

Femme Fatale and its Tragic Consequences in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*

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Abstract

Femme fatale is one of the social constructions of womanhood. It conveys the deep-rooted idea that some women are intrinsically destructive by virtue of their exceptional and irresistible beauty. This study is specifically concerned with interrogating gender stereotypes that are often found in works of literature. This is why it investigates femme fatale and its tragic consequences in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. The methodology for the study is qualitative in nature and is hinged on Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory. The paper argues that the concept of femme fatale sits tangentially against the women while neglecting other factors such as male tragic flaw, inordinate desire, ambition, personal choices, ignorance, overwhelming influence and impetuosity on the part of the male gender which activate the seemingly destructive nature of femme fatale. The study reveals that, though the woman is a passive agent of tragedy and her beauty a catalyst for destruction, she is not entirely to blame for the tragedy of the men who are involved in relationships with her. Her charming beauty associates her with destructive tendencies but she cannot solely be the carrier of fatality without the contributing actions and personal choices of the men who usually are termed victims. The study recommends that the factors which facilitate the destructive nature of femme fatale should be taken into consideration in literary discourses so that the concept of femme fatale will not be restricted to the alluringly beautiful woman alone as the carrier of the fatality.

Keywords: Beauty, Femme Fatale, Patriarchy, Seductive, Tragedy

Introduction

Femme fatale has always been an archetype of a fatal or dangerous woman in literary works. It is a phenomenon employed in Humanistic Studies to explain a situation in which, a beautiful and alluring woman is seen to be consistently, the source of disaster or even death to her partner or lover or even herself. The femme fatale concept has over time been used to describe a woman, who, basically through her feminine charms or nature, is assumed to cause pain, suffering and tragedy for her lover and, by extension, the society as vividly portrayed in the selected text. The belief in femme fatales is supported by the attractive and fascinating tales surrounding them in literary, mythological and religious tales the world over. The tales of femme fatale are accepted with child-like consciousness for those who, though believe and accept it, yet have not experienced it. It is a trend in every culture, which is infused into mythology and literature. Thus, it becomes obvious that writers' ideas emanate from the prevailing norms or perceptions in their socio-cultural environments as reflected in the play.

The very idea that constitutes femme fatale is as old as humanity. Originating in ancient times and being found to have existed in Judeo-Christian religion, as evidenced in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, and Samson and Delilah (Ruth Markus 188), femme fatale is presented as inextricably linked with beauty, amorous attraction, desire, enigma and fascination as well as with manipulation, peril, misfortune and downfall. Arguably, the concept of femme fatale is as old as memory. Its very existence in mythology, folklore, literature, film, and, of course, history, makes it popular at all times and its popularity entrenched in the psyche of the society. However, it transforms to reflect the social views of the times and it draws upon existing myth and history to create myth and history.

It is noteworthy that when a man is infatuated with a woman, he becomes entangled in highly dangerous or compromising situations with her without thinking about the consequences of his actions. However, society tends to project the blame for male weakness or destruction unto female beauty and purported seductiveness without taking into account other factors which activate the seemingly destructive nature of femme fatale as reflected in the play under study. Additionally, the study demonstrates that even though people have been made to believe that some women are dangerous and destructive on account of their beauty, and the reason they are labelled "femme fatales", it is a patriarchal stereotyped narrative that does not consider the roles men play in their relationships with these women that lead to their tragedy. This study, therefore, attests to the fact that there is no femme fatale story without the involvement of men's actions which emanate from their tragic nature which, motivate their inordinate desire and the personal choices they make. Essentially, even though myths have been used to explain certain things that have puzzled man since ancient times and they have also been held as truth at one time in the history of a people, the myth of femme fatale seems no longer able to withstand rational scrutiny in the face of present critical ambience where various interpretive tools abound.

