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Eurocentrism and Artistic Creation in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Pp 93-108)

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Abstract

This article goes beyond the plot of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart to codify the inspiration and moving spirit behind the novel. Eurocentrism is a philosophical and cultural construct that perceives Europe as the centre of civilization and the future of humanity. The racism that Eurocentrism engendered accorded an inferiority status to non-whites. In the quest to correct and rehabilitate the African cultural past from a sympathetic insider's perspective, Achebe adopted cultural nationalism as an ideological frame of reference in order to affirm his people's ethos in Things Fall Apart. As an objective and balanced imaginative writer, however, Achebe demonstrated moral integrity in portraying his people's past with all its strengths and imperfections. In specific terms, the novel depicts such cardinal themes as Igbo festivals, ceremonial rites and worship of the gods, the people's oral culture and other social practices, the colonial and missionary era that was both disruptive and also conferred some benefits, and Okonkwo's tragedy that hinged mainly on his unbalanced understanding of the duality concept in Igbo cosmology.

Introduction

Eurocentrism as a socio – political and philosophical concept in European thought gradually came into existence and took concrete form as from the 15th Century, or what is popularly known as the Modern Age. The Age of Discovery with its inventions in diverse spheres of European life created material comfort and enhanced the discovery of new areas of the globe and their various economic resource potentials. The Industrial Revolution which

came on the heels of the exploration of the new lands encouraged large scale exploitation, importation and processing of the raw materials into finished products in the industries of Europe.

The capitalist accumulation and imperialism that emerged in the wake of this economic progress saw many European nations occupying and taking full and exclusive control of some of the discovered territories for their political and economic advantage. The sense of social supremacy that came with the above accomplishments, along with its attendant regional pride, of Europe taking the centre stage in world affairs, made some of its people to assume a superiority status over other nations and races of the earth. It is the above foregrounding factors which gave rise to the coinage of the term, "Eurocentrism". According to Peter Childs and Roger Fowler,

Eurocentrism is a way of thinking that privileges Europe (or "the West") as the centre of historical development and posits European culture as superior to all others (2006:75).

In the given historical and geographical perception of Europe, the continent equally sees itself as representing the highest form of civilization. In this sense, Europe came to regard itself not only as the centre from which civilization radiates outwards to other nations, but also as "the end of history, and the future of humanity" (Childs and Fowler 2006:77). The *Encarta 2007 Dictionary* further defines Eurocentrism rather bluntly and tersely as "Focusing on Europe or its people, institutions, and cultures, often in a way that is arrogantly dismissive of others".

At the level of imaginative literary production, but narrowing the issue down to the African continent, Eurocentric thinking made many early European writers to hold a dim view of the African land mass and its peoples. Thus, in many of the creative works about Africa, the European novel often pandered to the assumptions and prejudices of the Europeans about the Dark Continent. Indeed, such an artistic portraiture of Africa is usually founded on an assumed philosophical or moral bias supposedly unique to the environment of action. That is why in his book, *Joyce Cary and the Novel of Africa*, Michael J.C. Echeruo has said that

For the European novelists, Africa is not only a place but also a moral influence. For almost all of them, it is a reversal of Eden, lush and fruitful but lacking the benefit of

redemption from the serpent. In their view, this Africa has a specifically debilitating moral influence (1973:11).

Further details on the depiction of Africa in European fiction show the popular governing literary tradition blended with poetic license to produce creative works that are essentially a gross distortion of the social reality that Africa is. In the words of Hammond and Jablow, such an artistic delineation of

Africa is strangely homogeneous and static; differences between past and present and between one place and another are obliterated. Africans, limited to a few stock figures, are never completely human, and Africa exhibits few changes over time. It became and remains the Africa envisaged by the British in Victorian times, the Africa of Haggard and Conrad. Thus, the literary image of Africa is a fantasy of a continent and a people that never were and never could be (1992:13).

It is against this background of stereotyping the African and his worldview, to the extent that Rudyard Kipling could refer to the African as “half devil, half child” (Achebe 1975:8) that Ngugi has rejected Eurocentrism and subscribed to an alternative universal context for social coexistence. In his book, *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi opts for the necessity to shift the locus of discourse from all minority class establishments and in the process, freeing

World cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender. In this sense I am an unrepentant Universalist. For I believe that while retaining its roots in regional and national individuality, true humanism with its universal reaching out, can flower among the peoples of the earth, rooted as it is in the histories and cultures of different peoples of the earth (1993:xvii).

