

## The Reconfiguration of Sisyphian Myth in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Akwanya's *Orimili*

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### ABSTRACT

A literary work fascinates scholars and critics in different ways which may be based on literary experience or interest. In whichever perspective, literature engages the mind with multiplicity of interpretations. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Akwanya's *Orimili* have been studied in varied ways but no study, as far as this research is concerned, has looked at either or both texts from the view of configuration of the myth of Sisyphus. Here is a reading that intends to look at the mythic patterns in the two works with respect to the characters of Santiago and Ekwenze Orimili, the protagonists. In the study, attempt is made to define the Sisyphian features, and establish how the patterns are configured in the two texts. The study uses the tool of archetypal criticism, from the perspectives of Northrop Frye, to examine these similar discursive formations in the texts. The study establishes that mythic thinking gives literature rootedness in tradition, and universal appeal.

**Key words:** Sisyphus, Myth(ic), Desire and Anguish, Absurdity, Archetype, Mythic Ideation

### INTRODUCTION

The existence of various perspectives on and orientations to the study of literary texts reinforces Northrop Frye's teaching that literature is 'an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries' (*Anatomy* 17). It is against this background that the present study makes its contribution to scholarship in the light of the reconfiguration of Sisyphian myth in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Amechi Akwanya's *Orimili*. Scholars and literary critics have studied the two literary texts in varied ways, but none has studied either or both in this direction which is an insight from mythic ideation. The former has been analyzed from the angle of existentialism. There is also analysis of the literary work as a site of encounter with symbols in the sense of representation that is intimately connected to the Bible. *Orimili*, on the other hand, has been examined from a sociological point of view; how *Orimili* is a victim of injustice in Okocha community through the denial of *ozo* title. The work has also received critical attention as a purely linguistic production in the direction of discourse of exclusion or 'un-belongingness.' The present paper intends to bridge this gap in scholarship by examining the identity of the myth of Sisyphus in them. Therefore, this study will establish, through the analysis of the characters of Santiago and Orimili respectively, the Sisyphian pattern in the two selected narratives using archetypal criticism. This confirms the words of Fidelis U. Okoro that 'the strength of a literary work is dependent on the multiplicity of interpretations to which it can give birth

to' (186). Similarly, A.N. Akwanya sees the literary work of art as 'a closed book, unless put to risk in the space of the reader, who analyses, who interprets, who judges as to what it all comes to' (*Literary Criticism* 134, emphasis added).

The primary motivation for this study is to show the identifiable features of the Sisyphian myth that connects the two selected texts, not limited by age, culture or provenance which can be recuperated by mythic thinking or by thinking back to literary tradition, what Ernst Cassirer calls 'mythic ideation.' Sosthenes Ekeh, citing Akwanya, observes that 'the measure of progress in arts does not involve a leap forward, as in the sciences; if anything, it is a "doubling back" to tradition, and the opening of new paths in a new work is by thinking along with tradition' (5). Accordingly, this research is geared towards examining the recurrent patterns of the myth of Sisyphus in the two novels, *The Old and the Sea* and *Orimili*.

The figure of Sisyphus, though rooted in ancient Greek mythology, appears today in literary studies as the myth of Sisyphus which is perceivable in the two texts. As a mythic figure, Sisyphus resurrects in the characters of Santiago and Orimili in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Orimili* respectively. These characters, just like Sisyphus, are recognizable in literature by the existential realities of struggles and failures encapsulated in the idea of shooting near target, the absurd situation, and the sequence of desire and anguish. The two literary works are from different authors, different cultures, different ages, and presumably different authorial

orientations. The choice of American and African authors is to validate the claim that there is something universal and enduring about literature not hindered or limited by time and space. Therefore, what sustains this universal appeal of literature may not be found in poetic matter; instead, it is found in poetic form. Akwanya notes that 'whereas the material cause, the things that go into the making of a poem, is variable and can be anything at all, form perdures over time' (*Literary Criticism* 49). Furthermore, Akwanya argues that the 'form is the fundamental question that exercises literary studies' (50). This view connects with Derrida's view of literature as 'meaning rethought as form.' In the context of the present essay, the poetic form is the mythological image of Sisyphus which qualifies as a symbolic form.