Literature Review

Tugce Ozdinc states that femme fatale is charming to the degree of enchantment. Her beauty, her voice, her words, or anything about her can be mesmerising. Her charming attitude is like a spell for others, pulling especially men towards her (178). Thus, drawing upon the negative labelling of some women, many scholars such as Mario Praz, Patrick Bade, Robert Greene, Virginia Allen, William Shakespeare, Wole Soyinka, Zulu Sofola, and Elechi Amadi have examined the concept of femme fatale and have come to the conclusion that exceptionally beautiful women are seductive and deadly to

men. As illustrated in the lives of the central female characters, these scholars situate beautiful women as the tragic objects of men's attraction and destruction. Despite the fact that the phenomenon of femme fatale is not new, it has generated a lot of confusion, anxiety, and controversy about what a femme fatale is and what she is not; how she is expected to behave and what repercussions emerge from the stated expected behaviour. This corroborates Edith Hamilton's assertion that, scholars differ widely, and will no doubt continue to do so (21).

Though Mario Praz, Patrick Bade, and Virginia Allen regard femme fatale as a sexual cannibal, a predator who is fascinated with death and pain and a willingness to destroy (*Femme Fatale* 34), studies have shown that the purported destructive image of beautiful women as femme fatales and their various negative representations and interpretations in works of art, is caused by the perpetuation of the myth of the fall of man which has been deeply entrenched in the modern psyche, and it is responsible for both the reinforcement and justification of women's beauty as being intrinsically seductive and destructive. This argument is sustained by Kate Millett when she asserts that myth is, of course, a felicitous advance in the level of propaganda, since it often bases its arguments on ethics or theories of origin (51).

Martha Vicinus corroborates the argument that "negative images of women" are connected with their sexuality, often depicted as predatory and positioned contiguously to witchcraft and enchantment (83). Joy L. Ramirez's stance lends credence to Vicinus' position when she asserts that the woman's fatality is not just thematic, but it has to do with the ineluctability of her representations and even the inevitably fixed set of meanings connected to her image either during the high point of her representation in the late nineteenth century or in more recent, arguably, post-modern versions of her appearance (189). This aligns with Diane Hoeveler, who, in *Romantic Androgyny: the Women Within*, asserts that, the ambiguities and conflicts between female appearance and reality consistently characterise femme fatale (196).

This argument is further sustained by E. A. J. Honigmann who posits that all stereotypes are misleading. Consequently, we are challenged to locate beautiful women beneath the mask, and to reconsider society's stereotype thinking more generally and the stereotypical judgements that society takes for granted (61). Studies have shown that Janey Place's description of femme fatale as the dark lady, the spider woman, and the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction (35) is one of the oldest themes in literature. However, in her article titled "The Femme Fatale: American Horror Story and These Deadly Women" posted on December 29, 2014 Sophie Raine states that femme fatale can only lead men into temptation if it is what they desire, and despite the fact that they are always quick to put the blame on the woman as a seductress, it is ultimately their tragic nature which propels their inordinate desire and personal choices for pleasure as well as their lack of willpower that causes them to yield to her, a statement this research demonstrates.

Jennifer Hedgecock takes the argument further when she avers that, femme fatale affects men and must have an effect on them; but that unless the male protagonist is present, the woman is not fatal (9). In "The Dread of Woman", Karen Horney, a Psycho-Analytical Psychiatrist, describes how male fears of castration and dread of female sexuality are projected onto women and the women are objectified in order for men to never have to deal directly with their fear, but only to face the projected "threat" of female sexuality (350). Horney's argument is sustained by James Maxfield's when he states that femme fatale is actually only a catalyst; in the end it is the men who are destructive to themselves

(Maxfield 14) on account of their inherent tragic nature which motivates their inner cravings and quest for pleasure and gratification derived from women who are conceived of as femme fatales.

