

Critical Essay:

Chelonian Watchers Climbing the Tower: Steinbeck and Achebe for World Readers

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Introduction

Chinua Achebe(1930-2013) reached his literary maturity exceedingly early, and his most important work, *Things Fall Apart*, was published at age 28 in 1958. Any scholar would take interest in the literature he read and found influential in his teens and twenties. Asked about this in an interview at age 33, Achebe replied:

I don't really think that there's anyone I can say admire all that much. I *used to* like Hemingway; and I *used to* like Conrad, I used to like Conrad particularly; and I like Graham Greene, I find him a bit heavy going now and again but I do like him; and some of the younger people like Kingsley Amis and—well, I don't have any special favorites. (Lingfors 6, emphasis added)

It is natural that Achebe, who had received a British-style education, felt close to British writers, so Hemingway was the only American writer whom he had previously liked. Achebe revealed his fondness of Greene, using the present tense twice. Although scholars such as John J. Han analyze Graham Greene's writing techniques and the similarities they have with Steinbeck, Achebe did not refer to Steinbeck.

The recently published *A Short History of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* notes that the author was out of the loop regarding the publication details of the book in 1958:

When Achebe's author copy of *Things Fall Apart* arrived, he was too excited to seriously consider the cover image by Cecil Bacon, on which he had not been consulted. After the novelty wore off, he realized disappointedly that it played on widely held notions of "darkest Africa." Apart from the grotesque masks, mud huts, bush, and banana trees, there was the racially charged depiction of two men: a bending, almost crouching, loincloth-clad African and a straight-standing, Bible-clutching, helmeted white missionary, veritable emblem of cultural

and religious authority.

The first UK cover remained unchanged until 1962 (Ochiagha 83-84).

Things Fall Apart was not highly esteemed as pure literature, and an “overt attention to anthropological detail” (Ochiagha 66) meant that until the 1970s, universities did not include it in literature courses but in anthropology programs. Acknowledging his evaluation at the time, what was Achebe’s impression of Steinbeck’s reception of a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962? He likely wondered why they continued honoring Western writers.

Achebe spent most of his lifetime in the United States as a professor appointed by American universities since the 1970s. In 1989, Charles H. Rowell asked Achebe, “If you were teaching a course on twentieth-century literature, what texts would you use?” He replied, “I would try to cover the world.” He added names from African, Egyptian, Indian, and Latin American literature like Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Camara Laye, Amos Tutuola, Alex La Guma, Nadine Gordimer, Naguib Mahfouz, Alifa Rifaat, Raja Rao, and so on, as well as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Faulkner, and Hemingway (Lingfors 173). He does not seem to have mentioned John Steinbeck.

As one of Achebe’s major themes was the Biafran War or Nigerian Civil War, his enthusiasm for Faulkner is unsurprising. Steinbeck’s outstanding motifs were apparently natural disasters and economic depression in the United States, and Achebe may have preferred the works of a writer who depicted the influence of the American Civil War to Steinbeck’s.

It is difficult to know whether Achebe reasonably evaluated Steinbeck’s works or not. Yet, after Achebe passed away in 2013, many readers in the twenty-first century appreciate both authors equally. To mark World Book Day, the World Economic Forum published online the article “9 novels that changed the world,” in which *Things Fall Apart* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are selected as books with “the power to touch us profoundly, to open our eyes to injustices—and sometimes even act as a catalyst for social change” (WEF 03 Mar 2016).

Claire Hayes, a theater and book critic, previously disliked reading the classics. However, she wrote “Reading the Classics: Achebe, Steinbeck and Bulgakov” on her blog in 2014. She wrote about *Things Fall Apart* after “discovering its influence on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.” She also chose *Of Mice and Men* in the article after “having loved and cried over *The Grapes of Wrath*.”

Representing the next generation of Achebe, Christopher Abani, a Nigerian and American author, was born in 1966. “Abani’s novels share with Achebe a panoramic view that balances the personal and political, intimate and historical” (BBC-Culture 20 Mar 2014). We could deduce Abani’s thoughts on the influence of the works of Achebe and Steinbeck on him

from the same BBC-Culture article: “Chris Abani read Achebe’s *The Arrow of God* when he was in college in Nigeria—and it left a profound impact. ‘It’s an incredible novel,’ he said. ‘It had a profound influence on me for the same things that drew me to Dostoevsky, Steinbeck, Orwell and Baldwin.’”

