

Chinua achebe: the father of african novels in english

Literature



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Chinua Achebe Chinua Achebe is known as “ the father of African novels in English”. His novels describe traditional African society and the effects of the Western culture on it (Liukkonen , par 1). The “ African English” literary style of Achebe has made him famous not only in Africa but all over the world. In “ Things Fall Apart”, Achebe once again focuses on the central theme of “ the tragedy of the man or society that refuses or is unable to accommodate change” (Brucker , par 19). “ Things Fall Apart” is about Okonkwo, a man who is a member of the Igbo community of Umuofia. He exemplifies an individual who refuses to adapt to the changes that were introduced by Western world, in particular the introduction of Christianity. He cannot accept that Christianity is causing divisiveness in his community. He fails to understand that his community is merely adapting to the changes in their culture in order to survive. Okonkwo is disappointed that his fellow Igbos do not join him in an uprising against the white men. In the end, Okonkwo commits suicide as a final act of desperation. In Achebe’s literary style in “ Things Fall Apart” and in most of his writings, he accomplishes his goal of introducing the African culture to the world through his unique language style. Through his novel, he wanted to let the world know that even before the European invasion, Africa is already a continent with a rich, unique culture. His novel embodies the traditions, legends, myths and customs of Nigeria. Although he uses the English language, he would sometimes insert a word or two from the African dialect and explains it within the novel too. Clearly, Achebe’s aim is to educate his readers about Africa without overpowering his work with the African language. Achebe asserts the African culture without aggressively pushing it to his readers. The Igbo proverbs and

sayings about religion and morals which he includes in the novel have great impact to the readers. Those from other continents who read Achebe's novel will get a glimpse of the African customs and traditions and are able to compare it with their own. Another literary style used by Achebe is the inclusion of folk tales in " Things Fall Apart". Just like Western literary style, Achebe also begins his folk tales with " once upon a time". One can see that Achebe also borrows from the English literary style, yet he adapts it to the African literature that he espouses. The cross cultural combination of western literary forms and Igbo/African creative expression gives value to the works of Achebe. Because of this combination of literary forms, the readers are immersed into the African culture in a very subtle way because it is presented through a literary style which is partly derived from English literature. The richness and complexity of the African culture is emphasized. At the same time, Achebe presents his views on the British colonizers through his portrayal of the Reverend James Smith, Mr. Brown and the District Commissioner. Achebe's adaptation of the Western literary form is evident in the plot of " Things Fall Apart". One notices that he borrows from classical Greek plays where the flaw of the protagonist eventually leads him to his own downfall. In this case Okonkwo is a typical protagonist in Greek plays who is destroyed by his " hubris". The influence of the Western literary style on Achebe is clearly illustrated when Okonkwo, at the end of the novel commits suicide. This ending is often seen in famous Greek tragedies. One can convincingly say that Achebe's style is a successful conglomeration of the African culture and the English language. The sophistication of the English language perfectly combines with the native culture of Africa. This is

the reason why " Things Fall Apart" is considered a classic. Achebe's African thoughts are not lost in translation. All aspects of the novel, its plot, characters, setting, tone and language all add to its artistic value. It produces a distinct literary style only Achebe can produce. One may consider Achebe not only a creative writer but also a cultural and political activist as proven in his " Things Fall Apart". Indeed the African English which Achebe represents is exceptional and will continue to draw readers to his works.

Works Cited Brucker, Carl. " Chinua Achebe 1930 - In " Survey of Literature", 1992." n. d. faculty. atu. edu. Web. 13 June 2012 . Liukkonen, Petri. " Chinua Achebe (1930-) - in full Albert Chinualumogu Achebe." 2008. kirjasto. sci. fi. Web. 13 June 2012 .