It is worthy of note that the different definitions and interpretations of femme fatale corroborate Praz's assertion that "there is no established type of the Fatal woman in the way there is an established type of the Byronic hero" (201). In fact, a critical look at these definitions of femme fatale reveals some similarities as well as differences. Thus, it is completely obvious that critical opinions about conceptions of femme fatale will continue to be sampled based on points of view but such opinions are as good as the critics make them appear. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, femme fatale is a symbolic vista of a door which gives illuminating spectacle of the world, the complexity of human motives, and men's inherent tragic nature, tragic flaw, ambition, inordinate desire, overwhelming influence, ignorance, personal choice and impetuosity that lead to their tragedy.

Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* has uniquely and distinctively attracted commendable critical attention from various critics. The critical works on this dramatic text individually bear convincing evidence of the portrayal of the debased and stereotypical image of beautiful and alluring women as femme fatales as well as their negative representations in various works of art. Some critics are of the view that femme fatale is a stereotype that Soyinka has repeatedly used in his works as reflected in the selected text. John Ebimobwei Yeseibo, while quoting Banham *et al*, states that in a raft of mainly male-authored plays, women are seen as either angelically virtuous or more often, as dangerous, duplicitous and rapaciously greedy. According to him, Nelly Furman captures this ugly scenario when she says "in a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange, valued on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between" (77).

Mary Crawford and Rhoda Unger observe that for Walter Lipman, stereotypes are culturally determined pictures that intrude between an individual's cognitive faculties and his or her perceptions of the world. Gender stereotypes are therefore consensual beliefs about the different characteristics of men and women (49). According to Yeseibo quoting Cheryle Johnson's "Class and Gender", "Both indigenous patriarchy and imposed colonial patriarchal customs and laws figure in women's oppression" (78). This corroborates Warren's argument, who, while quoting Stratton, asserts that Soyinka has mentioned to Sylvia Bryan that he uses women figures as symbols and essences (89). Idemudia-Uwadinma, while commenting on Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Dance of the Forests* argues that even though there are prominent female characters that are portrayed even stronger than some male characters, there seems to be a conscious effort by Soyinka to portray these women though as strong characters but in roles that are more derogatory than popular (3).

Nagueyalti Warren avers that at the core of Soyinka's social consciousness, a feminist reading of his works leads to and leaves the question of whether or not he supports patriarchy (81). Nevertheless, M. Vishnupriya's assertion that Segi is a femme fatale corroborates Carol Boyce Davies' argument in her essay on the characterisation and stereotypical portrayal of women in Soyinka's plays, where, according to Warren, she writes that, "a feminist reading of Soyinka reveals enough female stereotypes to suggest a definite sexist bias against women (88). Biodun Jeyifo notes that there is a highly visible group of feminist critics who have taken Soyinka to task on the theme of gender and its representation in his plays. And indeed, the world of Soyinka's drama is intensively, normatively male-centered (97). This coheres with Rowland Amaefula's position that the preponderance of patriarchs as

first generation playwrights has left the footprints of negative images for women and, consequently, the condition of women in society at large (258).

Thus, in various works of literature and art, beautiful and captivating women are regarded as cunning and vicious to the men in relationships with them but very few studies have attempted to look at it from this perspective that it is a patriarchal construction about whom the femme fatales are. This study, therefore, argues that the femme fatale label is a gender stereotype that does not reckon with the participation of the male in his tragedy. It is a patriarchal stereotyped narrative that excludes the men from blame and collaboration. Charles Nnolim argues that the debasement of the female image is as old as the Bible and the Koran, and has other origins in pre-historic literature and mythology (123). It validates the fact that patriarchy singles out women for special vilification. He also asserts that from Edenic myth to modern times, beautiful women have been depicted as angels with feet of clay and as purveyors of unhappiness both for themselves and for their male counterparts (169).