Nowadays, literature-conscious people are starting to acknowledge the similarities between Achebe and Steinbeck, which the two authors failed to notice in their lifetime. This paper first focuses on their most important works, and later deals with the authors’ stances as novelists analyzing the essence of surviving in world literature.

Part I: Resonance of Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

Despite the fact that John Steinbeck’s works, such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), are set in California, his philosophies resonate in different cultures and works worldwide, most notably in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which was written by the best-known Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe. It revolves around the protagonist Okonkwo, a polygamist, wrestler, and farmer. He lives in an Igbo village called Umuofia and spends seven years in exile in his motherland, Mbanta. When returning home, he finds his fatherland Christianized by the coming of the white man. He is now unable to adapt to the new faith and thus hangs himself from a tree.

1. The Land Turtle as an Image of Social Disintegration

Steinbeck dedicates the third intercalary chapter in *The Grapes of Wrath* to revealing how a land turtle overcomes all obstacles to cross Route 66. Steinbeck does not randomly mention this specific small creature. Rather, he purposively uses it to depict the hardships of migrant workers and families, especially the Joads, during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. Besides this, the shell of the land turtle is an organic example of mechanical grouping in that it is apparently composed of small parts, which together make the shell.

Surprisingly, Chinua Achebe devotes a considerable part of the 11th chapter of *Things Fall Apart* to how the Igbo people perceive a tiny animal similar to a turtle, through the tale Okonkwo’s second wife Ekwefi tells her daughter Ezinma. All the birds are readying themselves to fly to attend a party in the sky. Tortoise asks permission to accompany them. When they refuse because of his deceit (92), he persuades them that he will behave appropriately, continuing until they change their minds and approve of taking him with them. Thus, each gives him a feather from which to make wings. Tortoise tells them that they should have new names for the party, and he calls himself “all of you.” Upon their arrival, Tortoise speaks for the birds and expresses his gratitude to the hosts for their kind

invitation (92). When Tortoise sees various well-presented dishes, he asks the hosts for whom they are having the party. They say it has been prepared for “all of you.” Tortoise seizes this opportunity and reminds the birds that his name is “all of you,” and begins eating all the foods ravenously, leaving them with only leftovers. Becoming angry, the birds pluck the feathers off him and fly home. Tortoise asks them to send word to his wife, but they refuse (93). Then, in a fit of rage, Parrot accepts the job to deliver Tortoise’s message, namely that his wife bring “out all the soft things in [his] house and cover the compound with them so that [he] can jump down from the sky without very great danger.” However, Parrot says to the wife that she must “bring out all the hard things in the house” (94). Tortoise springs on them and his shell breaks into pieces. A physician assembles them by “sticking them together.” According to Igbo culture, these events explain “why Tortoise’s shell is not smooth” (94).

It could be argued that this account foreshadows the break-up of the Igbo people at the hands of the white man and how Okonkwo tries in vain to reunite them. Following the thread of the Igbo perception concerning the rigidity of Tortoise’s shell, many African readers could deduce that Steinbeck means the Joads’ unity is so fragile.

2. Fear of Falling Apart

Ma Joad expresses her fear that her family will fall apart after the bank or “the monster” evicts them from their land. She thus strives to pull the family together. In Chapter 16, the Wilsons’ car breaks down and Tom suggests that he and Casey stay to fix it while the Wilsons and Joads continue on to California. As soon as the Wilsons’s car is ready, they will start ahead to meet them there. The two families agree, but Ma stands firmly against Pa and threatens him with a Jack handle if her family splits up (184-185). Ma says excitedly:

All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain’t scared while we’re all there, all that’s alive, but I ain’t gonna see us bust up. The Wilsons here is with us, an’ the preacher is with us. I can’t say nothin’ if they want to go, but I’m a-goin’ cat-wild with this here piece a bar-arn if my own folks busts up (186).

