end of the Zuma festival, Chichi needs to boast, so she summons a masquerade and if it is not for Orlu, the masquerade would surely kill them. This serves as an introduction to masquerades in general but also to start a storyline.

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<sup>43</sup> For more information on Chittim, see chapter 5.1.

The previous four paragraphs showed what Campbell calls the “Road of Trials” (89). Sunny and her allies go through a series of challenges that should develop the characters spiritually, shown on characters proclaiming their allegiance to one another, their friendship, and one standing up for another. Sunny also grows in confidence with her newly acquired position, which manifests in her newly gained resistance to the sun and the Supernatural Aid she receives. Other trials could be found in *Akata Witch*; those listed are the most important to the story.

The Road of Trials ends abruptly, for one day, the four friends are taken to the Obi library, and they are told they are supposed to defeat a serial killer, the Black Hat Otokoto who was alluded to the whole story through news the characters read aloud or read in the newspaper. It is revealed that Black Hat Otokoto wanted to summon Ekwensu, the masquerade queen<sup>44</sup>.

They manage to defeat the Black Hat Otokoto, but he manages to sacrifice himself and summon Ekwensu. Sunny accomplishes to send her back into the Wilderness. Ekwensu is the guardian of the “Ultimate Boon” (Campbell 159). Though it appears defeating her is the final goal the heroine should achieve, the encounter with Ekwensu is the Ordeal. Sunny gaining self-confidence and acceptance into the Leopard Society are of greater importance. After Ekwensu is sent back into the Wilderness, the protagonist and her friends are taken to the Obi Library by a car over a bridge, a modern version of the “Magic Flight” (Campbell 182) Campbell describes. They are rewarded and acknowledged for their deed by the Obi library.

This concludes the Initiation and starts the Return. The hero achieved her goal: she defeated Ekwensu and the Black Hat Otokoto. Now she receives her reward: the acknowledgement from the Obi library, a new mentor, Sugar Cream, and also finding that her grandmother was a Leopard person too. The reward, in this case, is identical to what Campbell calls the “Queen Goddess of the World” (Campbell 100). The mystical marriage proposed by Campbell is transformed into the mentorship Sunny desired. This fully acknowledges that Sunny is a Leopard person, but this moment also presents

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<sup>44</sup> More information about the Black Hat Otokoto see chapter 7.1.4.

her character development externally. Campbell stated that his part of the story should be set in a place central to the story or central to the world, and, in this case, both are true, since it occurs in the Obi-library.

The second reward is the realisation that her grandmother was a Leopard person, too; this fulfils the Atonement with the Father (Campbell 116) function. Though a grandmother replaces a father, Sunny's being a "free agent" holds a degree of power over her emotionally, the realisation that she has Leopard ancestry at least partially removes this burden from her and implies that Sunny belongs to the Leopard society, something she struggled with throughout the story. It is often thematised in the Return part of the heroic journey that the hero is changed, so they feel they do not belong to the original world anymore. In *Akata Witch*, this feeling is not present, though there is tension between Sunny and her family because of her secrets. However, what is present is a shift in perception of the world since she realises that the worlds are not so separate after all.

### **7.2.2 Akata Warrior**

The beginning of *Akata Warrior* finds Sunny at one of the lessons with her mentor, Sugar Cream. Sunny is scolded for not knowing the traditional recipe for tainted pepper soup, a special soup that uses extremely spicy magical peppers. Sunny is going to pick some, so she can prove she can make it. This scene shows that the Leopard Knocks became a part of Sunny's familiar world; she knows how to navigate it, she is aware of all the customs in the Leopard Knocks. Sunny herself proclaims that Leopard Knocks is where she feels like she belongs (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 201).

It is also described that Sunny needed to start wearing glasses because of her light sensitivity caused by her albinism. Her glasses are similar in colour to her juju knife. This physical change shows Sunny's development as suggested by Vogler, further enforcing the idea of her perception of the two worlds changing. Firstly, her connection with the old world of *Akata Witch* is presented. Secondly, in the Leopard World, physical imperfections are signs of innate power. In *Akata Witch*, there is a character with the power of foresight, who is also blind, so this may be an allusion to a future power Sunny will be able to use, thirdly, glasses are traditionally associated

with wisdom or intelligence, so this physical trait may be a device to show Sunny's spirituality growing.

