

Principles of Literary Study

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May 4, 2026. Okorafor, “Mother of Invention”; course wrap-up.

review

- ▶ English in world literature
 - ▶ many global Englishes...thanks to colonialism and capitalism
 - ▶ English becomes a site of cultural struggle
 - ▶ Achebe's English: a Nigerian language, a language for talking back
 - ▶ literary "core" (New York/London) often Eurocentric, yet affords recognition and access to audiences for "global" writers
 - ▶ exam prep: "So what of a common tongue beyond English?"
 - ▶ Okri: the uses of subtraction
 - ▶ underspecified settings
 - ▶ underexplained actions (bombers or the Overtaker)
 - ▶ underdetermined relation between dream (?) myth (?) and reality (?)
 - ▶ not a documentary record
- I sang even when a white man with a television camera came into the school building. (19)

Okorafor: exam prep

- ▶ “My Chi is a smart home” (229). What’s a Chi?

Okorafor: exam prep

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Yes, Obi 3 was like an extension of herself. *Like part of my immune system who has just saved my life*, she thought, staring at the window. *Or my Chi.* (230)

- ▶ What kinds of reported discourse?

Okorafor: exam prep

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more exam prep

She'd always had allergies. Her father had even playfully nicknamed her “ogbanje” when she was little because she was always the one sniffing, sneezy, and sent to bed anytime the peri flowers bloomed. (220)

- ▶ What's an *ogbanje*? Are *ogbanje* real in this story? How about in *Things Fall Apart*?

more exam prep

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Goodness knew that when her allergies flared, she did feel like a spirit who'd prefer to die and return to her spirit friends than keep living in discomfort. (220)

- ▶ What kind of story is this?

genre markers

Obi 3 was one of her now ex-fiancé's personally designed shape-shifting smart homes. He'd built one for himself, one for his company, and this third one was also his, but Anwuli lived in it. And this house, which he'd named Obi 3 (not because of the classic *Star Wars* film but because *obi* meant "home" in Igbo, and it was the third one), was his smallest, most complex design. (214)

"Carpeting New Delta, periwinkle's signature tough flowers are a thing of beauty and innovation. A genetic hybrid drawn from a variety of plants including sunflowers, zoysia grass, rice, and jasmine flowers, we can thank periwinkle grass for giving us the perfect replacement for rice just after its extinction." (217)

another world for world literature

I write where the energy is, I follow my muse and my muse is definitely from my father's hometown of Arondizuogu, Nigeria.

Okorafor interviewed by Nathaniel Bivan and Risqah Ramon, *Daily Trust* (Abuja), December 2, 2016, dailytrust.com.ng.

another world...if we can keep it

No one had predicted weather patterns shifting. This is why scientists were calling the occasional spontaneous variation in weather patterns “climate chaos” instead of “climate change.” That’s what they’d recently been saying on the news, anyway. The pollinating grass was genetically staggered to release pollen at three separate times during the year, with one-third of the grass pollinating in each period. However, over the last twenty years, an unexpected shift in the length of the dry, cool Harmattan season had scrambled that timing, causing the pollination periods of all three groups to align.

The immense wealth made from peri production went directly to the Nigerian government and to the Chinese corporations who’d invested so deeply in Nigeria for decades, and next to nothing went to New Delta, much in the same way it had when the greatest resource had been oil. For this reason, the initially lovely city that was New Delta began to deteriorate, and the Chinese and Nigerian governments paid less attention to the pollination misalignment. (225–26)

another character for fiction

The strain of throwing up *and* having a contraction nearly caused her to pass out. One of Obi 3's drones pushed itself beside her to keep her from tumbling to the floor.

“The variations in electromagnetic noise my sensory lights pick up alert me that...”

“Shut up!” Anwuli screamed.

“...you are now in labor,” Obi 3 finished. (223)

tradition at work

Then Obi 3 said, “How about giving her the middle name Storm? Storm was the American Kenyan superheroine from Marvel comics. She could control the weather and fly.” (225)

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Photo by Anyaugo Okorafor, nnedi.com.

things don't have to fall apart

Obi 3 told her all about what it called “Project Protective Egg.” And then, as she clutched Mmiri in her arms, watching her death swirl about outside, the entire house began to rise up. (230)

Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the Earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with “what could have been” and more concerned with “what is and can/will be”. It acknowledges, grapples with and carries “what has been”.

“Africanfuturism Defined,” October 19, 2019, nnedi.blogspot.com.

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)

Beowulf and friends

(Later Medieval/Middle English)

Marie de France to Chaucer

Early Modern/Renaissance

Wyatt, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton

(1550–1700)

Restoration (17th c.)

Marvell

American Colonial (also 17th c.)

Bradstreet, Wheatley

18th Century/Enlightenment

Swift

Romanticism

Wordsworth, Barbauld, Keats, P. Shelley

Romanticism?

Austen

19th Century/Victorian Age

(Dickens, G. Eliot, Tennyson), Hardy, Conan

Doyle

Ante/post-bellum U.S. (also 19th. c.)

Melville, Dickinson

Modernism (early 20th. c.)

T.S. Eliot, Moore, Stevens, Yeats

Later 20th Century

Hughes, Bishop, Heaney

Postcolonial/Global Anglophone

Achebe, Ramanujan, Shahid, Okri, Okorafor,

(20th/21st c.)

Ko

Multiethnic American (20th/21st c.)

Hughes, Ramanujan, Shahid, Okorafor, Ko

next

- ▶ paper 2
- ▶ exam
- ▶ read on