Yeseibo, Furman and Nnolim's views align with this study's argument on femme fatale narrative as being controlled by men for thousands of years, and they also provide the basis for the narrative as illustrated in the play under study. Nawal El Sadaawi, corroborating Nnolim's view, provides a more illuminating debased image and representation of the woman in phallogocentric texts as a capricious vamp, a playful and beautiful slave, a she-devil imbued with cunning and capable of a thousand artifices, an explosive danger versed in all the arts of deceit and conspiracy, a seductive mistress captivating in her passion (521). She is as positive and dynamic as Satan and his evil spirits, wherever matters of sex and love are concerned. Woman in all the aspects of the role she is made to play, whether it is that of a queen or a slave bought from the market, remains a slave (Sadaawi 521).

Sadaawi's argument coheres with Zaki Mobarak's that "women have a greater power to destroy men than Satan and all his devils together" (522). It is my contention that the negative representations and interpretations of women as femme fatales are reductive, depreciatory and contemptible. Essentially, these scholars turn the discourse of femme fatale into a narrative that excludes anything that threatens patriarchy and its values. It also points to the fact that the catalogues of the distorted images of women consistently and systematically portrayed in literary texts is a reinforcement of the dominant ideology of patriarchy that assigns negative roles to women because of their gender. Consequently, the concept of femme fatale is not properly situated in human existence. It sits tangentially against the women because scholars focused mainly on the supposedly destructive beauty of alluring women while neglecting other factors which activate the seemingly destructive nature of femme fatale. It thus aligns with Nnolim's assertion that, the image of women in both Western and African literature is a gloomy one, compounded by the unhelpful hand of tradition and patriarchy (165).

Synopsis of *A Dance of the Forests*

Though Wole Soyinka's play, *A Dance of the Forests*, is known for its exploration of intricate issues such as history, identity and destiny, yet it is interlaced with human experiences and actions together with uncanny influences. The appearance of a femme fatale figure in the play, typified by the character of Rola, also known as Madame Tortoise is one of the main subjects in the play. In *A Dance of the Forests*, Madame Tortoise in the court of Mata Kharibu eight centuries ago is a historical prototype of Rola. She is also regarded as a femme fatale whose irresistible feminine charms intoxicate her lovers/partners and leads to their destruction. The play, which deals with both the present and past lives of the characters, presents Rola as a dangerous/deadly woman in the human community. She is

labelled a femme fatale, a whore, a seductress, and an evil and destructive woman unfit to be the queen of Mata Kharibu's empire. In fact, in the present, she is depicted as a courtesan and in the past, she is depicted as Madame Tortoise-the queen in Mata Kharibu's court known as a notorious whore. Rola is portrayed as a wicked seductress, a whore, a woman whose destructive beauty causes her path to be littered with dead lovers she callously sends to their early graves. Rola is also regarded as a dreadful woman in both past and present existences because two of her lovers died in their quest to possess her beauty and love (22). She is said to have abandoned her husband for Mata Kharibu, and akin to Helen of Troy, a war was fought over her.

Show me a man not overcome with passion for a beautiful woman. Her boldness is so reckless that she shows her love for a man's friend even before his face; she knows no pity in her passion, and always defends herself by attacking her accuser. But she is cunning in love's ways... A man in love with a beautiful woman, is lost in desire of the wanton-this is the tragedy of a man's life (Frank Harris 322).

The excerpt above attests to the fact that human beings always want to possess beautiful things and this objectifies women. However, just as men desire beautiful women and yearn for pleasure and gratification against all odds, women also break boundaries to gratify their desperate inner cravings for the men they love. This is seen in the relationship between the male and female characters in the selected text. The implication is that though patriarchal constructions of femme fatale project beautiful and captivating women as the purveyors of the tragic fate of men, yet other factors like tragic flaw, inordinate desire, ambition, personal choice, ignorance, overwhelming influence and impetuosity are all involved in the tragic consequences of femme fatale as reflected in the literary text under investigation. For instance, in the play, *A Dance of the Forests*, though Rola/Madame Tortoise's beauty is described as frighteningly beautiful and irresistible, despite her loveliness, the tragedy will not have occurred if the central male character, Mata Kharibu, and others did not make the choices of bringing her into their lives because of her alluring beauty.