Archetypal criticism is chosen to account for the similarity in the running patterns of the Sisyphian myth in the two texts. This theory connects the novels to literary tradition, and validates the view that a literary work is as old as humanity and announces its presence in different forms which can be in lyric, in narrative or in drama; hence, there is something archaic about art whether in the genus of literature or music or painting or sculpture, etc.

The study using archetypal/myth criticism assesses Santiago and Orimili as characters imbued with Sisyphus identity. Thus, the two texts will be seen in a new light from existing readings, through this textual analysis, of their 'belongingness' to the 'universal text' of literature. This confirms the thought of Derrida that a literary work though perceived in its individuality as a structured totality (*sunolon*) at the same time shares with other texts in the history of literature in terms of definite form.

In all, every encounter with a literary work of art is an encounter with new insights into the work's possibilities of critical interpretations. It is along this thinking that Roland Barthes conceives 'poetry as a movement of thought, risked and satisfied' (qtd in Akwanya, 'The World's Far Side' 88). This research engages thought from the view of the myth of Sisyphus, and its patterns of identification using the aforementioned literary works.

## THE RECONFIGURATION OF SISYPHEAN MYTH

This part of the essay addresses clearly the topic of this research which is the reconfiguration of Sisyphian myth in the two selected texts, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Akwanya's *Orimili*. In this light, the study will examine the features associated with the Sisyphus figures. First, it will look at the existential experiences of the Sisyphian characters in the texts which are characterized by struggles and failures. Also, we will look at the absurd situation typified in the two heroes, Santiago and Orimili. And lastly, attention will be drawn to the twin realities of desire and anguish as discursive formations or recurring sequences in the two literary works vis-à-vis is the Sisyphian pattern

### Shooting Near the Target: Structuration of Struggles and Failures

One of the recurrent patterns of structuration of the worlds ('the possible worlds' as expressed by Paul Ricoeur,

*Hermeneutics* 202) disclosed in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Orimili* is a dynamics of struggles and failures manifest in the experience of the two protagonists in the texts. This pattern, characterised as shooting near target, is the kind we associate with Sisyphus.

In Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago fits perfectly into the description of one who shoots near the target. He struggles all through his life to prove himself a successful fisherman by going to the deep sea, but when he seems to have achieved success, he loses his fish to the sharks. He is an old and experienced fisherman to the extent that his boy, Manolin, rates him to be outstanding among his counterparts. However, his struggles as a fisherman in the deep sea of the Gulf Stream in Cuba do not yield the desired success to the effect that people rightly associate him with failure. This fact is seen when Manolin takes his master to the Terrace Restaurant to buy a beer for him. There, the old man becomes an object of mockery among other fishermen (1). Other older fishermen simply 'looked at him and were sad' (1). These varied reactions are as a result of the old man's unfortunate experiences at sea: he is unable to catch fish for many days, while the successful ones are already selling theirs at Havana market. His struggles and failures in life have become ingredients for caricature and 'sympathetic identification' (Jauss). The opening sentence in the novel by the omniscient narrator captures vividly the plight and pathetic situation of the old man. It reads: 'He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish' (1). The narrator further remarks that the old man has become 'salao, which is the worst form of unlucky' (1). For being unable to catch fish for days, Manolin, his companion, is withdrawn from him by the parents, perhaps, with undisclosed intention that no one associates himself with an unlucky man. His unsuccessful fishing experience becomes very obvious when Manolin joins another boat, and they 'caught three good fish the first week' (1). This seems to suggest that the unfortunate destiny of Santiago could even contaminate or adulterate any bright destiny that it comes in contact with. Manolin's luck could not be made pronounced until he leaves Santiago. The implication is that Santiago's condemnation is highly projected by this contrast. He is doomed, destined to fail and infect anyone around him with same.

What is more, when the old fisherman, Santiago, eventually succeeds in catching a very huge fish, Marlin, that people testify to be extra-ordinary, it turns out to be only a skeleton of fish already eaten by sharks. This sequence portrays Santiago as a Sisyphian figure who struggles, but all his efforts end always in near success story. The mythic figure Sisyphus pushes a stone up a hill, and it rolls back each moment. In the case of Santiago, we see a similar configuration, in this case with the catching of big fish after days of struggles and efforts but has only a skeleton as the fruit of his days of labour; he fights a battle that is won and lost.