In chapter 18, Tom informs Ma that Noah will desert his family and prefers to live on the Colorado River. Worriedly, Ma says, “Family’s fallin’ apart (237). In Chapter 20, Ma reminds Tom of his promise that he will not break his parole by hitting or killing the deputies if they mistreat him to ensure that the family stays close-knit and united: “I’m a-prayin’. You got to keep clear,

Tom. The fambly's breakin' up. You got to keep clear (308).

Similarly, Achebe discusses this theme in *Things Fall Apart*. In Chapter 17, Okonkwo muses upon the bleak future awaiting his family after he knows that Nwoye leaves the faith of his ancestors and becomes a Christian. He fears that the family will fall apart if they follow Nwoye's lead:

To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decide to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white's man god. If such a thing were ever to happen, Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth (145).

In Chapter 20, Obierika explains to Okonkwo how the white man smartly breaks up the unity of Umuofia: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (166).

Furthermore, in Chapter 21, after this reflection, Okonkwo feels sorrow as he realizes that Umuofia has tumbled: "Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling up" (172). From these quotations, one could argue that the Joads and Okonkwo's clan, the Umuofia, share the same fate. The bank or "the monster" breaks up the unity of the Joads. Likewise, the white man disintegrates Umuofia. Indeed, they fall apart despite the efforts of Ma Joad and Okonkwo to keep their families acting as one.

3. The Cave as a Fountainhead of Inspiration

In Chapter 28 of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck demonstrates that after an in-depth meditation in the gloomy cave, Tom Joad eventually realizes the preacher Casy's concept of the Oversoul. Consequently, he resolves to leave his family to follow his career in proselytism. Tom says to Ma, "Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one" (463). He confides to Ma that he will be applying this theory within a tangible socio-political context by helping the poor and standing up against injustice:

I'll be ever' where—wherever you look. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad, an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes (463).

Astoundingly, Achebe meets with Steinbeck on this particular point. In the same chapter, Achebe shows how the cave is regarded as a place for inspiration in Igbo culture. In this regard, the priestess Chielo visits Okonkwo's compound at night and tells him she will take his little daughter Ezinma with her, since Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, needs her for a while. Despite Okonkwo's insistence that the Chielo should return in the morning, because Ezinma is sleeping for the moment, the priestess cautions him against disobeying the Oracle's order and enters his second wife's hut (95). She then asks Ekwefi to give Ezinma to her, whom she addresses as her daughter, and they leave together. Fearing for Ezinma's fate, Ekwefi tracks them secretly and carefully (96-97). When she ascertains that they are inside the cave, she awaits them at the entrance, ready to rescue Ezinma from the impending doom, until Okonkwo comes and assures her that she is secure and both of them can go home (102-103). This part implies that the dark cave is where Ezinma received the benediction as well as spiritual transformation and inspiration from the priestess under the eyes of the Oracle. Therefore, it could be interpreted Ezinma is charged with guiding the people of her clan in the future.

4. The Spirits of Group Idea

Undoubtedly, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a call for the group idea; that is, people within a group should act as one by helping each other. This philosophy is prevalent in the book. For instance, in Chapter 28, Steinbeck manifests the two families as in-laws. They celebrate Al's engagement to Aggie by making a few pancakes with sugar (468-469). They also act as one family. For example, Mrs. Wainwright helps Rose of Sharon deliver her stillborn baby (484-485).

Achebe stresses that the unity, generosity, helpfulness, and solidarity of these families have a counterpart among the Igbo people. In Chapter 12, many women visit Obierika's wife to help her prepare for her daughter's betrothal ceremony. Okonkwo's first wife, referred to as Nwoye's mother, brings with her "a basket of coco-yams, a cake of salt and smoked fish," and his third wife Ojiugo offers "a basket of plantains and coco-yams and a

small pot of palm-oil.” Their children bear pots of water (104). In addition, his second wife Ekwefi provides a “basket of coco-yams and fish,” and is accompanied by her daughter Ezinma who carries a pot of water (105). The women act as one to cook the yams, cassava, and vegetable soup. The youths prepare the foo-foo or cut firewood, and the children go back and forth to fetch water (106). Furthermore, three youths help Obierika butcher two goats, clean them, and cut them into pieces for the women to make the soup (107-108). The party was successful thanks to the neighbors’ collaborative efforts. In Chapter 19, Okonkwo invites all his mother’s kinsmen for a huge meal to thank them for the hard seven years of exile he spent in Mbanta. His three wives and their children work together to serve the guests as it should be done (155-156):

