

Principles of Literary Study

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Office hours: Thursdays 11:45–12:45 in MU 040A or by appt.

April 23, 2026. Achebe (3).

nested focalization

Evil Forest then thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth. And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life. He took the first of the empty stools and the eight other *egwugwu* began to sit in order of seniority after him.

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo....But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. (89–90)

- ▶ Who perceives?

review

- ▶ focalization: how the *fabula* is seen by the narrative
 - ▶ (who sees, but also what they *can* see)

type	narrator	perspective
EN[EF]	external	external
CN[CF]	character	character's
EN[CF]	external	character's

- ▶ the death of Ikemefuna in perspective(s)
 - ▶ traveling inward (Ikemefuna's fear; Nwoye)
 - ▶ the significance of what isn't acknowledged

embedding again

- ▶ Review the story of Tortoise and the feast in the sky (chap. 11, pp. 96–99). Who narrates? Who perceives?

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Low voices, broken now and again by singing, reached Okonkwo from his wives' huts as each woman and her children told folk stories. Ekwefi and her daughter, Ezinma, sat on a mat on the floor. It was Ekwefi's turn to tell a story.

“Once upon a time,” she began, “all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky.” (96)

“There is no song in the story,” Ezinma pointed out.

“No,” said Ekwefi. “I shall think of another one with a song.” (99)

Mother is Supreme

Achebe reading from chap. 14 (133–34) in 2006, PEN America Audio, pen.org/chinua-achebe-reads-from-things-fall-apart.

- ▶ What does this passage suggest about gender and authority? Find textual evidence to support your group's interpretation, and explain to each other **how** your evidence supports it.

interpretation (I)

“An albino,” suggested Okonkwo.

“He was not an albino. He was quite different.” He [Obierika] sipped his wine. “And he was riding an iron horse.” (138)

- What's an iron horse?

interpretation (2)

“Your buttocks understand our language,” said someone light-heartedly and the crowd laughed.

“What did he say?” the white man asked his interpreter. But before he could answer, another man asked a question: “Where is the white man’s horse?” he asked. The Ibo evangelists consulted among themselves and decided that the man probably meant bicycle. They told the white man and he smiled benevolently.

“Tell them,” he said, “that I shall bring many iron horses when we have settled down among them.” (145)

which side is he on?

It was one of those gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism which had the power of plucking at silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo man. (146)

The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. (147)

the missionaries

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive...And for the first time they had a woman [convert]. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child.

Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and childbirths. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance. (151)

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He [Okonkwo] had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka—"Mother is Supreme"—out of politeness to his mother's kinsmen. (162)

protagonists

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He [Nwoye] had decided to go to Umuofia where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write. (152)

next

- ▶ finish Achebe
- ▶ read Quayson