In his resolve to fight a war because of a woman despite warnings, Mata Kharibu tells the Soothsayer, "If you come to tell me of unfavourable stars / Soothsayer, turn round and go out again. We will fight this / War in spite of cowards and auguries" (58). This study argues that Mata Kharibu's irrational actions is a vivid reflection of blind passion that mutes the voice of reason and leads to his defeat and tragedy, including other male characters in the play. They allow their emotions to gain sway over their reason and this leads to their bad decisions and personal choices that become detrimental to them. Their pursuit of beauty and love and their yearning for pleasure and the gratification of their hearts' desires is, perhaps, one of the typical tragedies of life, a symbol for ever. Thus, a man, despite his genius, suffers also through his own excesses and tragic flaw, and bound to the stake of his own passionate sensibilities and consumed, as with fire. In other words, the male characters' inordinate desires, ambition, ignorance, personal choices, overwhelming influence and impetuosity, rather than the destructive beauty of their women lead to their tragedy.

In the play, Warrior talks about the war Mata Kharibu wants them to fight because of his inordinate desire, ambition and the overwhelming influence of his love for Madame Tortoise' beauty as an unjust war. He tells the Physician, "It is an unjust war. I cannot lead my men into battle / merely to recover the trousseau of any woman... / But Mata Kharibu is so bent on bloodshed that... / Is this the action of a ruler who values the peace of his subjects?" (54). Mata Kharibu wants to possess Rola's beauty and in some ways, conquer it. So, he says, "I will be satisfied with much blood. Does it not mean a great battle? On Kharibu's side at least, there will be real soldiers fighting" (58). Significantly, though the beauty of the central female characters is a veritable source of destruction, yet it is not altogether the cause of the tragedy of their lovers or partners. Rola's men are tragic characters whose qualities of destruction residing in their tragic nature motivate their actions and personal choices as reflected in the play under study.

In the same vein, Madame Tortoise's desperation to have Warrior is evident in her illogical actions and personal choices. She feels slighted by Warrior's blunt refusal to do her bidding. So, she furiously tells him, "What are you? Men have killed for me. / Men have died for me. Have you flints in your eye? Fool, / Have you ever lived?... /I, Madame Tortoise, spurned / by a common soldier. For that! Was it for that?" (64-65). Quite obviously, Mata Kharibu, Rola, and other characters in the play are all motivated, even driven by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware. They all engage even in self-destructive actions just to have what they want and this leads to their eventual tragedy. For instance, in the play, the soothsayer is not comfortable with Mata Kharibu's unreasonable decision to send his soldiers to war. Therefore, he asks him why he wants to proceed despite the unfavourable stars. Nevertheless, the powerful and overwhelming influence of the unconscious on human behaviour, is glaringly at work in the central characters in the text.

Thus, rather than heed to the soothsayer's advice, Mata Kharibu tells him, "It is too late to stop. I have been frightened. / I dare not stop. I cannot stop. That captain of my army has / put a curse on me.... / Why should my slave, my subject, my mere human property / say, unless he is mad, I shall not fight this war. Is he a freak?" (60). Essentially, it is the unconscious desires of the id for pleasure and gratification that motivate all the characters in the play to be involved in unjustifiable and ruinous actions to satisfy their desires without considering the consequences. Thus, the id, which reveals the selfish nature of human beings aimed at satisfying the instincts at all costs is made manifest in all the characters under study as they are cut off from the external world (reality) and plunged in their own world of perception to obey the inexorable pleasure principle.

Most often, a man's heart desires a beautiful woman and yearns for satisfaction against all odds, and then, in his quest for pleasure and inordinate desire for satisfaction at the hands of a beautiful woman, a man gets trapped in his own passions as vividly portrayed in the text under investigation. Even Warrior finds it very difficult to come to terms with Mata Kharibu's impetuous actions and illogical decisions because of a woman's beauty and love. Thus, he boldly tells the Physician, "You have done your work. You may tell the king / That I was mad before, but now I am fully returned to my senses / Go to the woman who draws / the frown on his face and greases the thunder of his voice... / I will not fight her war" (55).