Impetus for Writing *Things Fall Apart*

Thus far, the above discussion shows that Eurocentrism is denounced because it is rooted in racial arrogance and cultural bigotry. At the same time, this treatise has propounded a truly universal theory that accords social parity to all humanity in a global community. And having fore-grounded the social forces that gave rise to Eurocentrism and the need to reject it, it is also

pertinent to consider the factors that inspire Chinua Achebe's writing of *Things Fall Apart*.

As an undergraduate student of English literary studies at the University of Ibadan, Achebe read a number of literature textbooks. Of particular interest to him were some European novels set in Africa. Prominent among them was Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. Although European critics showered accolades on the novel, Achebe says in *African Writers Talking* (1978) that the book provides "a most superficial picture of the country, but even of the Nigerian character" (p 4). After a study of the fictional work, Achebe states that "no matter how gifted or well intentioned" (1975:70), no foreigner should take it upon himself to represent the authentic African experience.

Beyond Achebe's persuasion that the African writer has the unique right to recreate his social experience in literature, he equally goes on to state as follows:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (1975:45).

As a first generation African writer, Chinua Achebe's initial ideological frame of reference was evidently that of African cultural nationalism. By its own very nature and character,

African cultural nationalism took the form of the rehabilitation of the old cultural tradition and its values, including a reawakening of interest in the folklore, arts, music and cultural habits of the local people which most distinguish them from the metropolitan culture (Obiechina 1975:15).

Plot Development and Narrative Perspective

In a recent polemical work titled *Home and Exile*, Chinua Achebe has stated that "until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" (2000:73). This metaphor about the lions disadvantaged because they had no historian at first to codify and reflect their social experience in the game of survival in the jungle provides an apt paradigm in the art of reclaiming the African story. Indeed, the above proverbial assertion serves as the moving spirit that inspired Achebe's

writing of *Things Fall Apart*, given the deformation and misrepresentation of Africa's historical experience in a colonial context.

As a matter of fact, the African world and its characters were portrayed largely as stereotypes and caricatures in the service of white fiction on the continent. That is why Achebe's debut novel has to accomplish the dual task of debunking the false image of Africa and revitalizing authentic African social life from a sympathetic insider's perspective. Charles Sugnet confirmed this position when he declared that

As a North-American reader reading *Things Fall Apart* for the first time, I felt powerfully that I had seen the truth of Igbo society from the inside. I had seen, without being asked to judge, how the world made sense to Okonkwo and his people, and how the destruction of any element of their world-view threatened the whole fabric of coherence in which they lived (1996:85).

In order to produce such an objective story about his people's past, with its strengths and weaknesses, Achebe had to "frequent the old, the shrines, the festivals and all other available means towards the recreation of a credible, actual past" (Gerald Moore, 1980:124).

The novel is set in the imaginary rural community of Umuofia, which literally means "Children of the forest" (Robert M. Wren, 1978: xi). The connotation in modern Nigeria of "bush" is uneducated, uncontaminated by European urbanism. Yet, underlying this surface narrative about his rural countrymen is Achebe's ironic swipe directed at the European colonizer and other detractors. For what emerges from the tale about the Igbo people and their way of life is far from being savage, brutal and uncultured. Indeed,

His people win our full respect as individuals whose life has dignity, significance and positive values. Only they were as ruthless as the members of most societies in rejecting whatever seemed to threaten their security (Moore, 1980:125).

In essence, Chinua Achebe recreates for the reader the earlier world of Umuofia in which the people lived in unity and social cohesion before the coming of the white man. Central to the story is Okonkwo, a man of industry who aspires to embody within himself the social values that his people cherish most. This heroic persona, however, has a deep-seated fear of failure that springs from the scorn he harbours about his own father who took no title and died as a pauper and an outcast.

This defective psychological trait makes Okonkwo to reject any course of action that seems to imply that he is weak, soft or of an effeminate disposition. It is on the basis of this irrational fear of failure that he ill-advisedly participates in the killing of Ikemefuna and beats his wife during the week of peace. From that moment on, a number of vicissitudes befall him. Most, if not all of them, come as agents of retributive justice because he has violated the feminine principle that is cardinal to his people's cultural ethos. One of such reverses in Okonkwo's fortunes is his accidental killing of a kinsman during a funeral rite for which he is banished from the fatherland. In his absence, the white man comes to Umuofia.