Similarly, the sequence of struggle and failure is an undeniable pattern we find in Akwanya's *Orimili*. Ekwenze Orimili Nwofia - the protagonist of the text - wants to be an *ozo* member in Okocha community, and leaves no

stone unturned to get to the end, yet he is unsuccessful. He struggles throughout his life for admission into the peerage as he seems to believe that the meaning of his life depends entirely on this one singular quest. This endeavour he strongly hopes will give him identity in Okocha, and lay to rest his anxiety as well as his haunting 'fear of the unknown.' Hence, he struggles with all the resources at his disposal to secure it. For Orimili, nothing matters except the great desire – *ozo* initiation. The narrator remarks that:

Orimili's hands were full because he was saving for his title. Until the last harvest season, the idea of taking the title had been an object of fantasy for him. Now it had become a project and moved up from fantasy to the fore of his consciousness (41-2).

The catalyst that propels Ekwenze Orimili for the *ozo* title is his sad and alienating experience in which he was treated by Okocha titled men 'like a woman' as an eye witness in a fracas (42). Orimili witnesses a scuffle between five or six masquerades and one of his boatmen. In the course of the misunderstanding, one of the masquerades accidentally unmasks the face of a fellow. Ironically, *ozo* fraternity indict Orimili's passenger of abomination. Surprisingly for Orimili, though a witness and interviewed privately by two titled men, only the reports from the fellow in the mask, its companion and Orimili's passenger are considered to the disadvantage of the latter, an innocent young man. The narrator in the account of the incident makes the following comments:

Did it mean then that Ekwenze Orimili could not be trusted to report accurately what he himself had witnessed? For he was sure that if this had happened, the assembly would not be able afterwards to give the verdict against an innocent man. Rather, they had brushed him aside, treated him like an uninitiate: like a woman! For this reason, Ekwenze Orimili had decided to ask the titled men, in a formal kind of way, what they thought of him. That was the meaning of his application to be initiated into the *ozo* society (42).

Therefore, he wants to know through his application to the *ozo* cult 'whether he was a citizen or a stranger' (42). Ekeh observes that 'whether or not Orimili is a *bona fide* member of Okocha society on whom to be bestowed an *Ozo* title is one of the central problematics of *Orimili*' (vi). Orimili like Odewale in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are not to Blame* gets deeply perplexed with the question: 'I must know who I am!' (3.3). Unfortunately, he fails in his application to be admitted into the *ozo* fellowship. His quest to know who he is reveals that he is a stranger, and not a citizen of Okocha. OgbuefiOranudu after long historical account in the meeting of the *ozo* society reveals that Orimili has a history. He reports that Nwofias came to Okocha a generation or two before the war between Amofia and Ebonasa, villages in Okocha, but nobody knows from where except somewhere in the North (83). Unfortunately, 'to be anybody in Okocha, one need have no history; one might as well be obscure!' (37). Both OgbuefiOranudu and OgbuefiEmenogha 'had no history, beyond the fact that they were the son of so-and-so, who was the son of so-and-so, until... nothing. Their history could not be traced; it did not matter' (37). On a second

count, no foreigner in the history of Okocha has been conferred with the *ozo* title.

Apart from shooting near success syndrome, absurdity of life constitutes another Sisyphean pattern to be explored in the two works.

### The Absurd Situation

Absurdity is another noticeable feature of the Sisyphean figure, and remains a running pattern in a literary work of art that may be read in the light of the myth of Sisyphus. This feature questions the essence of human struggles that will eventually end in failures. There are indications of absurdity or absurd situations in the lives of Santiago and Orimili in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Orimili* respectively. By absurdity, we mean the meaninglessness and worthlessness of human efforts in the face of a shapeless world. It questions the essence of human life, the struggles man makes in life that end up in 'nothingness' (Jean-Paul Sartre), and whether all the efforts of man is really commensurate with the resultant effect. This existentialist idea is a significant discursive formative in the worlds of the two literary texts in their representation of reality. The experiences of the Sisyphean figures are absurd. However, the world under assessment is the world projected by the text or a possible world not the real world of human existence, as earlier on highlighted. Literary works are concerned with the possibility of existence in these kinds of worlds (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics* 177, 202). Aristotle in this context reminds us that literature deals with the probable. Therefore, it is in the nature of a literary work to create a world. 'What art is should be inferable from the work' (Heidegger, *Poetry* 18).