Warrior's disappointment and disapproval of Mata Kharibu's behaviour reverberates the study's stance that, though the captivating and irresistible beauty of a woman associates her with destructive tendencies, yet she cannot solely be the carrier of the fatality without the contributing

actions and personal choices of the men who are involved in relationships with her and are usually termed victims. Thus, it will be a disservice to the womenfolk to solely place such disastrous consequences on them because every man has a role to play in whatever choices he makes.

In *A Dance of the Forests*, a play which deals with both the present and past lives of the characters, Rola is regarded as a dangerous/deadly woman in the human community. She is labelled a femme fatale, a whore, a seductress, and an evil and destructive woman unfit to be the queen of Mata Kharibu's empire. In fact, in the present, she is depicted as a courtesan and in the past, she is depicted as Madame Tortoise—the queen in Mata Kharibu's court known as a notorious whore. Rola is portrayed as a wicked seductress, a whore, a woman whose destructive beauty causes her path to be littered with dead lovers she callously sends to their early graves. She is also regarded as a dreadful woman in both past and present existences because some of her lovers died in their quest, inordinate desires and personal choices to possess her love and beauty (22).

Essentially, though an alluring woman is a passive agent of tragedy and her beauty a catalyst for destruction, she is not entirely to blame for the tragedy of the men who are involved in relationships with her. Beautiful and attractive women occupy a central position in the tragedy of men, obviously by their captivating beauty which intoxicates their lovers or partners as reflected in the life of the major female character, Rola/Madame Tortoise. Nevertheless, it is the tragic flaw, inordinate desires, ambition, overwhelming influence and ignorance of the male and female characters in the play that bring about violence, hasty actions, poor decisions and personal choices that culminate into tragedy and death. The tragedy of the characters under study, is a pointer to the fact that man often acts against his better judgment, and follows the call of his instincts and passion against the dictates of his reason, thereby 'abandoning the dignity of his proper nature' and behaving like a beast (Muhammad Badawi 57). For instance, in the play, *A Dance of the Forests*, Mata Kharibu's burning and inordinate desire for pleasure and satisfaction manifests in his overwhelming love for Rola/Madame Tortoise, his irrational decisions, violent actions and personal choices.

Interestingly, the personality of the major male and female characters in the text is brought to the fore through the interplay of the Psychoanalytic concepts of the id and the unconscious, as well as inordinate desire, ambition, tragic flaw, overwhelming influence and ignorance. These all manifest in the characters' dialogue, impetuous actions and personal choices which eventually lead to the tragic consequences of femme fatale as reflected in the literary text under investigation. Moreover, when people are overwhelmed by their burning desires for pleasure and gratification, they become trapped in their own passions and utterly powerless to make the right decisions as reflected in the lives of Mata Kharibu and Rola/Madame Tortoise. For instance, for the sake of a beautiful woman, Rola/Madame Tortoise, Mata Kharibu sends his subjects to fight meaningless wars that send them to early graves.

This is akin to King David of the Hebrew tradition, who, for the sake of a beautiful woman, Bathsheba (Uriah's wife), sends Uriah and other servants of his to battle and in the end, they are killed (II Samuel Chapter 11: 1–27). Consequently, the id at work in the characters' lives is regarded as the impetuous, unconscious part of the mind that has no understanding of any form of reality or consequence, for which cause it seeks for immediate gratification at all costs. Because it is always trying to satisfy its hunger for pleasure, it operates without any thought of consequences, anxiety, ethics, logic, precaution, or morality (Ann Dobie 57). In their pursuit of love, beauty, pleasure and satisfaction, the characters in the play under consideration engage in many illogical and suicidal actions

which eventually lead to their tragedy. Moreover, the powerful and overwhelming influence of the id and the unconscious, is evident in the characters' burning and inordinate desires for pleasure and satisfaction; this subjugates them and compels them to engage in seemingly preposterous and hazardous actions and personal choices which eventually lead to their tragedy.