By the time he returns from exile, the chivalric "spirit of his people has deserted them in the face of the new white man's government and the activities of the converts to Christianity" (Oladele Taiwo, 1967:58). Subsequently, a confrontation takes place between traditionalists and the church in the wake of Enoch's unmasking of an ancestral spirit in the full view of women and children. In the guise of making peace, the District Commissioner gets the village elders arrested and extorts funds as reparation for the demolished church before the men are released.

Chafing with rage for the humiliation he suffered while in detention, Okonkwo gives vent to his wrath by beheading the white man's messenger who leads his colleagues to disperse the meeting of the clan. Seeing that he has put up a lone and futile resistance to the new dispensation, and with no support from his people, Okonkwo goes home and hangs himself. Most of the story in *Things Fall Apart* is told from the perspective of the third person narrator. Indeed, the narrative voice is

That of a wise and sympathetic elder of the tribe who has witnessed time and time again the cycle of the seasons and the accompanying rituals in the villages. This measured tone of voice implants in the reader's mind the sense of order, perspective and harmony whose later destruction is most poignant (David Carroll, 1990:33).

In analyzing the essential elements that give a semblance of cultural validity to Achebe's artistry in *Things Fall Apart*, we can categorize them under the following sub-headings: Festivals and Ceremonies, Rites and Worship of the Gods, Oral and other Social Practices, Dispensation of the White Man and its Ambiguities, and Okonkwo's Tragedy and Igbo Concept of Social Balance. It is these facts that are considered below in a sequential order.

Festivals and Ceremonies

The main festival and ceremonial events that Achebe presents in *Things Fall Apart* centre on the themes of the new yam and marriage. The Feast of the New Yam, which reaches its climax with a wrestling contest, holds every year before the harvest begins. The goal is “to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan” (p.26). According to Kofi Awoonor,

The festival of New Yam is not only a thanksgiving but an occasion for affirming the group ethos, of communion with the ancestors and the gods, and a renewal of faith in the primal life force itself (1975:253).

Equally significant to Achebe’s affirmation of African cultural values in his debut novel is the depiction of his people’s marriage ceremony. The episode focuses on the betrothal of Obierika’s daughter to her suitor. Akueke comes with a dish of Kola nuts and alligator pepper, and shakes hands with her in-laws. The men drink the palm wine that the suitor has brought. The bride price is then negotiated, using sticks and is “settled at twenty bags of cowries” (p.51).

The next stage of Akueke’s marriage celebration is her *Uri*. It is an occasion during which the immediate family, relatives and *Ummuna* receive the suitor’s palm wine. This phase is prelude to the bride’s going to settle in her matrimonial home. The affair clearly demonstrates the communal spirit of the people. Neighbours carry foodstuff and all that is necessary to prepare meat and other food items to feed the in-laws. Obierika is to present a live goat to his in-laws. The in-laws bring a total of “forty-five” (p.81) pots of palm wine. At the end of the feasting, the guests leave taking along with them the bride “to spend seven market weeks with her suitor’s family” (p.83).

During Okonkwo’s exile at Mbanta, Uchendu’s son, Amikwu, takes a wife. The last phase of the marital act is “the ceremony of confession” (p.92). At this full gathering of the *Ummuada*, Uchendu’s eldest daughter, Njide, asks the questions. The bride affirms her chastity and swears by Uchendu’s staff to prove her innocence. Uchendu then takes the hen from her, slits its throat and allows “some of the blood to fall on his ancestral staff” (p.93). After the rite, the man takes the bride to his hut and she becomes his wife.

Towards the end of chapter eleven, Achebe shows that mutual love between a man and a woman can result in an elopement. Since the time Okonkwo won the wrestling contest against Amalinze, Ekwefi has been in love with him. But she “married Anene because Okonkwo was too poor to marry” (p.76).

After two years of marriage, Ekwefi could bear it no longer and she ran to Okonkwo. In this case, Okonkwo has to refund the bride price.

Rites and Worship of the Gods

Among the many rites observed in *Things Fall Apart* is the orderly and clearly spelt out process of declaring war. When Udo's wife goes to the market at Mbaino and is beheaded, an ultimatum is dispatched to the community asking them to choose between war and the offer of a young man and a virgin. This is the normal course of action since "justice requires both compensatory and punitive damage" (Wren, 1979:20). Moreover, since Umuofia's deity does not champion a war of blame, no war is declared until "the Oracle of the Hills and the caves" (p.9) supports it. It is also stated in the novel that people consult *Agbala* to divine the cause of misfortune, their future destiny, when a man disputes with his neighbour or to consult the spirit of a departed ancestor.