The acquired familiarity with the Leopard world is disrupted by Sunny being attacked by the Lake Beast, which teleports itself to the Leopard Knocks with a whole lake. The Lake Beast serves as another "Threshold Guardian" (Campbell 71) as well as the Threshold itself, its appearance signifies the beginning of a new story, and another part of the fictional world will be explored. This is further illustrated on the lake beast being a relative of the river beast (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 19), which functions as a Threshold Guardian in the first instalment. As the name suggests, the Threshold Guardian guards the entrance into a new world; this suggests that another world or at least a region of the world must be explored for the hero to achieve spiritual balance, as indicated by Campbell. Sunny is saved from the beast by Mami Wata<sup>45</sup>, who also gives Sunny a comb. Though it could be suggested that meeting Mami Wata could represent the Goddess with whom the protagonist should enter a kind of union, she is in this case the "Supernatural Aid" (Campbell 63), since she not only saves the heroine but gives her the comb, which can be seen as a token protecting Sunny from death. This is acknowledged by Sugar Cream, who warns Sunny to "keep it well" (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 21). Later, it turns out the comb passively helped Sunny throughout the whole book, confirming the Supernatural Aid nature of it.

Sunny starts to learn Nsibidi. There is more than one Nsibidi text, so the language shows a degree of plurality<sup>46</sup>. Though this part forces Sunny to move into another world "inside" the texts, the function of them is to provide Sunny with knowledge, which is needed to reach the "Ultimate Boon" (Campbell 159) of this story (location of the guardian of the Ultimate Boon). The function may be Supernatural Aid, but the nature of the texts

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<sup>45</sup> For more details about MamI Wata see chapter 3.

<sup>46</sup> The use and realization of Nsibidi is described in more detail in chapter 5.1.7.

renders them the “Belly of the Whale” since they consist of dream-like worlds, which accelerate the heroine's spiritual development<sup>47</sup>.

Sunny's oldest brother then leaves for university. He returns after some time struggling for money. He confides to Sunny that he was forced to become a part of a confraternity<sup>48</sup>. His friend manipulated him to become a part of one but ultimately decided against becoming a member, resulting in the confraternity forcing him out of the school. Sunny and Chichi decide to avenge her brother by summoning Murks, creatures from the spirit world. Sunny oversteps, stops time, and kills the leader of the confraternity, for which she is sent to the cellar of the Obi-Library for three days. This part of the story shows the interconnectedness of the first familiar world and the unfamiliar magical world and that the difference exists only in perception, in the case of *Akata*, in the perception of Leopard people. Sunny fully acknowledges that Leopard and Lamb worlds are one, so another world must be presented to achieve duality.

The basement has multiple functions in the story. A djinn and a giant spider inhabit it. Giant spiders are present in multiple parts of the story (for example, Sugar Cream has them living in her office). The djinn tries to kill Sunny, and she must survive his attacks for three days, for which she uses juju and other means. At one point, she enters the Wilderness for the first time. The djinn, in this case, also acts as a Threshold Guardian to another world, the spirit world, or the Wilderness<sup>49</sup>, since the djinn allows Sunny to cross to the second world that needs exploring. Eventually, she manages to get help from the spider living in the basement, Ogwu, who is punished for her past failure and must stay there with her children until they manage to redeem themselves. Sunny helps them realize that they do not have to stay there if they help her. The last utterances show

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<sup>47</sup> The Nsibidi also functions as a mentor, which is discussed in chapter 7.1.2.

<sup>48</sup> Confraternities are illegal groups at Nigerian universities, which allow students to get better grades and positions at universities, more information can be found for example in acknowledgments in *Akata Warrior* (478) or in an article by Helen Oyibo, *Nigeria's campus cults: Buccaneers, Black Axe and other feared groups* (Oyibo).

<sup>49</sup> For further details, on the Wilderness, see chapter 5.

that this part is not only a device with which Sunny would cross a Threshold; she also conquers an Ordeal and gains an ally. The basement itself can be considered another Belly of the Whale (Campbell 83), since, as it is in the series, to enter the Wilderness is the same as to die, so Sunny must annihilate herself willingly to enter it, and the experience leads to her spiritual transformation, which comes shortly after.