It also lends credence to the fact that the id, which operates on the pleasure principle, and only takes into account what it wants while disregarding all consequences, is noticeable in the characters' inordinate desires, actions and personal choices for pleasure and gratification that lead to their catastrophic end. For example, patriarchal idiosyncrasies of male domination, power and freedom, reflect in Mata Kharibu's self-important overbearing attitude and confidence, pride and insensitivity which lead to his downfall. He brags before his subjects and says, "Not only he. Everyone who thinks like him, / be he soldier or merchant. / I will have no moral termite a thousand miles within my domain. / Mata Kharibu is not the idle eye that watches contemptible insects /eat away the strength of his kingdom (58).

The unconscious, which has a very powerful and overwhelming influence on the characters' behaviour is made manifest even in their language use and as Raman Selden asserts, reason has never had things all its own way because pleasure and desire continue to disrupt the clear lines of rationality (223) as reflected in all the characters in the text. In fact, the id plays out in all of them as they display their behavioural difficulties such as impetuosity, hate, overwhelming love, rashness, passion, rebellion, disobedience, naivety, and docility which manifest in their perplexities which also precipitate the agony and terrible ordeal they undergo. Additionally, it is the unconscious desires of the id for pleasure and satisfaction that motivate the desperate and violent cravings of the characters for gratification without an eye to consequences, and of course, it precipitates their violent and tragic ends as vividly portrayed in the selected play. The unconscious is therefore revealed as having a very powerful and overwhelming influence on the behaviour, actions and personal choices of the characters in the play under study.

Moreover, Madame Tortoise in the court of Mata Kharibu eight centuries ago is a historical prototype of Rola. She is also regarded as a femme fatale whose irresistible feminine charms, intoxicate her lovers/pursuers and lead to their destruction. Obaneji tells Rola, "I don't think that would be any better than here. /Isn't the graveyard filled with your lovers?... / Well, look at her. / Doesn't she look the type who would /drive men to madness and self-destruction! (21). Adenebi also talks about the assumed seductive and destructive nature of Rola's beauty when he says, "Nothing? Do you call that nothing? / Two lovers in the graveyard. / And the sordidness of it. / The whole horrible scandal /How did I ever get in your company?" (22). Adenebi further refers to Rola/Madame Tortoise as the woman who drains the life from men, slowly or in violence (42). Though a product of a patriarchal society, she is said to have abandoned her husband for Mata Kharibu, and akin to Helen of Troy, a war was fought over her. Hear Sylvia Bryan's observation about Rola, "Madame Tortoise/Rola, has a similarly destructive effect on men; / a personification of sex urge, /she drives men to desperation by intoxicating them / with irrepressible desire for her" (124).

Bryan's position corroborates the play's depiction of Rola as a woman whose feminine charms and beauty bring destruction to countless men as seen in the dialogue between Adenebi and her (23-24). However, the male characters' ambition, ignorance, tragic flaws, inordinate desires, personal choices, overwhelming influence and impetuosity, borne out of their tragic nature, all enhance the

formation of femme fatale tragedy as reflected in the plays. When Adenebi accuses Rola of also destroying young men, she replies, “I regret nothing. You men are conceited fools. / Nothing was ever done on my account. Nothing./ What you do is boost yourselves all the time. By every action./ When that one killed the other, was it on my account?/ When he killed himself, could he claim that he did it for me?/ He was only big with himself, so leave me out of it (24). It is noteworthy that though Rola’s beauty is described as charming and irresistible, as events keep unfolding in the play, Warrior, a subordinate of Mata Kharibu is seen not only rejecting Madame Tortoise’s advances and promises, but also refusing to be seduced by her alluring beauty.