Yam pottage was served first because it was lighter than foo-foo and because yam always came first. Then the foo-foo was served. Some kinsmen ate it with egusi soup and others with bitter-leaf soup. The meat was then shared so that every member of ummuna had a portion. Every man rose in order of years and took a share. Even the few kinsmen who had not been able to come had their shares taken out for them in due turn (157).

Indeed, group unity and human bondage is greatly important as the foundation of everything in the two authors’ writings.

5. The Concept of Mother Earth

Noteworthy is that Steinbeck shows that Ma firmly holds Pa’s position, who becomes unable to care for the family as he did prior to The Great Depression and Dust Bowl. Accordingly, Ma comes to symbolize a mother earth figure, and so endeavors to transmit this responsibility to Rose of Sharon. In her book *The Indestructible Women in Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck*, Mimi Reisell Gladstein comments on this situation:

Throughout the novel, Ma Joad functions as a nurturing mother to all. The fact that she is known as “Ma” and is not given a first name reinforces her maternal image. Not only does she prepare food for her own family, but she also welcomes strangers and offers to share with them whatever she has. She has baked bread, the staff of life, and symbolically she is the provider of both life and its sustenance. The image is of Mother Earth and Lady Bountiful (78).

Similarly, in her article “Women Wanting to Be Mothers, Women Refusing to Be Mothers: Motherhood as a Predominant Theme in Steinbeck’s Fiction,”

Hisako Osuga explains that “Steinbeck describes good and ideal mothers who symbolize warmth, food, and security like Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*” (41). She continues that “as her namelessness and her plump body show, she performs the role of a mother not only for her own children but also for the people around her. Ma understands the life of women, and her strong will is indispensable for the Joads, supporting them in their journey to the West and in their survival in California” (46). In addition, in the article “The Great Mother in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” Lorelei Cederstrom claims that “at the center of the humble recurring cycles of family life, Ma continually reflects the many aspects of the nurturing force of the Great Mother” (81). She clarifies that “[h]er character has a positive effect on those around her for it is firmly rooted in the generating spirit of the Great Mother” (82). Furthermore, all three scholars point out that Rose of Sharon eventually assumes the role of Ma’s successor. In her article “Mother Earth and Earth Mother: The Recasting of Myth in Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*,” Joan Hedrick points out that Rose of Sharon’s final act “also suggests the superfluosness of political activity: if mother earth has given out, one can still return to that original fount of plenty, the mother’s breast. This scene makes explicit the role that Ma Joad has played throughout the story. In death, deprivation, and uncertainty, Ma is the rock that gives the family strength” (135).

Indeed, “Mother Earth” is also accentuated in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, since Igbo society is undoubtedly pagan. This interpretation is strengthened by Lorelei Cederstrom’s assertion in the abovementioned article that “[p]agan cultures identify the earth, with its seasonal cycles of birth, growth, death, and renewal, with a feminine principle. Such cultures worship an earth goddess, on whose fecundity and compassion men, depend, and depict her as a maternal figure, a ‘Great Mother’” (76). Here, some facets of “Mother Earth” are worth mentioning to illustrate this point. In Chapter 13, during Ezeudu’s funeral, Okonkwo’s gun goes off and unintentionally kills the son of the deceased man. His clan banishes him to his motherland for seven years (116-117). Upon arriving there with his family, he is warmly welcomed by his maternal kinsmen, who help him start a new life by building a new compound and giving him two or three pieces of land on which to farm during the coming planting season (121). His uncle Uchendu holds a meeting to which he summons his siblings, but addresses only Okonkwo:

Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or “Mother is Supreme”? We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her

family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say Nneka—"Mother is Supreme" (125). ...

When Okonkwo cannot respond to this question, he stresses his previous idea and explains:

It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme (126).