The whole sequence of events in the world of *The Old Man and the Sea*, with particular reference to Santiago, is intimately connected to this fact of absurdity. The old man (Santiago) finds himself in absurd situations: he fishes alone in the sea, stays eighty-four days in futile struggle to catch fish, fights vigorously to preserve the Marlin he caught in the sea, and finally returns with a skeleton of fish. This is a hopeless world for the old man. And his situation presents many questions that address existential realities. In the beginning of the text, we encounter the old man alone after Manolin leaves him for another boat. His absurd situations tend to alienate him from people. Despite his loneliness in the deep sea as a result of his ill-luck, ageing body and retarding health the old man continues to struggle to catch fish. The narrator describes Santiago in these words:

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks. The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. But none of these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert (1).

The physical description of the old man interrogates the meaning of life as he struggles for nothing. He is 'thin, with deep wrinkles and old scars from handling heavy fish.' In fact, there is no clear evidence that the old man's profes-

sion has any meaning in his life. His struggles in the sea do not seem to improve his lots in life. The uninspiring life of Santiago is a pointer to his poverty in all its ramifications. He has nothing to show for his years of fishing and suffering. Worst still, he suffers from loneliness, abandonment and ill-luck but still struggles to catch fish that becomes a reality on the eighty-fifth day of fruitless labour. In the sea, he struggles with different sharks to preserve Marlin which he has caught. They therefore constitute further obstacles to his success. He continues to forge ahead, killing many of the predators that follow his fish due to the blood that drips from the fish. He only realizes that his efforts have been deflated by the sharks when he reaches home to discover only a skeleton of fish which he killed but already eaten by the sharks. The fishermen around testify that there has not been a catch of fish that is as big as Santiago's. It then dawns on him that all the efforts he invested in going to the sea for days to catch fish do not yield the desired result. Due to his absurd situation, he is handicapped to celebrate his success for killing the biggest fish. In fact, he accepts his absurd situation, and takes the option of sleeping and dreaming about lions (36). His sleeping and dreaming suggests that he accepts his absurd situations.

Santiago's response to absurd situations is that of acceptance of absurdity itself. 'No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable' (12). He sees it as a mode of existence that is part and parcel of his existence in the world that demands nothing than facing the challenges. In contradistinction with Santiago's response to absurd situations, is Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* who takes the option of escapism by committing suicide. He (Okonkwo) comes back from exile and cannot contain the devastating effect of the missionaries to Umuofia culture. This is an absurd situation that he finds himself but reacts differently. Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* confronts his absurd situation by revolt. He kills Mary Dalton, a white girl as a reaction to the racist discrimination which the Afro-Americans suffer. Sren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, advocates a kind of response to absurdity where the individual anchors on the transcendental reality or higher existence through 'leap of faith.'

The pattern of absurd situations we find in *The Old Man and the Sea* recurs in Akwanya's *Orimili*. Like Santiago, Ekwenze Orimili accepts his absurd situations. Orimili struggles all through his life for admission into the *ozo* club, but fails on the grounds that he has a history in Okocha. As a Sisyphian figure, Orimili's struggle and desire for the *ozo* title ends in futility. Contemporaries and friends have always addressed Ekwenze Orimili as 'Ogbuefi' which gives him hope that his candidacy any time he applies to the sodality will not have hitches. Ogbuefi Orandu and Ogbuefi Edozie Nwanze in their exchange of peasantries address him as 'Ogbuefi' (7). Interestingly,

His age-mates had become part of the ruling class of elders, [to the extent that] more and more of the townspeople were referring to him as "Ogbuefi Orimili" or "Ogbuefi Ekwenze Orimili" – as if he had taken the *ozo* title. [And] Orimili appreciated this greatly, for it

sounded to him as the people's voice signifying their recognition of his social worth, and assigning him a place which was his right' (96).

It turns out that his application receives the highest debate, opposition and scrutiny from the *ozo* fellowship. Since 'nobody sprouts out in a society' (35), why the criterion of no history used for Orimili's application?

