Daniel A. Nkemleke, "Entry on: Arrah and the Slave Girl by Cyprian Assam Egbe", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Eleanor A. Dasi and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/433. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Cyprian Assam Egbe

Arrah and the Slave Girl

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype Slavery in Africa





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

General information	
Title of the work	Arrah and the Slave Girl
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Ejagham
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	March 17, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Kembong
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults and adults)
Author of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com
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Creators



Cyprian Assam Egbe (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 57 (in 2018)

Social status: Esongribo*

Profession: Farming

Language of narration: Ejagham

* Esongribo is the second class title of the “Ekpe”, a male secret cult among the Ejaghams of Manyu Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. It comes after the “Sesekou”, which is the highest title in the cult.

Bio prepared by Daniel Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: Kembong is one of the villages of the Eyumojock Sub-Division that form the Ejagham tribe of Manyu Division. The Ejaghams are of Bantu stock and probably migrated because of wars and the need for a peaceful settlement. A majority of their population is found in Cross-River state in Nigeria. They are also known as the Ekoi. Like many other tribes of this part of the globe, they believe in the supremacy of the ancestors whom they worship, with special cults for this purpose. As a matter of principle custom, they do not sell land to strangers and newcomers in the belief that the land is owned by their ancestors (the first settlers) and they are simply heirs to it. They hold the Lake Ijagham as their sacred cradle. With regard to art, the people are good sculptors but their produce ends at the level of local consumption. Their main economic activity is fishing and farming (yams, maize, plantains) both for subsistence and commercial purposes. Some remote villages in the Ejagham tribe still practice female genital mutilation.

Occasion: Staged

Summary

A long time ago, there lived a beautiful young eighteen-year old girl, Arrah, from a royal family. Her grace and charm left no young man indifferent both within and outside the village of Tinto. Her beauty was also complemented by good manners and diligent housekeeping which she learnt from her mother. As a result, a long line of suitors called on her every day to ask for her hand, but she and her parents found none worthy enough of her. Eventually, despite the fact that in those days people did not approve of inter-tribal marriages, a wealthy prince named Ateba, from a distant land, Ndebaya, soon made an impression on the damsel and her family by regularly sending them expensive and varied gifts. So, Arrah finally agreed to marry him.

As was the tradition of the people, the marriage was celebrated in the bride's village with her face veiled from her husband. He would only see her face three weeks after the feast when she formally moved over to his home. When it was time for her to go, her family assigned two men, her younger sister Eneke and an attendant Anyi to accompany her. However, the men were instructed to accompany the three ladies right up to the River Monaya and then return home. When the girls

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crossed the river and the men left, Anyi suggested that they take a bath in the river. While they were bathing, Anyi lured Arrah to a part of the river that flowed down a cliff with fast and strong currents. As Arrah turned to look down, Anyi stepped forward and pushed her into the current. As the current swept her down, a mysterious crocodile appeared and carried her on its back down stream to a tree that grew over the river. She leaped unto the tree, climbed it and was saved.

Upstream, Eneke went berserk with wailing as her sister was being swept away but Anyi ordered her to be quiet and threatened to kill her unless she promised never to tell anyone about what had happened. She also ordered her to become her attendant while she became the new bride. They soon arrived Ndebaya and were received with the customary feasting and celebration though the people wondered briefly why only two of them had come instead of three as was the custom, and also why the bride's attendant was not happy.

Moreover, the Prince and his people were disappointed with the bride; she was not as beautiful as they had expected. Prince Ateba even noticed that it was not the Arrah, who had the grace and gait of the lady he had seen at Tinto but kept it to himself. Back at home, Anyi subjected Eneke to the worst treatment ever. She made her do the most difficult chores like cooking, paring nails, and laundry. She even made her wash her feet with warm water every evening before she went to bed. One day, as Eneke was washing clothes at the river Monaya, she started to sing a song to her lost sister Arrah imploring her spirit to rescue her from her despair. Immediately, she finished singing, Arrah emerged from the bottom of the river sitting on the crocodile's back. When they got to the shore, Arrah climbed down and ran into the arms of her frightened sister. Then she removed a very delicious and nourishing meal from her bag and fed her younger sister to her fill. So from that day, Eneke came to the river regularly, sang to her Arrah and she always showed up with food for her.

One day, a certain palm wine tapper heard Eneke's sweet voice from a distance and approached unnoticed to see who was singing. A few miles from the river, he hid himself in the nearby bush and witnessed everything that happened. He rushed back to the village and reported the incident to Prince Ateba. Three days later, Eneke left for the stream with a basket over flowing with all the dirty dresses of the household. Prince Ateba together with the palm wine tapper and three other men followed Eneke stealthily to the river carrying a goat whose mouth they had stuffed so that it would not bleat. After a while of

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	washing, Eneke stood up, looked around, assured herself that she was alone and started to sing. As usual, Arrah surfaced, looking beautiful as ever, on the crocodile's back. As she rushed to embrace her younger sister, Prince Ateba and his men ran out of their hiding and threw the goat to the crocodile. As the crocodile followed the goat downstream, they took Arrah and Eneke with them back to the village. Immediately, Anyi saw Arrah, she fainted and died.
Analysis	The phenomenon of snatching is ingrained in nature and humanity. Humanity, as has always been the case, has a tendency to covet what belongs to others. Nature on its part grasps, leaving behind a gap, which sometimes becomes very difficult to fill. This is the case with death. The consequences of these acts of men and nature often lead to regret, misery and sorrow, thereby creating a vacuum. Another reality related to this phenomenon, especially in Africa, is the husband/wife-snatching syndrome. This syndrome sometimes extends into the spiritual world, as many recorded myths have proven. Humanity and the gods snatch husbands/wives in the world and the underworld. The case of Ihuoma in Elechi Armadi's The Concubine is a very glaring example, in which men battle with the wife of the sea god, and the consequence to all of them is death. From time immemorial, humanity in classical and ancient cultures have secretly or openly indulged in this practice of occupying space like all forms of matter. The case of Anyi, the slave girl, in the above myth only helps to expose the extent of human desire. The tale shares the motif of a false bride taking the place of a true bride on the way to the wedding with the Grimm's tale entitled *The Goose-Girl* (*Speaking Horsehead*).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype Slavery in Africa
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth	Animals Appearances Family Humanity Nature Oppression Relationships Tradition Tricksters

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Culture

Further Reading

Hoover, H. M., *The Whole Truth and Other Myths: Retelling Ancients Tales*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *The Goose-Girl*, trans. Margaret Hunt. Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Die Gänsemagd" in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, no. 89 (accessed: November 26, 2020).

Addenda

Researcher: Daniel A. Nkemleke.

Assistant researcher: Cecilia Ahiwe.

Method of data collection: Tape-recording.

Editor: Divine Che Neba.

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