

Principles of Literary Study

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April 16, 2026. Austen, concluded; Achebe (1).

review: the end

- ▶ Closure expectations can be...
 - ▶ set by genre: lovers united, villains punished, moral delivered, etc.
 - ▶ created by internal tensions: characters in conflict, symbolic contrasts
 - ▶ produced by formal patterns
 - ▶ cyclic closure: end resembles beginning
 - ▶ narrative anticipations fulfilled
 - ▶ structural rhythms
- ▶ fulfilling or undermining such expectations can both be meaningful
 - ▶ everything gets what they deserve, and Elizabeth wins most
 - ▶ narrator declares herself at the end: surprise!
- ▶ what is winning anyway?

character as reputation, personality, or effect

[Elizabeth warns her father:] 'She [Lydia] will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her **character** will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous.' (172)

character and narrative layers

<i>fabula</i>	actor	causally important/unimportant
<i>sjužet</i>	character (effect)	flat/round
text	character (system)	minor/major
people	objectively	born free and equal in dignity and rights live in unequal societies
people	subjectively	pay more attention to some people than others

Woloch: characterization as a social process

histoire (Fr. “story, history”) synonym for *fabula*

discours (Fr. “discourse, speech”) the telling; *sjužet* and text

The asymmetric discourse of characterization becomes intertwined with the social conditions that it is attempting to describe. (Woloch, 64)

An analysis that begins by looking at what each sister *stands for* has already missed (which is to say enacted) the novel’s central trope: the conversion of characters into characteristics. (69)

The crucial narrative effect in *Pride and Prejudice* is to translate this social structure of multiplicity into a *culture* of superficiality, which is contrasted with the privileged and singular depth of the protagonist. (76)

the example of Mary Bennet

This [the piano-playing episode] is the most extended description of Mary, and a rare instance where the narrator attempts to explain what is behind Mary's single-minded pedantry. The explanation, however, is engulfed in and subordinated by the simultaneous construction of her opposition to Elizabeth: [Woloch quotes two paragraphs about the two sisters' performances at the piano]... We notice here the familiar trick of juxtaposing two types of comparison—between characters (Elizabeth and Mary) and between characteristics (two different modes of application, “a pedantic air and conceited manner” against an “easy and unaffected” style). Austen's depiction of Mary is unsparing and precise: she notes not simply that Mary's defects outweigh her abilities, but that this imbalance would persist with even “a higher degree of excellence.” The narrator's nuance, however, is directed toward the character's containment, while simultaneously, through the comparative nature of the description, serving to expand our sense of *Elizabeth's* depth of character. (71–72)

alas, poor Mary

The narrative accentuates the small attention that Mary attracts, or her marginal position within the novelistic totality, by always making the transitions toward her quite suddenly and cutting them off quickly. (71)

The stay-at-home sister, Mary has an equally limited space in both discourse and story. The passages I have quoted include almost every time that Mary is mentioned in the novel, give or take a couple of “grave reflections.” But despite the character’s flatness and simplicity, this is a shrewd and complicated characterization that ends up giving us a shocking sense of Mary’s isolation. (74)

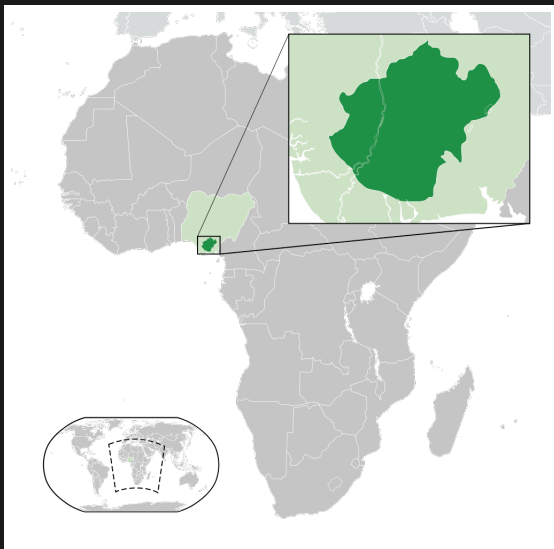
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Elizabeth, Darcy, and all the secondary characters fit into one unified, although asymmetric field....This field of characterization rigorously links the protagonist’s interior development to the dispersion and fragmentation of the many other minor characters, producing a textual structure homologous to the social structure of capitalism. (124; beyond what was assigned)

Achebe: coordinates



1861	British annexation of Lagos
1930	Albert Chinualumogu Achebe b. Ogidi
1944	Government College, Umuahia
1948	University College, Ibadan
1954	Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation
1958	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> (London: Heinemann)
1960	Nigerian independence
1960	<i>No Longer At Ease</i> (Heinemann)
1962	ed., Heinemann African Writers Series
1964	<i>Arrow of God</i> (Heinemann)
1966	<i>A Man of the People</i> (Heinemann)
1967	Biafran secession
1970	Nigerian Civil War ends in Biafran defeat
1972	at UMass Amherst
1976	return to Nigeria
1987	<i>Anthills of the Savannah</i> (Heinemann)
2013	Achebe d.

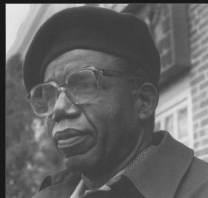


Image: F. Abiola Irele, "Homage to Chinua Achebe," *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001).[JSTOR](#).

Achebe: perspective

- ▶ Where is the material of the story seen from? Gather evidence in chapter 1.

Achebe: perspective

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Okonkwo was well known through the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. (3)

That was many years ago, twenty years or more (3)

That was years ago, when he was young. Unoka, the grown-up, was a failure. (5)

Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. (8)

The ill-fated lad was called Ikemefuna. (8)

footnotes without footnotes

“Do what you are told, woman,” Okonkwo thundered, and stammered.
“When did you become one of the *ndichie* of Umuofia?” (14)

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The elders, or *ndichie*, met to hear a report of Okonkwo’s mission. (12)

next

- ▶ Achebe, through chap. 12