The most pathetic of the absurd situation is that Orimili's son, Osita Orimili Nwofia, receives a double conferment of title by the same *ozo* society that denies him the same title because he is a stranger in Okocha. Ogbefi Nweke Nwofia who champions the exclusion of Ekwenze Orimili from their group leads the campaign for the conferment of *ozo* title on Osita. Nweke 'quickly got the sodality to agree to hold a reception for the young man [on his return from studies overseas], give him a fathered crimson cap for his head, which was balding rather early, and a pair of *ozo* threads for his ankles' (179). The narrator remarks that it is the first time in the history of Okocha people to honour somebody with the *ozo* title as a symbolic act without paying for it or going through a scrutiny by the elders. As a Sisyphian figure, Ekwenze Orimili finds himself between struggle and failure which is typical of an absurd situation.

We also find this Sisyphian figure in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the person of Okonkwo. This unity in literary works confirms the words of Frye that 'poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels' (qtd in Odoh and Chukwumezie 92). In this light, Odoh and Chukwumezie notes that 'the year that Okonkwo borrows the largest seed yams for enlarged farming is the year he suffers the poorest harvest; the year he intends to take the greatest title in the land is the year he commits murder and goes into exile' (97).

From the foregoing, the absurd situations we find in the lives of Santiago and Orimili are undoubtedly connected to the twin realities of desire and anguish.

### Desire and Anguish

The sequence of desire and anguish is very much evident as part of the discursive formatives of the two literary texts. And this 'facticity' is typical of the myth of Sisyphus, and Sisyphian figures like Santiago and Orimili. Anguish arises from the confrontation between desire and reality.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, desire is at the deep structure configuration of the short narrative. How do we assess the hardships that Santiago passes through, yet remains cheerful and undefeated? He experiences empty skiff and separation from his boy after forty days of futile labour, and still the desire for success propels him to struggle endlessly. From the beginning of the narrative till the end, Santiago struggles almost alone to win livelihood from nature and against nature; what Benoitoni Imane describes as 'one man's perseverance through the harsh life' (24). The cheerful and undefeated eyes of the old man show that his futile labour does not discourage him (1). And his desire to go to the sea everyday shows that he understands and accepts his absurd situation. It is this desire for success that strengthens the old man to be cheerful and undefeated. Santiago's spirit of struggle is

evident in his dialogue with Manolin when the boy wants to rejoin him after a successful fishing experience with a lucky boat. He rejects the boy's request and told him outright to remain with the lucky boat (1). Santiago is not discouraged by his hard experiences, instead they strengthen him. His desires, however, end up in anguish; for one, he desires to give Martin, the owner of Terrace Restaurant, who once gave him food and beers 'the belly meat of a big fish' (4). In fact, he desires to give him more than just that in appreciation of his kindness. Eventually, the desire turns into anguish when the old man returns home with a skeleton of fish.

In *Orimili*, the eponymous hero, Orimili, has one great desire all through his life, and that is to be admitted into the *ozo* peerage, 'the ruling class of wealthy people in Okocha of which the title of peerage was "Ogbuefi"' (6). Even before EkwenzeOrimiliNwofia's application for membership into the *ozo* sodality comes out into the open, the desire is already burning fiercely in him. We have a glimpse of this when OgbuefiOranudu (*UgonnayaOgalanya*) in response to Orimili's greeting called him 'OgbuefiOrimili,' and solemnly invited him to join their peerage. The narrator comments in clear voice that 'Orimili was delighted, and his good humour rose still higher when he heard OgbuefiEdoziNwanze [of Amanza] welcome him with the title of 'Ogbuefi' (7). This double recognition by two titled men in Okocha community gives Orimili hope that they are 'in favour of his [Orimili] becoming a member of the fellowship of title-holders' (7). For Orimili, in fact, his great desire is confirmed by the duo's salutation which for him transcends mere flattery or the likes, and perhaps an indication that his application has received favourable approval in the council of *ozo* members. This aspiration seems unparalleled for EkwenzeOrimiliNwofia who

had held the idea long enough that the title was a most worthy and compelling goal to aspire to, had so often imagined himself decked out in the robes and emblems of *ozo*, and felt how becoming they were that he had begun unconsciously to associate the title with himself (7).

The hope for investiture with the *ozo* is a great desire especially as he receives reassurances from friends for his application (31). As a matter of fact, Orimili earnestly desires the endorsements of many *ozo* members as possible, but his anguish at this point is whether to approach them directly or to leave it at their personal conviction on what they know about him when his application will be debated on in the club (18). Thus, the uncertainty of the desire to join the aldermen of Okocha remains a resonating anguish in his head.