Sunny is left weakened after her Ordeal in the cellar. Ekwensu uses it as an opportunity for her to attack Sunny, which results in Sunny becoming doubled<sup>50</sup>. Later, Anyanwu returns to Sunny, but they stay doubled. It is revealed that Anyanwu was travelling across the Wilderness to attend meetings to organize resistance against Ekwensu. This moment can also be interpreted as a “Mystical Marriage with a Goddess” (Campbell 100). Not only is Anyanwu based on Igbo Sun goddess, but Sunny achieves a new side of the spiritual self since she now knows that her Leopard abilities are her own and not Anyanwu’s only, which makes her more self-confident and stable. The term “marriage” does not apply here completely; it is more similar to a negotiated partnership between siblings. This negotiation takes place on a football field, which is not central to the story, but it is crucial to Sunny’s character, who loves the sport immensely. Sunny is missing her spirit face, and at the same time her spirit face forces hold power over her, so while negotiating an agreement with Anyanwu, there is a power lifted from Sunny since she becomes emancipated, and at the same time, she needs to rely more on her intelligence and skills, so that it can also be labelled as the Atonement with the Father (Campbell 116).

Sunny and her friends need to go to Lagos to meet Udide, the great spider, who will provide them with a flying grasscutter, a means of travel to Osi, the City of Smoke. Sunny, therefore, asks her brother Chukwu, who owes Sunny for saving him from the confraternity, to take her there. They embark on a road trip to Lagos; in Campbell’s terms, the group embarks on another journey. Along the way, the group needs to sleep over at different locations, where important facts about the lore are revealed. They face multiple tests on their road, which aren't mainly focusing on the magical part of the Leopard world

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<sup>50</sup> Getting doubled is explained in chapter 5.2.3.

but also describing Nigeria's current state<sup>51</sup>. For example, they encounter a group of people with a malfunction on their car, Chukwu and Sasha being aware of the possibility of them being robbed use smarts and juju, so they get safely out of the situation. Ekwensu and her minions also attack them. Both can be considered trials on the way to Lagos.

In Lagos, Sunny and her friends visit Udide. Sunny earns Udide's respect by telling Udide her life story. For that Udide weaves Sunny the flying Grasscutter. This scene fulfils multiple functions: It is the meeting with the goddess, since Udide is a goddess, and Sunny is provided with Supernatural Aid and a companion at the same time.

Sunny and her friends embark on the journey to Osi. While embarking, her brother Chukwu, Sunny's brother, sees the flying Grasscutter and loses his nerves; for him, this was Crossing a Threshold (Campbell 71) into the Leopard world, the world Sunny sees all the time. At the same time, Sunny experiences the Atonement with the Father (Campbell 116); this time, the relative is Chukwu. Sunny hid her true nature from her brother, which held power over her, and by this accidental reveal, this power is broken. Sunny and her friends break the rules of the Leopard society and are pursued by Leopard officials. The flight on the grasscutter resembles the Magic Flight, but in Propp's division of the narrative since it precedes the Ultimate Boon described below.

Sunny and the Oha coven are on the journey to Osi. On the way, they need to stop to get water. They stop by a lake to get some. Sunny is attacked by the Lake beast again. The beast pulls Sunny under the water into the Wilderness. There, she meets Ekwensu and the personification of death. Ekwensu and Death threaten Sunny, but Sunny defies them and escapes. Before the escape, Death reveals that she is peculiar to her, as she can die and come back to life, which confirms the previous rule of the world. This may be labelled as an Ordeal, it is not the Ultimate Boon or the ending, but Sunny manages to overcome it; Sunny overcomes death and learns more about the rules of the world.

Then Sunny and her allies arrive in Osi. Previously, Sunny's grandmother revealed to Sunny a house in Osi she should visit when she is there through Nsibidi. Using

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<sup>51</sup> Present day Nigeria and its issues are present heavily due to the genre of the book series, for more detail, see chapter 5.

the knowledge Sunny acquired, she manages to get to the house. Sunny and her companions are attacked by the masquerade Chichi summoned at the Zuma festival and by Ekwensu. While Chichi, Sasha and Orlu fight the masquerade, Sunny duels Ekwensu and manages to defeat her, not by using juju but by utilising a superstition Lambs believe: those masquerades are defeated by pulling off their mask, which she heard from her father who told her "... Never unmask a masquerade. That is an abomination!" (Okorafor, *Akata Warrior* 165). Sunny manages to do this, but Ekwensu stings her. Sunny is transported to the Wilderness, where she meets Chukwu, the supreme deity of Igbo people, along with Anyanwu. Chukwu breaks a kola nut with them<sup>52</sup>. This moment was the Ultimate Boon since Sunny got the recognition she deserved from a literal god and a form of marriage with a goddess or a god in the form of breaking the kola nut. Sunny also changed her perception of the world. Though Leopard society is never completely divided from the Lamb world, it is always suggested that Lamb people are superstitious and therefore ignorant for not realizing the truth; this is what Sunny is made to believe too but uses her Lamb knowledge and symbolically makes the two worlds she comes from into one.