The *dibia* or medicine man performs cardinal roles in the health of the community. Apart from curative functions, he can also stop an *Ogbanje* child from repeating its cycle of death and rebirth. Okagbue Uyanwa is such a *dibia*. Through the effectual work of Okagbue, Ezinma shows the location of her *iyi-uwa*, the stone which links her and the spirit world. In this way, she remains in the world of mortals.

The ritual outing of the *egwugwu* to dispense justice is equally an important aspect of the culture in the novel. It is a solemn and awe-inspiring moment. The *egwugwu* represent the nine village clans of Umuofia. The quarrel which centres around domestic violence between Uzowulu and his wife, Mgbafo, is presented. On hearing both sides of the case, the *egwugwu* withdraw to weigh the evidence and come up with a brilliant, satisfactory and incontestable verdict that reflects the time – tested wisdom and common sense of the elders. Indeed, the outcome of the judgment proves that the *egwugwu* are a spiritual and symbolic manifestation of the will of the clan.

The episode of the death and funeral rite of Ogbuefi Ezeudu reveals an important aspect of Igbo culture in its own right; yet linking the death of the old man with his last visit to warn Okonkwo not to participate in killing Ekemefuna equally presages, in an oblique fashion, a possible tragic happening that may befall Okonkwo, since he did not adhere to Ezeudu's caution. During the heroic warrior's burial ceremony that is accorded Ezeudu, Okonkwo accidentally kills the old man's sixteen – year old son. Since the act is inadvertent because it is a female crime against the earth,

Okonkwo is exiled from the clan for “seven years” (p.87). Subsequently, Okonkwo’s compound is demolished as part of the land cleansing ritual. During the exile, Uchendu also rehabilitates Okonkwo’s family in a holistic fashion and plans to let Okonkwo undergo “the requisite rites and sacrifices” (p.91).

The concept of *chi* is also an important facet of Igbo culture that Achebe illustrates in *Things Fall Apart*. It is a personal god of the individual. When Chielo learns of Ekwefi’s narrow escape from Okonkwo’s gunshot, she says to her: “Your *chi* is very much awake” (p.34). In the case of Okonkwo, his *chi* is not made for great things. Despite his determination and aspiration to achieve greatness, his *chi* is rather ill-fated. His “*chi* said nay despite his own affirmation” (p.92). Apart from *chi*, there are many other gods mentioned directly or implicitly in the text. They include Ifejioku, Idemili, Ogwugwu, Amadiora, Ekwensu and Chukwu.

Oral and Other Social Practices

Folktales, proverbs and the process of their composition and narration form a vital part of the Igbo verbal art and non-material culture. The stories provide entertainment and relaxation while teaching the cherished ethical values of the people. At the same time, the tales censure vices and all forms of social deviation. In chapter ten of *Things Fall Apart*, one of such stories is that of the tortoise and the birds invited to a party in sky land, and how tortoise’s greed ensures his humiliation and trauma.

The novel affirms the fact that among the Igbo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. And in practical situations, the apt use of proverbs in context enhances the communicative power of the speaker and makes the speech memorable. Indeed,

Proverbs are always appropriate, allowing a speaker to make his point tactfully and concisely. The concentration of meaning and evocative power of the proverbs impact a poetic quality to Achebe’s prose (Palmer 1972:62).

Other humane and valuable social practices in the novel worthy of commendation are the act of share-cropping and the demonstration of compassion for fellow human beings. In his formative years as a young farmer, Okonkwo went to Nwakibie with the token gifts of a pot of palm wine and a cock. After the traditional greeting, kola nuts and alligator pepper

are served. After sharing the drink, Okonkwo stated his need for a loan of eight hundred seed yams. The old man met the need even beyond Okonkwo's expectation because of his confidence in Okonkwo.

Furthermore, during Okonkwo's exile, Obierika exhibits a similar kindred spirit and fellow feeling towards his friend. In Okonkwo's absence, Obierika earns money for Okonkwo, giving the latter's seed yams "to share croppers" (p.100). In fact, he sustains the practice until Okonkwo's term of banishment is over.

