

Principles of Literary Study

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May 1, 2023. Achebe (4) and finale.

upcoming

- ▶ paper due tonight at 10 p.m.
- ▶ course evaluation: <https://sirs.rutgers.edu/blue>
 - ▶ eat sugary snacks as you fill it out
- ▶ exam: May 4, FH-A4, 8:00–11:00

review

- ▶ “Mother is Supreme”: complexities of gender
 - ▶ Okonkwo is not representative
 - ▶ but valuing the feminine doesn't mean equality for women
 - ▶ the novel's ambiguous critique
- ▶ the coming of the missionaries
 - ▶ changing points of view, changing protagonists
 - ▶ interpretation as a problem
 - ▶ historical hindsight induces irony

the matter of colonialism

One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (208–9)

Okonkwo/Umuofia

Okonkwo's machete descended twice...

He heard voices asking: "Why did he do it?" (204–5)

mediators again

He had just sent Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was now called *Isaac*, to the new training college for teachers in Umuru. (182)

The men of Umuofia met in the marketplace and decided to collect without delay two hundred and fifty bags of cowries to appease the white man. They did not know that fifty bags would go to the court messengers, who had increased the fine for that purpose. (197)

Quayson: motive

All these critical formations in relation to Achebe's work can be perceived as united in subtle maneuvers that take the culture of the realist novel as most truthfully inscribing the space and time of history. (122)

This reading of *Things Fall Apart*, then, is offered as a means of exposing the gap that exists between the realist African text and the reality that it is seen to represent. (125)

Reading "culture" out of a novel is valuable but inadequate. (133)

argument (dialectical synthesis)

Things Fall Apart thus explores a loving image of Umuofia at the same time as it reveals a dissatisfaction with the values of the society it describes in such detail. And this is undertaken at a more subtle level than the mere explication of content can reveal. (133)

argument (dialectical synthesis)

Things Fall Apart thus explores a loving image of Umuofia at the same time as it reveals a dissatisfaction with the values of the society it describes in such detail. And this is undertaken at a more subtle level than the mere explication of content can reveal. (133)

I agree with him and add that the very choice of the metropolitan language for the writing of post-colonial literatures secretes liminality into the inaugural act of post-colonialist representation itself. (124)

Achebe's language

It did not occur to him [Achebe] that he was the first great African writer in the English language...Shortly afterwards he came to London on a course at the BBC. He showed it [*Things Fall Apart*] to his course officer who sent it round to Heinemann's. Heinemann's normal fiction reader read it and did a long report, but the firm was still hesitating whether to accept it. Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There were no precedents.

Alan Hill, interviewed by Kristen Holst Petersen in 1990, rpt. in *Things Fall Apart*, ed. F. Abiola Irele (New York: Norton, 2009), 148–49.

Maybe someday I will, myself, translate *Things Fall Apart* into the Igbo language. Just to show what I mean, though, for me, being bilingual, the novel form seems to go with the English language. Poetry and drama seem to go with the Igbo language.

“Chinua Achebe, *The Art of Fiction* No. 139,” interviewed by Jerome Brooks, *Paris Review* 133 (Winter 1994).

poetry practice I

An old, mad, blind, despis'd, and dying king,
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring,
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,
A people starv'd and stabb'd in the untill'd field,
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edg'd sword to all who wield,
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay,
Religion Christless, Godless—a book seal'd,
A Senate—Time's worst statute unrepeal'd,
Are graves, from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

poetry practice 2

No language is old—or young—beyond English.
So what of a common tongue beyond English?

I know some words for war, all of them sharp,
but the sharpest one is *jung*—beyond English!

fiction practice I

- ▶ What's the difference between narration and focalization? Give an example.

fiction practice 2

Her name was Jennie Swobodo.

plenary

- ▶ Questions, concerns, random thoughts?

review...in principle

- ▶ How texts are *composed* out of words or other signs matters.
- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *production* matter.
- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *circulation and use* matter.
- ▶ The text's *relationships to other texts* matter.

review...by way of history

(Early Medieval/Anglo-Saxon)	<i>Beowulf</i> and friends
(Later Medieval/Middle English)	Chaucer and friends
Early Modern/Renaissance	Wyatt, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton
Restoration (17th c.)	Marvell
Colonial (also 17th c.)	Bradstreet, Wheatley
18th Century/Enlightenment	Swift
Romanticism	Wordsworth, Barbauld, Keats, M. Shelley, P. Shelley
19th Century/Victorian Age	(Dickens, G. Eliot, Tennyson), Hardy, Conan Doyle
Ante/post-bellum (also 19th. c.)	Melville, Dickinson
Early 20th Century	Hammett, Caspary
Modernism (also early 20th. c.)	T.S. Eliot, Moore, Stevens, Yeats
Later 20th Century	Hughes, Rich, Heaney
Postcolonial/Global Anglophone (also 20th/21st c.)	Achebe, Ramanujan, Shahid
21st Century	!

next

▶ read on!