Warrior’s encounter with Rola/Madame Tortoise aligns with this study’s argument that though wild and powerful like the forces of nature, a woman’s beauty cannot be destructive without the contributing actions and personal choices of some men for pleasure and satisfaction. Rola/Madame Tortoise is also regarded as a dreadful woman in both past and present existences because two of her lovers died in their quest to possess her love (22). However, when Obaneji tells her that “the graveyards are filled with her lovers,” and that “she looks like the type who would drive men to madness and self-destruction” (21), her response is that the men begged that their lives be wrung out of them, and that their heads be turned inside out (23). Also, when Adenebi accuses her of ruining countless men, both young and old, she tells him that the men are investors who choose to invest foolishly (24). Thus, to Rola, her relationship with the men who eventually get destroyed on account of her beauty is purely business. Consequently, she is not to be held responsible for their tragedy as even their extravagant spending on her is an investment.

Mata Kharibu insists on going to battle without considering the peace of his people and the entire kingdom. Warrior, while talking about how Mata Kharibu’s inordinate desire for Rola/Madame Tortoise’ beauty and love motivate his bad decisions and personal choice for war, he also tells the physician, “Mata Kharibu is leader, not merely of soldiers but of men./ Let him turn the unnatural pattern of men/ always eating up one another. /I am suddenly weary of this soldiering where men/ must find new squabbles for their cruelty./ Must I tell the widowed that their men died for another’s trousseau?” (56). It is worthy of note that the id is only concerned about its own satisfaction, and this accounts for why it does not care about reality, consequences, or even the needs of others. Consequently, when the id wants something, it gives no consideration to other things as nothing else becomes important to it.

This is evident in the characters’ overwhelming desire for pleasure and gratification against all odds. It can even be self-destructive in its drive to have what it wants (Dobie 57). Certainly, the id appears in that form in the major characters under study. Thus, in their quest to satisfy their inordinate desires for beauty/handsomeness and love, they get trapped in their own passions through their impetuous actions and personal choices. In fact, the tragedy of the major characters in pursuit of beauty/handsomeness and love is strange and terrible, and their actions defy rational understanding (Richard Gill 228) as vividly portrayed in the selected play.

Thus, the selected concepts in Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory are used to explore in detail the depths of the major characters’ motivation and conflicts in the selected play and also tracing the intricate, mysterious operations of their minds. In addition, the inner passion driving the major male and female characters under study, find expression in their personal choices and impetuous actions which, in turn, lead to their destruction. It therefore becomes apparent that, the Psychoanalytic concepts of the id and

the unconscious, offer great insights into the major characters' lives and the conflict of opposing forces within them; in fact, they dig up the unexcavated monuments of the characters' minds. In other words, the interplay of these concepts, being the inner forces which influence the complex behaviour and irrational decisions of these characters, provide great and fascinating insights into the complexity of people's emotional lives and the motives which inform their actions and personal choices as reflected in the selected play.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, femme fatale has elicited a lot of critical comments from several significant scholars, who have examined the concept from different perspectives. The various criticisms implicitly reveal the different representations and interpretations of femme fatale in both Western and African societies as reflected in the selected play. Interestingly, even though the critical works reviewed all articulate and underpin the structures upon which this study stands, that other than the inherent flaw located in the tendency of some females to bear on males, there are other factors such as tragic flaw, inordinate desire, ambition, personal choice, overwhelming influence, ignorance and impetuosity on the part of the male gender which enhance femme fatale tragedy but are never considered when the fatality of the entrancingly beautiful woman is discussed. This study, therefore, demonstrates the complexity of femme fatale as it explores her beyond mere destructive tendencies usually associated with her to equally consider the contributing actions of the men, who usually are termed victims of femme fatale. The major point is that all human beings are products of the choices they make and victims of femme fatale are also products of the choices they make.

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