

## **Book Review**

# **Title of the Book: Things Fall Apart**

**Edited by: Chinua Achebe**

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Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a beautiful novel - as an extended metaphor for African despoliation, life and politics it works wonderfully. Beautiful is, perhaps, a strange word to describe this essentially melancholic novel but whilst *Things Fall Apart* is a sorrowful affair it is never a despondent one. The scenes from the life of Nigeria's Ibo society are painted with an assured, uplifting clarity and they resonate brightly - and long. Okonkwo is an excellent, wonderfully human, central character: strong; headstrong; wilful; proud. A traditionalist, he is acutely aware of the pitfalls of forgetting the past but he is blind to the absurdities, cruelties and sheer backwardness of certain of his tribe's customs and of his own, sometimes outrageous, actions.

Okonkwo can fight with the best of them - indeed his place in his community stems from his physical prowess and his victory in an important wrestling contest when he was still comparatively young - but he can't prevent 'progress'. What he knows (and the reader acutely shares in his knowledge via Achebe's polished, elegant writing) is that Europeans and their impudent monotheism, hubristic imperiousness, their racism and ultimately the sheer violence of their culture and its justice is not in any way 'progress' at all. Achebe shows us Okonkwo's (and Africa's) dilemma: the progress to a capitalist future is no future; the rural isolation and ignorance of his tribe is no longer even a viable present.

*Things Fall Apart* tells two overlapping, intertwining stories, both of which center around Okonkwo, a "strong man" of an Ibo village in Nigeria. The first of these stories

traces Okonkwo's fall from grace with the tribal world in which he lives, and in its classical purity of line and economical beauty it provides us with a powerful fable about the immemorial conflict.

The second story, which is as modern as the first is ancient, and which elevates the book to a tragic plane, concerns the clash of cultures and the destruction of Okonkwo's world through the arrival of aggressive, proselytizing European missionaries. These twin dramas are perfectly harmonized, and they are modulated by an awareness capable of encompassing at once the life of nature, human history, and the mysterious compulsions of the soul. *THINGS FALL APART* is the most illuminating and permanent monument we have to the modern African experience as seen from within.

*Things Fall Apart* is about the tragic fall of the protagonist, Okonkwo, and the Igbo culture. Okonkwo is a respected and influential leader within the Igbo community of Umuofia in eastern Nigeria. He first earns personal fame and distinction, and brings honor to his village, when he defeats Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling contest. Okonkwo determines to gain titles for himself and become a powerful and wealthy man in spite of his father's weaknesses.

Okonkwo's father, Unoka, was a lazy and wasteful man. He often borrowed money and then squandered it on palm-wine and merrymaking with friends. Consequently, his wife and children often went hungry. Within the community, Unoka was considered a failure and a laughingstock. He was referred to as *agbala*, one

who resembles the weakness of a woman and has no property. Unoka died a shameful death and left numerous debts.

Okonkwo despises and resents his father's gentle and idle ways. He resolves to overcome the shame that he feels as a result of his father's weaknesses by being what he considers to be "manly"; therefore, he dominates his wives and children by being insensitive and controlling.

Because Okonkwo is a leader of his community, he is asked to care for a young boy named Ikemefuna, who is given to the village as a peace offering by neighboring Mbaino to avoid war with Umuofia. Ikemefuna befriends Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, and Okonkwo becomes inwardly fond of the boy.

Over the years, Okonkwo becomes an extremely volatile man; he is apt to explode at the slightest provocation. He violates the Week of Peace when he beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo, because she went to braid her hair at a friend's house and forgot to prepare the afternoon meal and feed her children. Later, he severely beats and shoots a gun at his second wife, Ekwefi, because she took leaves from his banana plant to wrap food for the Feast of the New Yam.

After the coming of the locusts, Ogbuefi Ezeuder, the oldest man in the village, relays to Okonkwo a message from the Oracle. The Oracle says that Ikemefuna must be killed as part of the retribution for the Umuofian woman killed three years earlier in Mbaino. He tells Okonkwo not to partake in the murder, but Okonkwo doesn't listen. He feels that not participating would be a sign of weakness. Consequently, Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna with his machete. Nwoye realizes that his father has murdered Ikemefuna and begins to distance himself from his father and the clansmen.

Okonkwo becomes depressed after killing Ikemefuna, so he visits his best friend, Obierika, who disapproves of his role in Ikemefuna's killing. Obierika says that Okonkwo's act will upset the Earth and the earth goddess will seek revenge. After discussing Ikemefuna's death with Obierika, Okonkwo is finally able to sleep restfully, but he is awakened by his wife Ekwefi. Their daughter Ezinma, whom Okonkwo is fond of, is dying. Okonkwo gathers grasses, barks, and leaves to prepare medicine for Ezinma.

