Things Fall Apart launches the Ibo quartet of Achebe, in which the novelist presents an African's Africa as a peopled landscape with meaningful social content and activity within a carefully patterned framework of historical consciousness responding to tradition and change, on one hand, and the crisis of the human personality, on the other. Achebe's description of the Ibo community, with which Things Fall Apart opens is in marked contrast to the white man's projection of Africa as a dark continent with forests, rivers and trackless wilderness permeated by mysterious silence and foreboding existential menace, - all seen from the point of view of an alienated individual steeped in the dark areas in his own experience. Conrad's Heart of Darkness, for instance, projects Africa as an ambience and presence reflecting the inner predicament of Marlow, a
typical western man. Achebe shifts the emphasis from the exotic European myth of pre-historic Africa to a social community at work with all its rich rippling normality of life embracing the chores and routines of a human activity controlled and regulated by its vernacular institutions and customs. The title of the novel, adopted from Yeats's 'The Second Coming', underscores the image of Africa not as a fabulous, formless darkness and a vast chaos, but as a living culture with the connective tissue of a long tradition subjected, like all living cultures, to the change and self-differentiation in the course of time, revealing its ordeals and tribulations in achieving a new sense of destiny, and accommodation to historical crisis.

The Umuofia community, with its hierarchical structure defined by tradition and custom, is confronted with a new set of values institutionalised in the western forms of government, religion and social organisation. The social environment of this community is based on the unquestionable assumption that the community is greater than the individual and is the source and succour of his drive for self-fulfilment. The western world-view, with which the traditional
Ibo culture is confronted, rests on the opposite assumption that the individual can be above the community by virtue of his heroic qualities and attainments as well as his ability to master and manipulate the forces of nature, history and society. As Yeats hints at in his poem, the unfettered individualism of the West has the potential danger of climaxing into anarchy, in which the ceremonies of innocence are lost. Thus the encounter between such sharply opposed cultures is likely to result in the disintegration of the social structure and the weakening at once of public spirit and personal feeling. Such a view places self and society in an adverse, and possibly decreative relationship. While adopting the Yeatsian epigraph for his fictional purposes, Achebe not only adopts it as a prophetic device, but also renders it as a metaphor of sociological analysis. This he achieves by pitting the story of his protagonist against the history of the Ibo society and bringing out their tragic correspondence and interaction.

In projecting the conflict between tradition and change in the Ibo culture, Achebe takes an artist's interest
in showing rather than telling, replanting the historical process on the African soil and pressing his sociological insight into a psychological drama of individual human character with all its internal ambiguities and uncertainties. Although the external focus of the novel is the Ibo social setting, it is internalised throughout as a force of destiny acting upon the protagonist's character and consciousness. By scrupulously remaining close to the facts of society and human behaviour, Achebe blends the laws of probability and of necessity, and also concretises and distances the racial and individual experiences by means of artistic objectivity. He renders both sides of the polarised situation with authentic detail. The Yeatsian abstraction of an apocalyptic collapse of civilization is given a substantial social and psychological reference. At the same time, the character of Okonkwo, the protagonist, is delineated convincingly as the product and the source alike of the tragedy which overwhelms his culture.

The sense of place is firmly established in Achebe's novel, both in its communal and personal aspects. The novel opens with a description of Okonkwo and his finely
grained sense of individuality as one who has a heroic conception of himself and a correspondingly exaggerated expectation of the community's response to his actions and attainments. Next, his immediate family set up is described and his relationship to his father and his household is firmly established. This is followed by descriptions of the community life of Umuofia, with its customs and beliefs, cults and rituals, its laws and restrictions, all adding to a sense of the broader life in which Okonkwo's character is defined. In presenting these inner and outer elements of Okonkwo's world, Achebe indirectly hints at the nature of the conflict that is bound to follow, with all its grim inevitability. Achebe's diagnosis goes beyond the cliches of colonial encounter and points to the internal deficiency of both the Ibo culture the personality of Okonkwo, in which are inherent the causes of conflict and tragedy. In his conception of status and respectability Okonkwo follows a partial and outmoded system of social preference. He conveniently glosses over the essential flexibility of the non-authoritarian and open-ended system of his traditional society. Exaggerating the personal code
of valour, fearlessness and courage, Okonkwo unconsciously sets himself as a subversive force against the democratic processes of decision making and action within his own culture. On the other hand, the Umuofia community, in contrast to its almost idyllic presentation through the point of view of the ironic narrator, is shown as a society which has been progressively out of touch with its traditional genius for social flexibility and openness. Clinging to a world-view and its corresponding moral imperatives, even when their actual usage had lost its sharp pointedness and relevance in a changing world, Umuofia loses its vitality and its capacity to respond creatively to change.