"The Initiation" (Campbell 89) in *Akata Warrior* is more intricate. Sunny does not need to explore the Leopard world since its rules, norms, main layout, and possibilities are familiar. Sunny is shown to grow spiritually and gain balance, as her splitting with Anyanwu and helping Ogwu escape from Obi Library's cellar supports this. At the same time, the Leopard society starts to consider her its member since she is punished for her digression and not annulled as in the first book, which confirms that Sunny grew spiritually.

Sunny and her companions then embark on a literal Magic Flight (Campbell 182-192) since they travel on the flying grasscutter. They are pardoned from their transgressions against the Leopard rules as a reward for their achievement, and Sunny's brother Chukwu is not made to forget the encounter so Sunny would have an ally in her own family.

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<sup>52</sup> Breaking the kola nut is an Igbo tradition used to welcome guests to one's house (Ibiene). This refers to a previous instance in the story, mentioned in chapter 6.5.



They then travel back from Lagos home. On the way, Sunny and Chichi are tasked by Uside to repay a debt Chichi's family made against her. The finale of this narrative builds a cliff-hanger that prepares the ground for the third instalment mentioned above. Sunny underwent a considerable number of trials. The Return is not so exploitative of new traits or spirituality; it shows mainly the appreciation for Sunny's achievements. Sunny received another reward in her brother being allowed to retain his memories about the Leopard world, granting both Sunny and her brother Chukwu an exception from the rules. This again shows how the Lamb and Leopard worlds are interconnected and are, to an extent, one.

### **7.3 The duality of worlds in *Akata***

Campbell suggests that the two worlds in, which the story is set, seem opposed to each other at the beginning of the narrative, one being material and the other spiritual (70-71), but in the end, they are ultimately divided only in the perception of the hero, and they are, in fact, just one world (Campbell 212-213). In *Akata*, this duality is exploited<sup>53</sup>. There is a clear spatial and ideological division between the Leopard and the Lamb worlds<sup>54</sup>. Okorafor shows that these two sides of the fictional universe interact and even merge and overlap, so both sides experience similar or the same problems.

First, in *Akata Witch*, the Black hat Otokoto is a problem that concerns both the Leopard and the Lamb society. Despite the problem being perceived slightly differently in the two worlds—Leopard society being concerned with potential apocalypse and Lambs perceiving the problem as a ritual serial killer (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 347)—it shows that the duality or even opposition of the two worlds exists only in the perception of the inhabitants of the fictional world.

Second, more subtle world-building details show this division of perception. This is especially notable during the Zuma festival, where tents for different traditional religions

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<sup>53</sup> See chapter 5 and its subchapters.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter 5 and its subchapters.

stand. The Leopard people play football, go to restaurants, and have their recipes for food described in the books; all these aspects are included in the Lamb world as well.

Third, even more nuanced examples of the entanglement of the two worlds are present. The social problems, which plague the Lamb world, manifest in the Leopard world. The most pronounced is discrimination based on origin<sup>55</sup>. Sasha is told that he is inferior based on his American upbringing, resulting in Sasha being called ignorant. Anatov, for instance, tells him he should learn Igbo to become a better Leopard person. Sunny is discriminated against during the Zuma festival because she is a girl, so her try-out for the team is made much harder than everyone else (Okorafor, *Akata Witch* 251). For the same reason, she is treated differently by her parents.

All the mentioned above is true for *Akata Witch* because the duality between Lamb world and Leopard world is exploited there, as Sunny needs to acclimate herself within the fictional world. In *Akata Warrior*, the duality is created in the opposition between the two worlds and the Wilderness described in previous chapters<sup>56</sup>. Campbell would say that the Wilderness, being the spirit world, is seemingly in true opposition to the material world—the world of Lamb and Leopard peoples. The Wilderness can be seen by every Leopard person when they call forth their spirit face, making them more spiritual than Lambs, and only Sunny can enter the Wilderness without dying. The Wilderness is home to masquerades and gods, implying that Leopard people are closer to both, supporting their claim to be more spiritually mature.