The White Man's Dispensation and Its Ambiguities

The new era of the white man's presence in *Things Fall Apart* confers both evil and good upon the community. In practical experience, the arrival of the white man into the traditional Igbo world is first felt in terms of his military might and fire power. During Okonkwo's second year in exile, Obierika visits him and tells of the decimation of Abame because the people killed the first missionary that came to them. The killing of the white man is at the instance of their oracle which said "the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them" (p.97). The people then tie his bicycle to a sacred tree. This incident later provides ocular proof of the community's culpability that warrants a subsequent military expedition.

From the perspective of the local people, Obierika's second visit to Okonkwo is equally more sombre and less cheery. The missionaries have won converts, including Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, and are sending agents to nearby communities on evangelistic campaigns. At first the converts were people of no title, the *efulefu*, whom chielo calls "the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up" (p.101).

But if Christianity does not make sense to the natives because of its illogical creed of a God without a wife, and yet has a son, the new era also has its undeniable merits. By clearing and living in the evil forest, the Christians demystify the power of darkness that holds the people in its tyrannical grip. That is why Eustace Palmer is right when he says that

The secret of the new faith's success is precisely that it offers a refuge to all those whom the clan, for a variety of reasons, regard as outcasts. If the clan had not been so callous towards its underdogs, the white man's religion would not have taken hold. As it is, it is the *osu*, the parents of twins, and all those held in contempt because they have

taken no titles who flock to the missionaries' banner (1979:57-58).

Moreover, the era of European presence ushers in a new administration, a new legal system of judging cases, education, medical service and legitimate trade. On the one hand, the court and the prison function in a way that violates the traditional way of conflict resolution; but on the other hand; education, the hospital and the white man's peace result in the emergence of an enlightened and healthier community. The trade in palm oil and kernel also results in a business boom, "and much money flowed into Umuofia" (p.126).

One of the ambiguities of the new epoch is the contrastive approach to Christian proselytisation. While Brown, Kiaga and Okeke are moderates who encourage dialogue, mediation with local social practices and believe in persuasion as a means of winning converts. Reverend James Smith, Enoch and Okoli are fanatics and hardliners who are intolerant and precipitate a crisis between the Christians and traditionalists. As a reprisal for unmasking an egwugwu, the ancestral spirits reduce Enoch's house to a desolate heap and destroy the Church, leaving behind "a pile of earth and ashes" (p.135). It is then that the District Commissioner comes ostensibly to mediate the peace between the contending parties. But he ends up getting the clan elders arrested and makes them to pay a fine of "two hundred bags of cowries" (p.137). It is in this sense that Ernest Emenyonu is right to conclude that

Things Fall Apart can be seen as an African classic, a story which transcends time and place. The Universality of its thematic preoccupation as a study in colonial diplomatic blunder must not be missed by the perceptive reader (1991:51).

Okonkwo's Tragedy and Igbo Concept of Social Balance

In the introduction to J.P Clark Bekederemo's *Song of a Goat*, the classical Greco-Roman idea of tragedy is defined as follows:

The theory of tragedy, according to Aristotle, states that the main character in a tragedy must be a great man or a hero; a king, a great warrior or a nobleman. He must at the same time be human enough for us to relate to, and identify with his actions. The story of the play must move the hero from a position of happiness to misery, which may eventually lead to his downfall and possibly to his death. The tragic hero's

change in fortune is usually caused by overwhelming pride, a character flaw, which leads the hero to make an error of judgement. It is this that causes his tragic end, and his fate should arouse pity in us (1993:10).

In the conception and execution of the fate of Okonkwo and that of his society in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe has followed the above tragic pattern to show that his hero's fall from honour to shame and death is just as monumental as that of any other classical hero. In the novel, it is stated that "Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things" (p.6). His heroic attainments consist of being the greatest wrestler in the nine villages of Umuofia, a wealthy farmer with two barns full of yams, marrying three wives, taking two titles and showing incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars from which he brought home five human heads. The respect and social prestige that Okonkwo has attained qualify him to be the emissary of war sent to Mbaino and is subsequently entrusted with caring for Ekemefuna, the child-hostage.

Despite Okonkwo's great social and ethical attributes, however, he is also plagued by a deep sense of insecurity arising from the fear of failure, lest he should be like his father. In fact, it is averred in the novel that he is "impatient with his father and all unsuccessful men" (p.3). Okonkwo's psychological disposition is such that he never shows any emotion openly except that of anger. To him, "the only thing worth demonstrating was strength" (p.20). And anger as a tragic flaw makes Okonkwo to humiliate Osugo because the man has taken no title, and yet had the effrontery to contradict him at a meeting. The same character trait ensures his beating his wife during the week of peace, and would not stop "halfway through, not even for the fear of a goddess" (p.21). Robert Wren sums up the tragedy of Okonkwo in relation to the female principle in Igbo culture when he says that Okonkwo "commits three overt crimes against Ani – he violates the week of peace, he murders Ezeudu's son and he hangs himself" (1997:27).

