

Comparison and Contrast between Protagonists of *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not, Child*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to present history of African writing in English language which began in 18th century. It presents also periods of African literature which include pre-colonial literature, colonial African literature and post colonial African literature. It finds out classifications and theories of African oral literature. African oral literature classifications are: 1- Folkloristic 2- Generic 3- Situational / sociological 4- Stylistic. African oral literature theories are: 1- Evoltutionist theory, 2-Historical- Geographical theory, 3-Functionist theory, 4-Structuralism.

This paper explores the similarities and differences between the protagonists in two novels.

Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian writer. He wrote Things Fall Apart novel. Ngugi Wa thiong is Kenyan writer. He wrote Weep, Not Child novel. Both of them are Africans and they have written their novels in English language. Their protagonists portray the concept of traditions and customs and culture of their tribes. Achebe and Wa-Thiong present concepts of liberty, self-confidence and ambitions. They draw their characters during colonization. The protagonist (Okonkwo) in Achebe' novel share the protagonist (Norge) in Wa-thiong'novel several merits and they also differ in some merits.

Key words: African literature, African oral literature, Achebe, Ngugi.

INTRODUCTION

African writing in English began in the eighteenth century and was well established by the second half of the nineteenth century. Fictional works were in existence from the 1890s onwards.

African possessed printing house during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Sierra Leon, Ghana and Nigeria. Many African thinkers have chosen to express their concepts in literary form using English. They wrote novels, short stories, plays and poems explaining African life. The favorite genre has been prose fiction.

The earliest forms of writing in English by black Africans were all the stories of the slaves captured and transported by the European slave. Traders who thronged to the West African coast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of the most significant of early African slave narratives was Olaudah Equiano wrote down how the occasion of his sale by the liberal captain Pascal who had taught him to speak and write English.

Pre-Colonial Literature

In the pre-colonial African societies oral literature was the only form of literature known to the various people. It was valued as one of the major means by which these societies educated, instructed and socialized their younger members.

Proverbs, being part of oral literature, were used in conversation, in story-telling or merely as a means of clarifying points made, or intensifying the meaning of words and sentences.

Colonial African literature

The African works best known in the West from the period of colonization and the slave trade. In the colonial era, African exposed to Western languages began to write in their tongues. African literature in the late colonial period between the end of World War 1 and independence showed themes of liberation, independence and negritude.

Post colonial African literature

African writers in this period wrote both in Western languages French, English and Portuguese and in traditional African languages. Themes in this era are social problems, the clash between Africans past and present, between tradition and modernity. Between individualism and community.

Austin Lwanga Bukonya is classified oral literature into four classifications and theories.

African oral literature classifications are:

- 1- Folkloristic belongs to society.
- 2- Generic includes narrative and poems.
- 3- Situational / sociological is classified according to when and where oral form is performed.
- 4- Stylistic is classified to manner a form is delivered.

African oral literature theories are:

- 1- Evolutionist theory states the verbal art of a people.
- 2- Historical- Geographical theory state tales.
- 3- Functionist theory presents an oral literature as aid.
- 4- Structuralism presents oral literature as a basic of life.

The term African literature is intended to cover both the oral tradition and the mainly 20th century writing of the Negro, Bantu and Nilotic peoples living in the part of the African continent. Achebe does not see African as one unit but he sees it

as a group of associated units comprises the national and ethnic literature of Africa.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY:

African writers present concepts of liberty, self-confidence and ambitions in their novels. They portray their characters' dream of liberty in a violent period. Their characters are very ambitious. Do Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa-Thiong analyze their protagonists according to these concepts?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper focuses on the analysis of the protagonists in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi Wa-Thiong novel *Weep Not, Child* to find similarities and differences between them.

OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to find out the African literature periods. It tries to attain the following objectives: to determine the aspects of Okonkwo and Njorge personalities (the protagonists) in the selected novels and to identify similarities and differences between them.

METHOD

The researcher used content analysis in two selected novels namely: "Things Fall Apart" and "Weep, Not, Child". They were chosen based on their models of the genre under the study. This paper attempts to present how the selected novels prove the dimensions of protagonists and their personalities to find similar and different merits between them.