Sunny has evolved and feels comfortable in the second world of *Akata Witch*, the Leopard society, and there is no further possibility of her to grow within the constraints of this world. According to Campbell, the hero needs to evolve spiritually, and that is why after the Leopard society is explored extensively in *Akata Witch*, the Wilderness is explored more in *Akata Warrior* as a logical next step in Sunny's spiritual evolution. Sunny learns how to navigate and help different creatures that exist in the Wilderness, and

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<sup>55</sup> This problem manifests in the analysed works predominantly as *Akata* is a slur used for foreigners living in Nigeria, for further details, see chapter 5.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 5.1.

because of Anyanwu, she learns about different rules and social norms governing the Wilderness. A new opposition is thereby created. The Wilderness is known in the first book, but more explored in the second, Okorafor cleverly shifts the paradigm between the worlds, so there would be a possibility for Sunny's growth, but still puts the spiritual and the material into opposition, per what is achievable for Sunny at the point of the story. *Akata Warrior* explores Osisí, a stepping stone leading away from the Leopard world to the Wilderness. Presumably, the following instalment will explore Osisí itself as well as the Wilderness further.

## **8 Correlation of young adult literature and the heroic journey**

The previous chapters analyse the different aspects of young adult literature and the heroic journey. This chapter explores the correlation between the two with references to literary theorists: McCallum (young adult literature), Propp, Campbell, and Vogler (heroic journey) focusing on the theoretical correlation—and differences—of the frameworks while using tropes described by literary enthusiasts writing about young adult literature and exemplifying the concepts in *Akata*.

### **8.1 The duality of worlds**

Campbell states that the construction of the fictional world consists of the familiar (or material) world and the new (or spiritual) world, where the heroic journey takes place. Vogler adds that this division may only exist in the perception of the hero, or it may be represented by a different set of values (87-90). This directly correlates to the description of a child and an adult in McCallum's perspective, the former being self-absorbed and the latter being a subject acting by themselves who can help others and establish stable relationships, which marks a clear difference of the value sets.

The duality proposed provides a vantage point from which the hero may be able to see themselves or that the world may show the hero how they are seen. The key to a character's development lies within the unfamiliar part of the world. This division of perception is also reminiscent of the concept of the Unseen in urban fantasy, such as *Akata*. In *Akata*, there are three worlds: the Lamb world, the Leopard world, and the Wilderness. All three represent a level of spirituality, the Lamb world being the least spiritual and the Wilderness being the most spiritual, with the Wilderness seemingly representing adulthood.

### **8.2 The protagonist**

Campbell describes the hero as initially having near to no heroic qualities. The hero is characterized similarly in the first trope described in chapter 2.2.1, which correlates to cultural displacement described by McCallum (51). This may be reinforced by them being the youngest, often the third, child according to Propp, having a disability, such

as wearing glasses or something similar or worse, mentioned by Vogler (31), and being cast out from the society for not fitting the norms of the fictional universe as suggested by Coats (150). Sunny is a third child who suffers from albinism, which makes her an outsider in Igboland.

The protagonist, as Campbell notes, needs to feel that what they have is enough (47), but this perception of the world is disrupted by either an urgency to do or change something or by an outside intervention forcing the hero to act (Vogler 99-101; Propp 27). Such events disrupt the protagonist's identity, which forces them to revisit their values and change their identity in a major way on the journey. Seemingly, the hero must go through annihilation of what they know and believe to be true to achieve their true self. In Sunny's case, this is her finding out that she is a Leopard person.

Campbell, Propp, and various bloggers agree that the hero, despite it not being apparent from the start, is exceptional in a way<sup>57</sup>. According to Campbell, this exceptionality comes in the form of a grand destiny (46), other sources claim that it is an exceptional power. Sunny has both. Her power allows her to enter the Wilderness and she is destined to defeat Ekwensu.

On the journey, the hero finds something important that is representative of their extraordinariness, which is either a dormant quality or ability that the hero learns to use, or an object that the hero acquires on the quest (Campbell 63). This power may manifest itself spontaneously in a critical moment of the story (*14 Popular Fantasy Tropes — And How to Make Them Feel New Again*) or it may manifest gradually as something hidden. Sunny's greatest weakness is her albinism, which by Leopard standards ties to her power—invisibility. This power is gradually explored in *Akata Witch* and climaxes with a sudden outburst at the end of it<sup>58</sup>. In *Akata Warrior*, exploration of Sunny's extraordinariness increases with her getting doubled.

### **8.3 The role of authority**

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<sup>57</sup> See chapters 6.2, 7.1.1 and 7.2 and its subchapters.

<sup>58</sup> See chapters 6.2 and 7.2.1.