The two quotations reflect that the father in times of bliss and prosperity protects and feeds his family, but in times of hardship the mother replaces him to keep the family from falling apart. This insight is evident in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Pa and Grampa serve as the shields and breadwinners of their family during prosperous and happy years; however, in the midst of hardship, deprivation, and need, authority shifts to Ma, who seizes it staunchly and becomes the nourishing and protecting figure of her family and all the destitute.

Conclusion of Part I

Part I elucidates how John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* share common themes, despite the fact that the two authors belong to different cultures and their works are set in dissimilar backdrops. Motifs such as the land turtle as an image of social disintegration, fear of falling apart, the cave as a fountainhead of inspiration, the spirit of a group idea, and the concept of mother earth testify to certain meeting points between the American and Igbo cultures.

In fact, the similarities between these novels cause us to consider the following question: Why do they have these points in common? Possibly, Achebe and Steinbeck share some of the same ideals regarding literature. *The Grapes of Wrath* was inspired by Steinbeck's idea that the story could help and inform the political situation of migrants. Similarly, Achebe teaches the reader the culture of his country, Nigeria, before and after the British takeover. In *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe: Volume 1: Omenka, the Master Artist-Critical Perspectives on Achebe's Fiction*, the editor Ernest N. Emenyonu mentions that Achebe demonstrates in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that "art is, and always was, at the service of man. Our ancestors created myths and told their stories for a human purpose" (442).

Finally, they also shared the same English publisher, William Henry

Heinemann, who first published *The Grapes of Wrath* in the UK in 1939. *Things Fall Apart* “had been published in 1958 in hardback under the general market imprint of William Heinemann” (Currey 575). Thus, Steinbeck’s writing possibly influenced the publisher in its decision to publish Achebe. {Chaker Mohamed Ben Ali wishes to acknowledge Mimi Reisel Gladstein for editing Part I.}

Part II: The Two Authors’ Stances as Novelists

The latter part of the paper investigates whether the two authors’ works qualify for exceeding distinction as world classics, which would enable Steinbeck and Achebe to outlive the rest of twentieth-century writers in literary history and remain world novelists in the future. As we can easily infer from Part I, they have many traits in common. Nevertheless, we will concentrate on the two most important characteristics because of space limitations.

1. Fair Religious Views

Both Chinua Achebe and John Steinbeck were raised by Christian parents. On the one hand, Steinbeck grew up as an Episcopalian (Ray 27). Christened by his family when he was three years old, he was a choirboy in Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church (Ray 30-31). Alex Gilmore states that Steinbeck’s mother “read to him from an early age, including Bible stories when he was three. Later, he wrote, ‘Literature was in the air around me. The Bible I absorbed through my skin’” (192). On the other hand, according to *The Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia*, edited by M. Keith Booker, Achebe received his Christian faith from his missionary parents and thereafter in British institutions:

Born November 16, 1930, at Ogidi, just east of Onitsha in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, in an area that was first colonized by the British at the end of the nineteenth century, Achebe was christened Albert Chinu-alumogu Achebe. The son of Christian evangelists, he was educated in colonial schools, attending Government College at Umuahia from 1944 to 1948 and University College, Ibadan, from 1948 to 1953. The Ibadan of this time was an institution in which Achebe’s “formal studies in English literature would have been very similar to those of British undergraduate” (2).

Although the two authors’ religious bases were Christianity, their religious views go beyond what we call Christianity. Steinbeck’s *To a God Unknown* starts with the epigraph “He made the sky and the earth, and His will fixed/ their places./ Yet they look to Him and tremble./ The risen sun shines forth

over Him./ Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?" This quote is from the Veda, the counterpart of the Bible in Hinduism. The protagonist of the novel, Joseph says, "I'm denying no Christ" (165), but his behaviors are unacceptable to his brother Burton, whose "nature had constituted for a religious life" (30). The brother criticizes Joseph without trying to understand his sources of vitality, saying, "He is worshipping as the old pagans did. He is losing his soul and letting in the evil" (165).