FINDINGS

- 1- The two writers present very important human merits.
- 2- They portray their characters in a strong style.
- 3- Their concepts are similar.

Poet and novelist Chinua Achebe was one of the most important African writers. He was also considered by many to be one of the most original literary artists writing in English during his lifetime. He is best known for his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Born Albert Chinualumogo Achebe, Chinua Achebe was raised by Christian evangelical parents in the large village Ogidi, in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria. He received an early education in English, but grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy. He studied literature and medicine at the University of Ibadan; after graduating, he went to work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos and later studied at the British Broadcasting Corporation staff school in London.

During this time, Achebe was developing work as a writer. Starting in the 1950s, he was central to a new Nigerian literary movement that drew on the oral traditions of Nigeria's indigenous tribes. Although Achebe wrote in English, he attempted to incorporate Igbo vocabulary and narratives.

Things Fall Apart (1958) was his first novel, and remains his best-known work. It has been translated into at least forty-five languages, and has sold eight million copies worldwide. Other novels include: *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966).

Achebe left his career in radio in 1966, during the national unrest and violence that led to the Biafran War. He narrowly escaped harm at the hands of soldiers who believed

that his novel, *A Man of the People*, implicated him in the country's first military coup.

He began an academic career the next year, taking a position as a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nigeria. That same year, he co-founded a publishing company with Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo. In 1971, he became an editor for *Okike*, a prestigious Nigerian literary magazine. In 1984, he founded *Iwa ndi Ibo*, a bilingual publication dedicated to Igbo cultural life.

Achebe's university career was extremely successful: he was made Emeritus Professor at the University of Nigeria in 1985; he taught at the University of Massachusetts and the University of Connecticut; and he received over twenty honorary doctorates from universities around the world. He also received Nigeria's highest honor for intellectual achievement, the Nigerian National Merit Award, in 1987. His novel *Anthills of the Savannah* was shortlisted for the Booker McConnell Prize that same year.

Achebe became active in Nigerian politics in the 1960s. Many of his novels dealt with the social and political problems facing his country, including the difficulties of the post-colonial legacy. When Biafra, an Eastern region in Nigeria, declared independence in 1967, Achebe put aside writing long fiction in order to spend thirty months traveling Europe and the United States advocating for the new country. During this period, he produced several short stories dealing with the complex realities of the Nigerian Civil War; the best known of these stories is "Civil Peace". Several decades later, in 1994, Achebe was forced to flee Nigeria after the repressive regime threatened to imprison him for his political stances and activism.

Achebe was married and had four children. He last lived in the United States, where he held a teaching position at Bard College until 2009, when he joined Brown University as a professor of Africana Studies. In his later years, he also served

as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund. He continued writing throughout his life, producing both fiction and non-fiction, and winning awards like the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. His final published work was the literary autobiography *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*.

Chinua Achebe died in 2013, of an undisclosed illness in Boston

Chinua Achebe's Works

Things Fall Apart, 1958

No Longer at Ease, 1960

The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories, 1962

Arrow of God, 1964

A Man of the People, 1966

Chike and the River, 1966

Beware, Soul-Brother, and Other Poems, 1971

How the Leopard Got His Claws (with John Iroaganachi), 1972

Girls at War, 1973

Christmas at Biafra, and Other Poems, 1973

Morning Yet on Creation Day, 1975

The Flute, 1975

The Drum, 1978

Don't Let Him Die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christofer Okigbo (editor with Dubem Okafor), 1978

Aka Weta: An Anthology of Igbo Poetry (co-editor), 1982

The Trouble With Nigeria, 1984

African Short Stories, 1984

Anthills of the Savannah, 1988

Hopes and Impediments, 1988

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a writer of Kenyan descent. One of the foremost living African novelists, he has also developed a reputation as a post-colonial theorist, and has taught at universities around the world.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born James Thiong'o Ngugi in Limuru, Kenya in 1938. He studied at Makerere University in Uganda; as a student there, he published his first short stories. After graduating, he pursued a second bachelor's degree at Leeds University in England. He eventually became a professor of English, and has taught around the world. As an adult, he dropped his Western first name and adopted his current Bantu name to emphasize his cultural pride. This is why some editions of his early books – including *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* – are published under the name "James Ngugi."