Both narratives present characters, objects, and values that act as authority over the protagonist. A crucial part seems to be a parent, as evidenced in the step called the “Atonement with the Father” (Campbell 116). In acquiring subjectivity, there may be an unwillingness to become a subject, a power held over the protagonist. A power tying the character to their initial self needs to be lifted for them to become their final self (Campbell 120,121). Sunny’s first Atonement with the Father is when she finds out that her grandmother was also a Leopard person. The more important instance is the moment of Sunny getting doubled and then reunited with Anyanwu.

Campbell describes a mentor, which in Vogler’s conception represents the function of guidance for the hero (Vogler 39). This function is supposed to show the hero the rules of the new world they find themselves in. The mentor may just reveal facts about the world, so the function may be fulfilled by an object or even a memory that helps the hero to establish their new identity. Sugar Cream and Antonov are the traditional representations of mentors in *Akata*, while more Voglerian conception of this archetype is represented by the various texts in *Nsibidi*.

The importance of authority in young adult literature is reinforced by McCallum’s claim that the protagonist can change themselves only from the point of view of someone else (70). This and the concept of abjection gives authority utmost importance, which may be the reason why young adult literature does not have a concept similar or equivalent to the shapeshifter archetype. This archetype is not present in *Akata* at all or only in a very mild form.

A very similar function is fulfilled by the shadow, the double or the doppelganger, which in both Campbell’s and McCallum’s conception represents a mirror for the protagonist, providing a vantage point that shows them how to change their personality (Campbell 168; Vogler 60-68; McCallum 68-69). This doppelganger may be represented by a character as well as rules and norms unknown to the hero or even something happening before the beginning of the story.

Both the concept of the shadow and the mentor are parts necessary for the abjection to manifest. They represent a superego that the hero needs to act towards so that they can become their clean self. Whether these Others are represented by characters,

objects, or norms, it is obvious that the hero needs to either comply or refuse them and by doing so the hero allows themselves to change their individuality. For Sunny, the biggest shadow and at the same time source of abjection are the norms and values of the Leopard society. Her Leopard-dom in general plays a large role within the universe.

#### **8.4 Correlation of the concept of the Other and the individual steps of the heroic journey in the construction of the narrative**

The heroic journey and the young adult literature describe the development of one's individuality, the way they do it seems to be different. Campbell describes multiple steps that lead to the development of identity. McCallum describes that this search for identity may take the form of a quest for a stable identity. Campbell also claims that identity is the ultimate goal of the heroic journey, but it is not the apparent goal, which may be defeating an all-powerful villain (Campbell 160).

The hero has a major Other<sup>59</sup> that they need to become a subject to but at the same time they encounter other Others or even personifications of parts of the major Other that help them to acquire their final individuality (Coats, *Growing Up, In theory* 33). In the case of *Akata*, it is Sunny's Leopard-dom. These representations may be the different archetypes described by Campbell, Vogler, and Propp as well as the different challenges on the journey. Sunny's Leopard-dom is personified by various characters, for example, Sugar Cream. This quest or journey would begin with the introduction of the main character and their familiar surroundings, the familiar world, what would Campbell call the Departure (45). The reader first encounters Sunny in a classroom where she feels familiar. She then finds out that she is a Leopard person. The hero would then realise that they need to change their personality in a way, which, in Campbell's conception, is the Call of Adventure, in whatever form it may come. This change can be refused, but if it is, the hero may be annihilated (Campbell 57-58; McCallum 142). Encountering the Threshold Guardian then symbolizes the acceptance that the change needs to take place. By Sunny being initiated

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<sup>59</sup> The concept of the Other is applied to *Akata* in chapter 6.4.

to the Leopard society and crossing the bridge into Leopard Knocks she accepts that this development will happen.

The hero is then displaced into a culture or an unfamiliar world, whose norms they need to accept as their own (Vogler 17, 326; McCallum 100). Sunny starts to learn the rules of Leopard society from her mentors<sup>60</sup>. The rules and norms may be contrasted between the familiar and unfamiliar world. This is not to say that the hero may not find themselves culturally displaced from the start, but this displacement must function as an Other or as the abjection. Sunny finds herself in Nigeria, which is a new environment for her since she was born in the USA. Gradually, the hero learns these rules, which allows the hero to evolve and at the same time fight the unconquerable evil that stands against them in the story. Sunny learns these rules which helps her to defeat Ekwensu. The acceptance of the rules may be represented by acknowledgment by a representation of the unfamiliar world, the Queen Goddess of the World. The Queen Goddess may be the representation of the Other that the protagonist encounters or a super-ego representing abjection and the fact that the hero got rid of the abjection and made themselves a clean self. Sunny encounters the Queen Goddess in both books<sup>61</sup>. In *Akata Witch*, the goddess is represented by Sugar Cream, and in *Akata Warrior*, it is the supreme god Chukwu.