A public trial is held on the village commons. Nine clan leaders, including Okonkwo, represent the spirits of their ancestors. The nine clan leaders, or *egwugwu*, also represent the nine villages of Umuofia. Okonkwo does not sit among the other eight leaders, or elders, while they listen to a dispute between an estranged husband and wife. The wife, Mgbafo, had been severely beaten by her husband. Her brother took her back to their family's village, but her husband wanted her back home. The *egwugwu* tell the husband to take wine to his in-laws and beg his wife to come home. One elder wonders why such a trivial dispute would come before the *egwugwu*.

In her role as priestess, Chielo tells Ekwefi (Okonkwo's second wife) that Agbala (the Oracle of the Hills and Caves) needs to see Ezinma. Although Okonkwo and Ekwefi protest, Chielo takes a terrified Ezinma on her back and forbids anyone to follow. Chielo carries Ezinma to all nine villages and then enters the Oracle's cave. Ekwefi follows secretly, in spite of Chielo's admonitions, and waits at the entrance of the Oracle. Okonkwo surprises Ekwefi by arriving at the cave, and he also waits with her. The next morning, Chielo takes Ezinma to Ekwefi's hut and puts her to bed.

When Ogbuefi Ezeudu dies, Okonkwo worries because the last time that Ezeudu visited him was when he warned Okonkwo against participating in the killing of Ikemefuna. Ezeudu was an important leader in the village and achieved three titles of the clan's four, a rare accomplishment. During the large funeral, Okonkwo's gun goes off, and Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son is killed accidentally.

Because the accidental killing of a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo and his family must be exiled from Umuofia for seven years. The family moves to Okonkwo's mother's native village, Mbanta. After they depart Umuofia, a group of village men destroy Okonkwo's compound and kill his animals to cleanse the village of Okonkwo's sin. Obierika stores Okonkwo's yams in his barn and wonders about the old traditions of the Igbo culture.

Okonkwo is welcomed to Mbanta by his maternal uncle, Uchendu, a village elder. He gives Okonkwo a plot of land on which to farm and build a compound for his family. But Okonkwo is depressed, and he blames his *chi* (or personal spirit) for his failure to achieve lasting greatness.

During Okonkwo's second year in exile, he receives a visit from his best friend, Obierika, who recounts sad news about the village of Abame: After a white man rode into the village on a bicycle, the elders of Abame consulted their Oracle, which told them that the white man would destroy their clan and other clans. Consequently, the villagers killed the white man. But weeks later, a large group of men slaughtered the villagers in retribution. The village of Abame is now deserted.

Okonkwo and Uchendu agree that the villagers were foolish to kill a man whom they knew nothing about. Later, Obierika gives Okonkwo money that he received from selling Okonkwo's yams and seed-yams, and he promises to do so until Okonkwo returns to Umuofia.

Six missionaries, including one white man, arrive in Mbanta. The white man speaks to the people about Christianity. Okonkwo believes that the man speaks nonsense, but his son, Nwoye, is captivated and becomes a convert of Christianity.

The Christian missionaries build a church on land given to them by the village leaders. However, the land is a part

of the Evil Forest, and according to tradition, the villagers believe that the missionaries will die because they built their church on cursed land. But when nothing happens to the missionaries, the people of Mbanta conclude that the missionaries possess extraordinary power and magic. The first recruits of the missionaries are efulefu, the weak and worthless men of the village. Other villagers, including a woman, soon convert to Christianity. The missionaries then go to Umuofia and start a school. Nwoye leaves his father's hut and moves to Umuofia so he can attend the school.

Okonkwo's exile is over, so his family arranges to return to Umuofia. Before leaving Mbanta, they prepare a huge feast for Okonkwo's mother's kinsmen in appreciation of their gratitude during Okonkwo's seven years of exile.

When Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, he discovers that the village has changed during his absence. Many men have renounced their titles and have converted to Christianity. The white men have built a prison; they have established a government court of law, where people are tried for breaking the white man's laws; and they also employ natives of Umuofia. Okonkwo wonders why the Umuofians have not incited violence to rid the village of the white man's church and oppressive government.

Some members of the Igbo clan like the changes in Umuofia. Mr. Brown, the white missionary, respects the Igbo traditions. He makes an effort to learn about the Igbo culture and becomes friendly with some of the clan leaders. He also encourages Igbo people of all ages to get an education. Mr. Brown tells Okonkwo that Nwoye, who has taken the name Isaac, is attending a teaching college. Nevertheless, Okonkwo is unhappy about the changes in Umuofia.

After Mr. Brown becomes ill and is forced to return to his homeland, Reverend James Smith becomes the new head of the Christian church. But Reverend Smith is nothing like Mr. Brown; he is intolerant of clan customs and is very strict.