But if Okonkwo is averse to the female principle, his stance is vacuous and lacks a basis in Igbo cultural ethos. For instance, Umuofia is powerful in war and magic because "the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called *agadi-nwayi*, or old woman" (pp.8-9). Furthermore, the people of Umuofia approach the god, Agbala, through his priestess" (p.12) as an intermediary. Even the coincidental death of Ogbuefi Ndulue and that of his wife, Ozoemena, on the same day underscores the deep bond of friendship between them because

they had one mind. Indeed, it is well known that “He could not do anything without telling her” (p.48). Added to this truth is the fact that the scorn Okonkwo harbours towards his father is stretched to the extreme; for Unoka equally symbolizes the leisurely, pleasurable and contemplative side of life.

This emphasis on masculinity and sternness in the life of Okonkwo makes him to comport himself with bad grace during the period of exile. That is why Uchendu reprimands Okonkwo and tells him that a man belongs to his clan when life is sweet and all is well with him. But in times of sorrow, bitterness and grief, a man returns to his maternal home to be comforted by his mother’s spirit, hence Nneka means “Mother is Supreme” (p.94).

G.D. Killam (1969:19) stresses the all - pervasive role of the “female principle” in *Things Fall Apart* when he asserts as follows:

While a continuing emphasis on male activities – acquisition of wealth and wives, the production of children, courage and resourcefulness in sport and war – informs the surface interest of the novel, all activity in *Things Fall Apart* is judged by what is or is not acceptable to “Ani, the earth goddess and source of all fertility,” ... “ultimate judge of morality and conduct” (p.26) in the clan.

Being a man of resilient will-power, Okonkwo returns from exile determined to make a new start. He plans to rebuild his compound, initiate his sons into the *Ozo* society, marry two new wives and take “the highest title in the land” (p.121). But Enoch’s unmasking of an egwugwu, the reprisal attack on the Church and Enoch’s house, the District Commissioner’s arrest and taxation of the elders, with the attendant humiliation they suffer – all combine to reduce Okonkwo’s ambition to a cipher. This is because, when he sights the head messenger coming to disperse the meeting, the bitter memory of humiliation in detention comes afresh to Okonkwo. In his rage, he confronts and beheads the man. Frustrated and disappointed that the clan would not follow his example, Okonkwo goes home to commit suicide. In this regard, Ojinma Umelo’s statement seems quite appropriate when he says of Okonkwo that

While he embodies the acquisitiveness of his society, its materialism, and its love of manliness, Okonkwo persistently shows an aversion to the other “female” side on

which the society's survival depends, and it is this that leads to his tragedy (1991:24).

Given the above facts about Okonkwo's tragedy which destroys him along with the old rigid values of the clan, it becomes pertinent to note that the typical characters who maintain the necessary duality inherent in Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart* are Nwakibie, Obierika, Ndulue and Ezeudu. Okonkwo's disparaging attitude towards the female principle makes him a misfit. Indeed, his tyrannical rule of the home instills fear in the members and becomes a potent seed of disintegration which brings about the defection of Nwoye to the fold of the Christians.

Conclusion

In the preface to the book, *African Literature and African Historical Experience*, Chidi Ikonne has said that

The creative writer, no matter his genre, deals with events already experienced or in the process of being experienced. He works from the vantage position of knowledge of the past which, present, is already in the process of becoming past in the foreseeable future. More than the historian, however, he is concerned about how his target audience receives whatever "he wants to say". Consequently, more than the historian, still, he uses his imaginative art to palliate his intentions and thus conveniently criticizes and instructs, while seeming only to entertain and please (1991:x).

This is precisely what Achebe does in *Things Fall Apart*. The work is a blend of artistry and historicity, which superficially sets out to amuse and entertain. But, underlying this outward surface meaning is Achebe's main motivation, namely to rehabilitate the distorted perception of his people in Western literature. While denouncing the stereotypical image of the African and his social environment, he presents the authentic African world with all its strengths and imperfections. It is this literary objectivity coupled with a deep understanding of his characters' psychology that distinguishes Achebe's art in *Things Fall Apart* and elevates it to the status of a world classic.

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