To move forward with their spiritual transformation, the hero may willingly self-annihilate their former unclean self to become a new clean self, which may be reflected in the hero's appearance. This is a part of the story, which may be present in the form of an inner monologue, should stir the protagonist towards the individuality they desire. This inner monologue may be represented by them entering the Belly of the Whale, which takes place in a certain location within the world or even in a disincarnate realm. This self-annihilation is a tool for dealing with abjection and achieving a clean self. This is represented by the time Sunny spent in the cellar of the Obi Library as well as the works of Nsibidi.

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<sup>60</sup> See chapter 6.4, 6.5, 7.1.2 and 7 and its subchapters.

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 7 and its subchapters.



The hero is then prepared for the Ultimate boon or the climax of the story. Before the climax the hero should be more or less a part of the unfamiliar world, they are changed enough for the hero to become the subject within the world. This may be represented by them receiving an object that would help them to defeat the main antagonist of the story. Then the climax comes. The hero should defeat the villain and then receive something that completes their new individuality, which is symbolic of self-acceptance. In the first book, Sunny defeats Ekwensu seemingly by mustering an unexpected power that helps her defeat Ekwensu. In *Akata Warrior*, it is acknowledged that she is an individual, since she defeats Ekwensu by pulling off her mask, for which she is recognized by the supreme deity, Chukwu.

Finally, they return to the familiar world, where they realize they have achieved a new equilibrium within themselves, they become a subject within the world. The realization that the world is but one and not two should be revealed. Simply said, the protagonist achieved a new sense of individuality to the extent that they may think they do not belong to the familiar world. At the end of *Akata Witch*, Sunny accepts that she is a Leopard person, which is emphasised by the revelation that her grandmother was one too. In *Akata Warrior*, Sunny shows that she achieved to change her individuality by pulling Ekwensu's mask off.

## Conclusion

The hypothesis this thesis aimed to prove was that there is a correlation between the heroic journey and works of young adult literature, especially with the focus on the protagonist's character development, and that a specific transformation of the constitutive elements of the heroic journey may occur in the young adult literature.

In the theoretical part, I have accumulated applicable literary concepts, background information about the author and information relevant to the books analysed. Firstly, Okorafor has been contextualised as an author of importance while discovering her many achievements.

Secondly, the thesis has scrutinised the literary concepts of young adult literature and the heroic journey. The young adult literature has been defined by its target audience, which comprises adolescents, people who are becoming adults. The core concept of young adult literature has been identified as the Other, as described by McCallum. The Other is anything that provides a vantage point to the protagonist that forces them to become a subject within the world, subsequently coercing the hero into transforming their individuality. Coats adds the concept of abjection into the young adult literature as another core element.

The heroic journey has been examined from the concepts of Campbell and Vogler, prominent literary critics. The constituting heroic journey elements have been identified, namely steps of the journey and archetypal characters met on it. Instead of the concept of archetypal characters, the general idea of these being an allocation of a prototypical function, as described by Vogler, has been used to match young adult literature concepts.

Thirdly, the background information needed for analysis has been introduced, namely Igbo mythology, which Okorafor has used to construct the fictional world of the narrative. Traditional Igbo religion is polytheistic, however Christianity influenced it during the colonial period, which resulted in some of its features transforming. It includes several concepts unknown to the rest of the world, for example, Nsibidi. This information has proven essential for examination of the *Akata* books in the practical part<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> See chapter 5.2.

The practical part aimed to analyse *Akata* from the vantage point of individual literary concepts based on primary and secondary sources and to analyse the transformation of the trivia connected to Igbo mythology for the purposes of the fictional cosmos.

The world has been proven to fit the definition of a typical urban fantasy cosmos. A realistic place, contemporary Nigeria, is used as the primary world and is layered over with the fantastical and unfamiliar. There are two layers seemingly in opposition to the primary world, Leopard society and the Wilderness, which function as the Unseen (Ekman 463). This division achieves a progression of duality within the world. While Igbo mythology constitutes a significant part of the fictional world, some of its aspects were transformed to fulfil their purpose within the story, for example, the transformation of Ekwensu into a one-dimensional villain (*14 Popular Fantasy Tropes — And How to Make Them Feel New Again*).