Violence arises after Enoch, an overzealous convert to Christianity, unmasks an egwugwu. In retaliation, the egwugwu burn Enoch's compound and then destroy the Christian church because the missionaries have caused the Igbo people many problems.

When the District Commissioner returns to Umuofia, he learns about the destruction of the church and asks six leaders of the village, including Okonkwo, to meet with him. The men are jailed until they pay a fine of two hundred and fifty bags of cowries. The people of Umuofia collect the money and pay the fine, and the men are set free.

The next day at a meeting for clansmen, five court messengers who intend to stop the gathering approach the group. Suddenly, Okonkwo jumps forward and beheads the man in charge of the messengers with his machete. When none of the other clansmen attempt to

stop the messengers who escape, Okonkwo realizes that they will never go to war and that Umuofia will surrender. Everything has fallen apart for Okonkwo; he commits suicide by hanging himself.

Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages. He is haunted by the actions of Unoka, his cowardly and spendthrift father, who died in disrepute, leaving many village debts unsettled. In response, Okonkwo became a clansman, warrior, farmer, and family provider extraordinaire. He has a twelve-year-old son named Nwoye whom he finds lazy; Okonkwo worries that Nwoye will end up a failure like Unoka.

In a settlement with a neighboring tribe, Umuofia wins a virgin and a fifteen-year-old boy. Okonkwo takes charge of the boy, Ikemefuna, and finds an ideal son in him. Nwoye likewise forms a strong attachment to the newcomer. Despite his fondness for Ikemefuna and despite the fact that the boy begins to call him "father," Okonkwo does not let himself show any affection for him.

During the Week of Peace, Okonkwo accuses his youngest wife, Ojiugo, of negligence. He severely beats her, breaking the peace of the sacred week. He makes some sacrifices to show his repentance, but he has shocked his community irreparably.

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo's family for three years. Nwoye looks up to him as an older brother and, much to Okonkwo's pleasure, develops a more masculine attitude. One day, the locusts come to Umuofia—they will come every year for seven years before disappearing for another generation. The village excitedly collects them because they are good to eat when cooked.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected village elder, informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has said that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo that because Ikemefuna calls him "father," Okonkwo should not take part in the boy's death. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that they must return him to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

As he walks with the men of Umuofia, Ikemefuna thinks about seeing his mother. After several hours of walking, some of Okonkwo's clansmen attack the boy with machetes. Ikemefuna runs to Okonkwo for help. But Okonkwo, who doesn't wish to look weak in front of his fellow tribesmen, cuts the boy down despite the Oracle's admonishment. When Okonkwo returns home, Nwoye deduces that his friend is dead.

Okonkwo sinks into a depression, neither able to sleep nor eat. He visits his friend Obierika and begins to feel revived a bit. Okonkwo's daughter Ezinma falls ill, but she recovers after Okonkwo gathers leaves for her medicine.

The death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu is announced to the surrounding villages by means of the ekwe, a musical instrument. Okonkwo feels guilty because the last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in

Ikemefuna's death. At Ogbuefi Ezeudu's large and elaborate funeral, the men beat drums and fire their guns. Tragedy compounds upon itself when Okonkwo's gun explodes and kills Ogbuefi Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

Because killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo must take his family into exile for seven years in order to atone. He gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. The men from Ogbuefi Ezeudu's quarter burn Okonkwo's buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his sin.

Okonkwo's kinsmen, especially his uncle, Uchendu, receive him warmly. They help him build a new compound of huts and lend him yam seeds to start a farm. Although he is bitterly disappointed at his misfortune, Okonkwo reconciles himself to life in his motherland.

During the second year of Okonkwo's exile, Obierika brings several bags of cowries (shells used as currency) that he has made by selling Okonkwo's yams. Obierika plans to continue to do so until Okonkwo returns to the village. Obierika also brings the bad news that Abame, another village, has been destroyed by the white man.

Soon afterward, six missionaries travel to Mbanta. Through an interpreter named Mr. Kiaga, the missionaries' leader, Mr. Brown, speaks to the villagers. He tells them that their gods are false and that worshipping more than one God is idolatrous. But the villagers do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. Although his aim is to convert the residents of Umuofia to Christianity, Mr. Brown does not allow his followers to antagonize the clan.

Mr. Brown grows ill and is soon replaced by Reverend James Smith, an intolerant and strict man. The more zealous converts are relieved to be free of Mr. Brown's policy of restraint. One such convert, Enoch, dares to unmask an egwugwu during the annual ceremony to honor the earth deity, an act equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. The next day, the egwugwu burn Enoch's compound and Reverend Smith's church to the ground.

The District Commissioner is upset by the burning of the church and requests that the leaders of Umuofia meet with him. Once they are gathered, however, the leaders are handcuffed and thrown in jail, where they suffer insults and physical abuse.

