Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Wake Me When I’m Gone by Odafe Atogun", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1555. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Odafe Atogun

Wake Me When I’m Gone

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Wake Me When I’m Gone
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Odafe Atogun, *Wake Me When I'm Gone*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2017, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781782118428
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Odafe Atogun (Author)

Odafe Atogun was born in Nigeria, in the town of Lokoja, where the Rivers Niger and Benue meet. He studied journalism at the Times Journalism Institute, Lagos. Now a full-time writer, he is married and lives in Abuja working on his third novel. His debut novel, *Taduno's Song* (2016), was selected for the BBC Radio 2 Book Club. *Wake Me When I'm Gone* is Atogun's second novel. His books have been translated first into German, Italian, and Turkish, followed by other languages. In 2018, Atogun published a short story, *Man of God*, in *Johannesburg Review of Books*, December 5, 2018.

Sources:

The author's website: Odafeatogun.com (accessed: June 4, 2019),

Odafe Atogun at Canongate.co.uk (accessed: June 4, 2019),

Odafe Atogun at Ouidabooks.com (accessed: June 4, 2019),

Wikipedia (accessed: June 4, 2019).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Summary

The story opens with Ese's musings on a painting of herself, trying to figure out what the countless suitors had seen that made her so beautiful in their eyes. She concludes, "This was long ago, when we had not seen much of civilisation, and our daily existence was guided by ancient rules and traditions." – a statement of the lot which awaited her after the death of her husband.

Ese is a young widow who once excelled in business on Main Street Market until that fateful Friday when news filters in from the farms that her husband, Tanto, is dead. This leaves Ese and her son, Noah, so devastated that she resolves not to remarry out of love for her late husband and son, though tradition requires her to. Her decision not to remarry makes the inhabitants of Main Street regard Ese as foolish. Especially since she rejects the incessant advances of the Chief, who owned the lone white horse in that neighbourhood. So, the Chief, bent on reinforcing the law of the land, which holds that a widow is supposed to remarry after a given period or her children are handed to her late husband's brother, connives with the High priest to place Ese under house arrest and give her son, to one of his mean paternal uncles, Jaja. However, Tanto's best friend, Kpofe, intervenes, and Ese triumphs.

She regains custody of her son and resolves to return to Main Street to revamp her business. The people on Main Street experience a commercial and social revival, most especially due to Toya's painting of Ese – a highly coveted portrait. Unfortunately, one day, it is stolen, and its theft causes chaos and throws Ese's village into another dark episode. After several weeks of heavy storms, the High Priest dies, predicting that the sanctity of the village will only be restored by a young man whose half-obscured face was in the stolen painting.

In the meantime, Ese and Noah live on food reserves while hoping for better days. Noah befriends the orphans on the outskirts of the village but, regrettably, starts suffering from a high fever and dies. His death takes a toll on Ese, who, after recalling Mazamaza's words, "Go back to your village, one day your son will live again," decides to transform her house into an orphanage by taking in her son's four orphans from the outskirts. Again by tradition, Ese, as a woman, is not supposed to build and own a house in her village. So when she starts moulding blocks for this purpose, she is stopped. The chief and high priest plan

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

to hang her at the marketplace on Main Street. Fortunately, the orphans and Jaja's son persuade Ese to leave. She does so on the eve of the execution. After a month's journey, fate leads her to Mama, the kind old widow who gives her sanctuary in her mansion.

Coincidentally, Ese's arrival in that village appears to be a fulfilled prophecy that Mama had held on to for the past twenty years; three days later, she dies after bequeathing her mansion to Ese. Mama's death marks the start of Ese's journey to fulfilling destiny: the gods bless her with a stray boy who coincidentally is her late son's lookalike. Convinced that he is her late son, she names him Noah; they both start a flourishing business and she resolves to transform her mansion into an orphanage.

Finally, Ese triumphs over the dreadful laws in her adopted village, thanks to the help of Kewe and the youths, coupled with the young Chief's approval. Kpofe finds his way to the new village and confirms to Ese that her son has truly died and that the adopted Noah is a gift from the gods as a reward for her faith. This confirms Mazamaza's prediction that Ese's son will live again. The adopted Noah returns to Main Street, Ese's village of birth, where the people eagerly await his arrival to fulfil the late High Priest's prophecy. It held that Noah would become the new chief and lead them into an era of prosperity and beauty.

Analysis

Repressive institutions like the patriarchy, have always been at the core of societal instability, whether one is speaking of it in our present, daily lives or mythic and fictional narratives from ancient times. In the Yoruba, as in many other African cultures, widows and orphans are often victims of such oppressive institutions. The story of Ese is one of great tragi-comedy as it chronicles the struggles of a widow to surmount cultural and patriarchal limitations. Through her faith, determination, and the help of good-willed people, she is able to remake life, re-actualise herself, celebrate the joy of motherhood, and offer hope to orphans. Kpofe's intervention for Ese to be released and regain custody of her son is an indication that some of these repressive traditions are dying. Furthermore, the gods often come to the aid of these vulnerable groups. Ese becomes the inheritor of the unknown Mama, while Noah becomes the ruler of Main Street as it was prophesied. Like the Biblical Noah, Noah leads a new breed of people in the above story. The narrative decries repressive traditional

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

	norms, particularly those oppressing, stigmatising and depriving widows and orphans. More so, the gods, use a widow and an orphan to restore beauty and prosperity in Main Street. So, as the title of the novel suggests, these repressive traditions must be confronted and erased to grant equity among people. The myth, therefore, accentuates the necessity for children and young adults to remain hopeful for a fulfilling life while at the same time being bold to defy constraining cultural practices.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Child, children Death Disobedience Hope* Loss Oppression Orphans Parents (and children) Prediction/prophecy Punishment Step-parents Tradition
Further Reading	Genyi, Akwaya George, "Widowhood and Nigerian Womanhood: another Context of Gendered Poverty in Nigeria", *Research on humanities and Social Sciences* 3.7 (2013): 68–73. Habila, Helon, "*Wake Me When I'm Gone* by Odafe Atogun review – magical thinking in Nigeria", *The Guardian* 2017, October 14 (accessed: September 19, 2020). Okoye, P. U., *Widowhood: A National or Cultural Tragedy*, Enugu: Nucik Publishers, 1995. Henley, Tara, "Odafe Atogun's *Wake Me When I'm Gone* 'delightful'", *Toronto Star*, November 10, 2017 (accessed: September 19, 2020).

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Wake Me When I’m Gone by Odafe Atogun", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1555. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.