Joseph feels a sense of unity with nature throughout the novel. For Joseph, "[f]or a moment the land had been his wife"(12), and he talks to a special tree. A severe drought costs him a visit to a church, and Joseph asks Father Angelo to pray for the "dying" land in vain (251). In the second last chapter, the protagonist climbs up a rock and "gently open[s] the vessels of his wrist" (261). Note that Steinbeck provided this male character living in total harmony with nature with mysterious attractiveness and depicted his action in an affirmative way:

He watched the bright blood cascading over the moss, and he heard the shouting of the wind around the grove. The sky was growing grey. And time passed and Joseph grew grey too. He lay on his side with his wrist outstretched and looked down the long black mountain range of his body. Then his body grew huge and light. It arose into the sky, and out of it came the streaking rain (261).

While Christianity forbids suicidal acts, Joseph's body can raise up to the sky in a divine manner, and he succeeds in giving rain to the land.

The protagonist is far from being polluted with detestable paganism. Joseph never considers the salvation of his own soul, as he exceeds his individuality. In a sense, he is an ideal existence in the natural world, clearly distinguished from individually detached and self-centered people. Therefore, Steinbeck made Father Angelo think of Joseph as follows: "When he had gone, Father Angelo went back to his chair [...] and he thought, 'Thank God this man has no message. Thank God he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in.' And in sudden heresy, 'else there might be a new Christ here in the West'" (252). Joseph, who had some potential of becoming another Christ, was portrayed as a vividly impressive character, unlike his brother, who is an inflexible Christian.

Scholars notice that Steinbeck was influenced by his mother's roots. Part of his mindset may have been formed based on the influence of Celtic culture, in which fairy tales and myths have been handed down between generations. It can be inferred that this influence led to Steinbeck's religious flexibility or generosity toward beliefs in groves.

Achebe felt his very young life had been lived on the "crossroads of

cultures" (*Hopes and Impediments* 34), as he was surrounded by traditional Igbo culture and the influence of Britain. *Chinua Achebe: Teacher of Light* notes, "In Chinua's childhood home, [...] Igbo beliefs still dominated, although half the village had converted to Christianity. [...] Chinua's youthful ambivalence is reflected in his writing" (18-19). As indicated in the introduction of this paper, Achebe liked reading Conrad in his boyhood, whereas he was fascinated by Igbo doyens' words of wisdom when growing up. The environment must have developed the brilliant boy's ability to consider things from various viewpoints.

The Igbo society described in *Things Fall Apart* has strict divine laws in which the gods are positioned at the top. On the other hand, it is run democratically. Diligent workers from poor families could become more powerful and wealthier than lazy people, and however powerful a man is, he could be punished without leniency if he violates the gods' laws. The Igbo knew what was essential to their society. Achebe explains how well the community system is organized and how enriched its cultures are. At the same time, he does not hesitate to describe what dropped from the Igbo unity net. Twin babies should be killed, as should *ogbange*. Chapter 22 includes the following case: "The child had been declared an *ogbange*, plaguing its mother by dying and entering her womb to be born again. Four times this child had run its evil round. And so, it was mutilated to discourage it from returning" (174-175). Achebe never fails to depict cruel aspects in the well-constructed Igbo society.

Those dropped from the Igbo unity net such as *osu*, the outcasts, and Nwoye, Okonkwo's unworthy son, are charmed by hymns outright and converted. Nwoye, whose Christian name is Isaac, is sent to a new training college for teachers (172), making him hopeful and worthy in the Christian society. These processes Achebe develops are amazingly convincing.

In *To a God Unknown*, Steinbeck created a contrast between Joseph and his brother Burton. Burton is detached from nature, and does not see divinity in it. In addition, Achebe did not forget to contrast Okonkwo and Mr. Brown, a white missionary. Mr. Brown does not take coercive measures, and so becomes "respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith" (168). When visiting the village, Mr. Brown spoke with Akunna, a great man, for hours through an interpreter, and they "learnt more about their different beliefs" (169). We can deduce Achebe's own views of monotheism and polytheism from their religious discussion. Neither succeeds in converting the other, but they become more understanding of the other's religion. The ending part leads readers to know that Mr. Brown has to leave the area because of his illness, and that a more meaningful contrast is between Mr. Brown and his successor Mr. Smith, who is forcible and does not try to understand native residents' cultures or religion. As such, Achebe used

stereotypes by choosing common names like Brown and Smith.