After the prisoners are released, the clansmen hold a meeting, during which five court messengers approach and order the clansmen to desist. Expecting his fellow clan members to join him in uprising, Okonkwo kills their leader with his machete. When the crowd allows the other messengers to escape, Okonkwo realizes that his clan is not willing to go to war.

When the District Commissioner arrives at Okonkwo's compound, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself. Obierika and his friends lead the commissioner to the

body. Obierika explains that suicide is a grave sin; thus, according to custom, none of Okonkwo's clansmen may touch his body. The commissioner, who is writing a book about Africa, believes that the story of Okonkwo's rebellion and death will make for an interesting paragraph or two. He has already chosen the book's title: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

Language is an important theme in *Things Fall Apart* on several levels. In demonstrating the imaginative, often formal language of the Igbo, Achebe emphasizes that Africa is not the silent or incomprehensible continent that books such as *Heart of Darkness* made it out to be. Rather, by peppering the novel with Igbo words, Achebe shows that the Igbo language is too complex for direct translation into English. Similarly, Igbo culture cannot be understood within the framework of European colonialist values. Achebe also points out that Africa has many different languages: the villagers of Umuofia, for example, make fun of Mr. Brown's translator because his language is slightly different from their own.

On a macroscopic level, it is extremely significant that Achebe chose to write *Things Fall Apart* in English—he clearly intended it to be read by the West at least as much, if not more, than by his fellow Nigerians. His goal was to critique and emend the portrait of Africa that was painted by so many writers of the colonial period. Doing so required the use of English, the language of those colonial writers. Through his inclusion of proverbs, folktales, and songs translated from the Igbo language, Achebe managed to capture and convey the rhythms, structures, cadences, and beauty of the Igbo language.

The concept of *chi* is discussed at various points throughout the novel and is important to our understanding of Okonkwo as a tragic hero. The *chi* is an individual's personal god, whose merit is determined by the individual's good fortune or lack thereof. Along the lines of this interpretation, one can explain Okonkwo's tragic fate as the result of a problematic *chi*—a thought that occurs to Okonkwo at several points in the novel. For the clan believes, as the narrator tells us in Chapter 14, a "man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*." But there is another understanding of *chi* that conflicts with this definition. In Chapter 4, the narrator relates, according to an Igbo proverb, that "when a man says yes his *chisays* yes also." According to this understanding, individuals will their own destinies. Thus, depending upon our interpretation of *chi*, Okonkwo seems either more or less responsible for his own tragic death. Okonkwo himself shifts between these poles: when things are going well for him, he perceives himself as master and maker of his own destiny; when things go badly, however, he automatically disavows responsibility and asks why he should be so ill-fated.

In their descriptions, categorizations, and explanations of human behavior and wisdom, the Igbo often use animal anecdotes to naturalize their rituals and beliefs.

The presence of animals in their folklore reflects the environment in which they live—not yet “modernized” by European influence. Though the colonizers, for the most part, view the Igbo’s understanding of the world as rudimentary, the Igbo perceive these animal stories, such as the account of how the tortoise’s shell came to be bumpy, as logical explanations of natural phenomena. Another important animal image is the figure of the sacred python. Enoch’s alleged killing and eating of the python symbolizes the transition to a new form of spirituality and a new religious order. Enoch’s disrespect of the python clashes with the Igbo’s reverence for it, epitomizing the incompatibility of colonialist and indigenous values.

Achebe depicts the locusts that descend upon the village in highly allegorical terms that prefigure the arrival of the white settlers, who will feast on and exploit the resources of the Igbo. The fact that the Igbo eat these locusts highlights how innocuous they take them to be. Similarly, those who convert to Christianity fail to realize the damage that the culture of the colonizer does to the culture of the colonized.

The language that Achebe uses to describe the locusts indicates their symbolic status. The repetition of words like “settled” and “every” emphasizes the suddenly ubiquitous presence of these insects and hints at the way in which the arrival of the white settlers takes the Igbo off guard. Okonkwo is associated with burning, fire, and flame throughout the novel, alluding to his intense and

dangerous anger—the only emotion that he allows himself to display. Yet the problem with fire, as Okonkwo acknowledges in Chapters 17 and 24, is that it destroys everything it consumes. Okonkwo is both physically destructive—he kills Ikemefuna and Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s son—and emotionally destructive—he suppresses his fondness for Ikemefuna and Ezinma in favor of a colder, more masculine aura. Just as fire feeds on itself until all that is left is a pile of ash, Okonkwo eventually succumbs to his intense rage, allowing it to rule his actions until it destroys him.

What man Achebe? He has done a great job for his country and himself, because who gave important to his people, whom were living in the poor situations, that is why, I have to mainly focuses the man of language, his languages are very simple, who used easy language to people are easy to understand his language style. So, I like very much him.