Ngugi is best known for his novel *Weep Not, Child*, which he wrote while studying at Leeds. However, he has had a prolific career as a novelist, and his style has changed over time. He initially wrote mostly realistic works, but he in recent years has explored a more experimental, magical realist aesthetic. Some of his other well-known novels include *Petals of Blood* (1977), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). In 2012, his memoir *In the House of the Interpreter* was published.

Despite his stylistic shifts, Ngugi's interest in the legacy of colonialism has remained consistent. In 1977, Ngugi publicly announced that he would no longer write in English, and campaigned for other African writers to do the same. Since then, he has published most of his novels in Gikuyu, his native language, before translating them himself for English-speaking audiences abroad.

Ngugi's work is often highly political, which has caused much controversy for him in Kenya. He was imprisoned in 1977 for a year of solitary confinement after his politically provocative play *I Will Marry When I Want* was first performed. In his theatre, Ngugi attempts to involve the audience directly, which makes his political messages more threatening to authorities. After a decades-long exile from Kenya, Ngugi and his wife returned in 2004, and were assaulted in their home, in what is believed to have been a

political attack. However, the couple recovered and has continued to travel and promote Ngugi's books in Kenya. In recent years, he has been considered a frontrunner to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Ngugi currently holds a post as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine.

His works

- The Black Hermit, 1963 (play)
- Weep Not, Child, 1964, Heinemann, 1987
- The River Between, Heinemann 1965, Heinemann 1989,
- A Grain of Wheat, 1967 (1992)
- This Time Tomorrow (three plays, including the title play, "The Reels", and "The Wound in the Heart"), c. 1970
- Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics, Heinemann, 1972
- A Meeting in the Dark (1974)
- Secret Lives, and Other Stories, 1976
- The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (play), 1976,
- Ngaahika Ndeenda: Ithaako ria ngerekano (I Will Marry When I Want), 1977 (play; with Ngugi wa Mirii), Heinemann Educational Books (1980)
- Petals of Blood (1977) Penguin, 2002, Caitani mutharaba-Ini (Devil on the Cross), 1980
- Writers in Politics: Essays, 1981 Education for a National Culture, 1981
- Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, 1981
- Devil on the Cross (English translation of Caitani mutharaba-Ini), Heinemann, 1982,
- Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya, 1983.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN OKONKWO AND NJORGE

Okonkwo and Njorge are ambitious but each one of them creates his entity and personality in a different way. Okonkwo does not want to be like his father. His father is lazy and sluggish. He wants to be a prominent figure in a society. Also Njorge does not want to be like his father works under the white man. His only dream to be educated and recovers his land.

Both of them are vigorous and challenge circumstances around them to do what they plan. Poverty plays an important role in their life. It forms their thoughts and personalities. Okonkwo is very poor in his youth but he decides to get rid of poverty through working hard. Njorge also is very poor he determines to get his chance in education because he thinks that education is his only hope to solve all problems and to get rid of tyranny. The protagonists are patient to struggle and fight strict circumstances without boredom. Loyalty exists in two protagonists. Okonkwo and Njorge are optimist and stubborn.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OKONKWO AND NJORGE

Okonkwo is very tough and drastic. He does not show any emotion or affection for his family. He wants everything to be under his control. He thinks that a delicate sensation means a peak of weakness. He plans for himself to be a man without heart to manage his life without apprehension. Unlike Njorge is very sensitive and dreamer. His world full of luscious wishes and dreams. Okonkwo is reckless. He reveals that when he hits his wife during a week of peace. In that week, no one commits any mistake.

Njorge is tranquil and diplomatic that appears in his dialogue with Mwhiki and how he persuades her to stay in a village. She suggests escaping with him but he refuses.

Affection and romantic imagination do not exist in Okonkwo. He never shows love towards others. He deals with his wives in disdainful way and insults them. They are just like slaves obey his orders and commands.

Njorge is romantic and his private world full of shiny future. He does not hide his perception as a human and that reveals in his relation with Mwihi. He does not deprive himself to live as a natural human without obsessions and apprehensions.

Both of them write their novels to reflect different human merits in simple language and in ornate style.

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