Ekwenze Orimili wants to be initiated into the *ozo* society because of his desire for full integration in his community in order to 'root his family deeper in Okocha,' and tries to explore every possible means (185). Consequently, this desire begins the 'quest sequence.' His financial status and integrity seem to be a plus to the realization of his object of interest. He is 'one of the wealthiest men in Okocha' (7). And his four-apartment bungalow, no doubt, makes him outstanding as 'there were few such houses in Okocha' (1). The speech of OgbuefiUdozo during the debate concerning OrimiliNwofia's candidacy for the *ozotitle* highlights Orimili's exalted standing in his community. As such, Udozo does not

understand why he should not be an *ozo* member, and poses these questions: 'Is Orimili not the wealthiest man in Okocha today? Isn't his son now getting ready to come home from overseas? Who among us here is expecting his son so to return?' (84).

His desire arguably leads him to contract a marriage between Osita, his son studying overseas, and Adoba, OgbuefiObiefunaEmenogha's daughter. He wants to get the necessary connections that will make his dream a reality. Though OgbuefiEmenogha, *Nnadeluaku*, has been his age-long friend, he wants a 'deeper and obviously more permanent relationship' so that he will do all within his power to secure a seat for him among the council of titled men in Okocha (36). The narrator makes the following remarks about Emenogha: 'Adoba was going to marry OsitaNwofia. Fine. He himself was going to put all his energy to work so that Orimili should be made an alderman' (36).

In the midst of his desire, Orimili has doubts about his candidacy for the *ozo* peerage which constitutes anguish in his object of interest. The fear of the unknown and the possibility of exclusion as regards the *ozo* membership were great sources of anguish for Ekwenze Orimili. These unknown forces become 'ghosts' in his life; an idea expressed by Odoh and Chukwumezie as 'the ghost phenomenon' (94). His greatest anguish comes when he 'cast a quick glance in the direction of the sodality house, which lay just on the rim of Amanza at the far side, [with mixed feelings] knowing that it was in that house his fate was to be decided' (18). Ekeh notes that 'Orimili is not just wracked by the failure of his purpose. The anguish has always already been there before the purpose takes a definite shape. In point of fact, it is the very thing that sets off the narrative, which thereby gives it a name. In this wise, the anguish is ontological' (29).

Threatened by the anguish of the ghost phenomenon, Orimili recalls that neither his 'father nor his grandfather had taken the title' (7). On the other hand, he feels he has not yet the needed connections from renowned *ozo* members who will speak on his behalf. He, therefore, thinks of using the evenings at Amanza to build up the necessary contacts and relationships that will sail him through instead of waiting to be admitted purely on merit, especially as he will not be privileged to take part in the debate for his application. From the sequence of events, Orimili's desire for the *ozo* title has *ab initio* anguish coming from the uncertainty of his admission.

## CONCLUSION

Sisyphus is a mythic figure entrapped in endless and futile labour without any hope of ending his absurd situation. He engages in tasks that demand struggles which are motivated by desire for success. He lives in an absurd world. Similarly, the efforts of a Sisyphian figure end up in failures and anguish which comes either from the uncertainty of his desire or from his near success story. He desires to succeed in his pursuit in life but loses out on coming close to it. However, his response is neither escapism nor revolt; rather he accepts his absurd situation as part and parcel of his existence. Though the figure of Sisyphus originated from Greek mythology, as a mythic figure he existed before he was named.

Santiago and Ekwenze Orimili of *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Orimili* respectively embody qualities that make them Sisyphian figures. Like Sisyphus, they have the same recurrent patterns of struggles and failures, absurd situations as well as desire and anguish.

The study has established that the myth of Sisyphus is a viable reading in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Orimili*. The identified features that qualify the texts as having Sisyphian configuration were explored in the characters of Santiago and Ekwenze Orimili. These mythic patterns are the discursive formations of struggles and failures as well as the absurd situations initiated by the desire of the Sisyphian characters for a successful task in life or to secure their objects of interest, and the attending anguish. The reading of the two texts as rooted in mythic thinking with a common denominator in the myth of Sisyphus confirms the universal nature of literature. This universal literary experience offers its promise on the literary form and literary tradition which are not variable on the basis of individual interest; Heidegger teaches that 'whenever and however we may try to think, we think within the sphere of tradition' (*Identity*41). The study also confirms the timelessness of literature through the process of myth-making.

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