The literary concepts of young adult literature, namely the Other and the abject, have been found in the narrative. Sunny's Leopard-dom fits the description of the most pronounced Other<sup>63</sup>. It is something defining of her character that needs her to become a subject. The Other is constituted by its personifications, for example, the authority figures within the Leopard society. Sunny is gradually becoming a subject towards the Other. Multiple instances of abjection have been found, such as her physical condition and the rules of Leopard society. Sunny learns about the values and standards of the Leopard world several times through punishment because of her transgressions.

Additionally, several tropes of young adult literature have been observed in the book series. Sunny fits the description of a "chosen one" (Dayleview) since her power exceeds the standards of the fictional cosmos. Signs of romance have been discovered; also, the protagonist and her friends spend time doing things ordinary teenagers do (Johnson) (e.g. going to restaurants, cooking together and other.). Therefore, *Akata* is a typical representative of young adult literature.

The heroic journey comprises the Departure, the Initiation, and the Return phases (Campbell 45, 89, 179), all of which occur in the narrative. Most of the components

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<sup>63</sup> Leopard-dom as an Other is described in chapter 6.4.

described by Campbell and Vogler are present; examples of a Threshold Guardian, a mentor, an Atonement with the Father, the Ultimate Boon and an Ordeal, even the Belly of the Whale are present in the narrative. These are not necessarily described prototypically, but they are allocated as a function as defined by Vogler. The heroic journey calls for a dualistic world, which has been traced in *Akata*. In *Akata Witch*, the opposition is illustrated on the Lamb and the Leopard worlds. In *Akata Warrior*, it has shifted to the physical world and the Wilderness<sup>64</sup>. There is only one function not realised fully—the shapeshifter character.

The final part of the practical part has put the two types of narrative into a correlation. Several aspects of both narratives have been found similar or even fundamentally the same in their purpose. McCallum (3) and Campbell describe their protagonist changing their individuality (212). The change of individuality should tie to the spirituality of the protagonist or the transition from concrete to symbolic. This change does not happen in isolation, so while Campbell's framework is full of individual steps and archetypal characters, similarly to Propp's morphology of a folktale, which was expanded upon by Vogler, McCallum describes a generic concept of an Other. While McCallum is very general about what the protagonist needs to come into contact with, the heroic journey focuses on specific forms that contribute to the protagonist's development. Nevertheless, all these concepts aim to provide vantage points that facilitate the hero's personality change and, therefore, resemble each other.

Both young adult literature and the heroic journey emphasise authority<sup>65</sup>. In the case of "the mentor" archetype (Vogler 39), it is mostly trying to show a better way<sup>66</sup>, while "the Queen Goddess of the World" symbolizes acceptance into the second world (Campbell 105). The doppelganger provides a mirror that the hero must take into account (McCallum 68; Vogler 65). In comparison, abjection, a concept similar to an authority,

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<sup>64</sup> To learn what the Wilderness is, see chapter 5.1. To see how it is used, see chapters 7.3 and 8.1.

<sup>65</sup> The role of authority is described in chapter 8.3.

<sup>66</sup> Realisations of the mentor archetype can be found in chapter 7.1.2.

suggests both accepting rules provided by an authority as well as resisting authority. The hero of young adult literature is transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Vogler goes as far as to describe the hero as an ego similar to a child (29-30), so parents and other authorities are necessary for the hero to grow or to achieve a complete individuality.

The most necessary aspect of both is that the hero must emerge victorious, accepting themselves and others and with a new subjectivity. If they do not, they will annihilate themselves. To achieve that, they must undergo ordeals and challenges and conquer the Ultimate Boon (Campbell 160; Vogler 197). In other words, the hero becomes a true subject in the world or manages to achieve a pure, clean ego. The hero needs to be displaced from what the protagonist knows for the change to happen. It may not necessarily move the hero spatially but show the protagonist a different perspective or show the hero the Unseen.

Young adult literature is shunned for its perceived poor quality<sup>67</sup>, but we teachers need to realize that through a relatable hero, an aspect of the hero young adult literature and the heroic journey agrees on, the reader may change their view of themselves. This thesis proves that the heroic journey may apply to fantasy narratives aimed at young adult literature, with some similar or identical narration techniques; therefore, it provides literary theory in a classroom. The heroic journey may apply to the canonical works of literature, so sharing the theoretical means and teaching more about young adult literature could hopefully lead the students to understand and enjoy them.

Young adult literature may fulfil a definite escapist function, and in that, it may help the reader to deal with their issues healthily since teenagers deal with similar ordeals every day. We, as people, establish our individuality dialogically with the world since anything we encounter may be considered an Other that we need to become a subject.

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<sup>67</sup> See chapter 2.

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