An increasing sense of fairness is essential to modern world literature, especially that pertaining to religions. At this point, Steinbeck and Achebe produced ideal works for world readers today and in the future. Both authors viewed religions from diverse standpoints, and they had no unbalanced prejudice toward heathens and paganism.

2. Political Stance

Those who try to capture things fairly are often enraged by unfairness and injustice. It is well known that Steinbeck wrote to the authorities to deal with people fairly at the times of “the harvest gypsies” and Japanese internment camps. This does not mean he was acting based on an ideology or sect, but that he hated that which robs humans of their dignity and life force.

The unstable Nigerian political situation led to Achebe being referred to as “an outspoken critic of Nigeria’s post-colonial government” (Hawker 11). Giving the lecture “Africa is People” on June 17, 1998, at a World Bank event, Achebe pled for the African people. He implored that the “captains of global finance, donors and lenders, should ‘do the right thing.’ They should stop supporting corrupt African leaders” (Sallah 137). Without bias toward a specific ideology, he merely sought humanistic righteousness.

In his words, Achebe “had no good fortune of meeting Martin Luther King,” but he did write an essay to praise and applaud him. It ends as follows: “[I]t is appropriate that we celebrate Martin Luther King, a man who struggled so valiantly to restore humanity to the oppressed and the oppressor” (*British-Protected Child* 137). One could argue that both Steinbeck and Achebe had common motives to write. Their wrath against cruel or egotistic people and a cold-blooded system that robbed helpless humans of their life force caused them to author these works. They assumed that it was writers’ responsibility to correct social injustice.

The two writers also drew inspiration from William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). In his book *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer: A Biography*, Jackson Benson explains that Yeats, among others, left his imprints on Steinbeck’s psyche: “[T]he most probable sources of a stimulus toward a more subject approach in his writing, therefore, came from poetry—Whitman, Yeats and Jeffers—and from his extensive reading in philosophy and psychology” (201). He adds that Steinbeck “could not forgive certain kinds of behavior, and he could not reach that ‘tower beyond tragedy’ (to use a phrase that Ed adopted from Yeats) (sic) that would allow him to ignore injustice as ultimately unimportant” (248). Ed Ricketts expected Steinbeck to sublimate his everyday anger to wrath in his literature. Furthermore, Yeats’ influence on *Things Fall Apart* is apparent, as Achebe picks out the first

stanza of *The Second Coming* (1919) as an epigraph of his novel from which the title per se is taken, “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

In his mind, Yeats’ tower was not an imaginary ivory tower. The Introduction of *The Tower* tells us that Yeats visualized such a tower: “The tower [...] should suggest the real object. I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work.” We should not forget that much of Yeats’s labor and efforts were dedicated to the Irish independence movement through the Irish Literary Renaissance. Yeats did not only indulge in traditional myths and legends, but also served as a senator in the Irish Free State for eight years. His stance of assimilating political realities and turning them into mythical height likely appeared supreme to Steinbeck, Achebe, and Ricketts. As such, the two authors belong to the same school of Yeatsian writers.

Conclusion

The chelonians mentioned in Part 1 survived various disasters. The Achebe tortoise dares to dream of flying up in the sky, and while he is severely injured, he continues to live on the land with others’ help. The Steinbeck turtle cannot spoil itself with an overarching dream and can barely crawl on the land. Their lives resemble those of ordinary people, and it can be inferred that Achebe and Steinbeck expected humans to survive countless tragedies and retain their vitality without being totally defeated.

The works of Steinbeck and Achebe did and will succeed in changing our social consciousness. Literary works written for the self-conscious or just for the sake of art may appeal to a certain number of readers, but hardly create much social impact or influence. In contrast, works by writers who fought with their pens against others’ oppression in the real world are viscerally appealing to people’s emotions and the human intellect sustaining our lives as a supermassive group. Research on the analogy between Achebe and Steinbeck thus becomes far more interesting and meaningful than expected. Considering their similarities in the context of world literature, Africa will have a significantly increasing number of Steinbeck lovers during this century and hopefully in those to come.

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