The traditional equilibrium between the individual and the tradition is disturbed by the intrusion of a third force represented by the West. Achebe traces the point at which the traditional society is most vulnerable in terms of its own self-contradictory tendencies. He takes care to counterpoint the egalitarian ethos of the tribal community with the negative impulses embodied in its superstitions and its unequal social discriminations. The offence and the
it gives to some parts of its own social system prepare a fertile ground for subversion and revolt on the part of those who have been discredited and alienated by the age-old pride and prejudice of the Ibo social order. For instance, in its unfair and discriminatory treatment of the outcasts and slaves, in its disproportionate laws of crime and punishment, in its stern administration of justice and, above all, in the particularly inhuman treatment of hostages and prisoners of tribal war, the Ibo community is far from being idyllic. Ikemefuna, the tragic hostage, becomes the crucial test and symbol, to whom the whole disintegrating process of the society and the collapse of the protagonist's personality are traced. In thus establishing a naturalistic context and frame-work for his narrative, Achebe demonstrates a different kind of 'Heart of Darkness' in which sociological and psychological issues take precedence over the romantic and existential despairs and agonies of the western hero's anthropological encounter with dark Africa. The white man's African burden becomes the African's European burden, bringing about a kind of human crisis with which Ibo character
can hardly cope by means of the traditional values and responses. In chronicling these various dimensions of Ibo life, *Things Fall Apart* emerges as a story not only of African being but also of African becoming, narrated with a sensitive awareness of history and a sense of the past whose presence is at once positive and negative. It offers a moving and understanding analysis of the human situation. The double vision and the double perspective of the African predicament shapes the entire dialectical pattern of the narrative in the novel and provides dramatic links with the spatial and temporal aspects of African culture and the African personality.

II

*Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's first novel was published in 1958. It is unquestionably his most popular novel and marks the beginning of the new wave of writing in Africa.

*Things Fall Apart* derives its strength from the quality of the author's perception of the social forces at work in an ancient and proud society, and from his (Achebe's)
admirable knowledge of human psychology shown in the development of Okonkwo's character. 1

Besides revealing an admirable knowledge of human psychology, Achebe shows great skill in delineating the traditions and customs of his people and in evoking the transitional ethos of the tribal society under the crisis of historical change. Tradition stands at the heart of Things Fall Apart; not merely as a backdrop, but as a presence which defines and enacts the character of individuals as well as the destiny of the community as a whole. In fact, Achebe seems to follow L.P. Hartley who observes that

It is safer for a novelist to choose his subject something he feels about than something he knows about or has got to know about by study or conscious observation. 2


Achebe's fictional aim is to absorb the concrete particulars of the life of the past in the Ibo society into a narrative mode moving towards universal feeling while offering an authentic psychological analysis of the personality of individuals seeking accommodation within a changed external order. By understanding the past, the meaning of the past is defined and presented in an objective perspective. In Achebe's presentation the narrative itself becomes a technique of placing the various contradictory elements in African experience in a kind of balance such that all the factors in the situation are shown as valid agents in making up the complex destiny of the tribe.

The British missionaries introduced into West Africa an alien religion which gradually and rapidly displaced the native faith in a traumatic manner, which is the major premise of Things Fall Apart. The novel deals with the traumatic impact of the white man's arrival. The old and the new Ibo generations, the Christian missionaries and the emerging new social groups are all studied and portrayed with insight, irony and charity and particularised in the shifting contexts of a style of life and a
world-view under change.

The novel is a storehouse of Ibo tribal tradition, their culture, their religion and their ways of speech. Traditional rituals, ceremonies, folk-tales and proverbs are incorporated in *Things Fall Apart* into a vividly felt and realised way of life. The novel recaptures the texture of life in the Ibo village community as it had been before the western advent. The time, as has been mentioned, dates back to the period when White missionaries and officials were first penetrating Eastern Nigeria, confronting the placid normality of Ibo tribal life with the turbulent currents of an aggressive western way of life.

All this social activity, and the anthropological detail which it validates, concretises the tribal culture, in describing which Achebe presents an Africa far different from the white man's stereotype of it as primitive, uncultured and superstitious. Through his substantiating details he portrays the tribal society as civilized, harmonious and purposive within its own ethos and defining frame-work of customs, observances and folkways as a self-consistent and
poised way of life, whose major goal was to maintain a creative equilibrium between the tribal community and its individual components of people, families and social groups, seeking happiness, prosperity and cultural fulfilment.

Into this almost idyllic society is introduced the character of the hero, Okonkwo, whose psychology and behaviour are rooted in the values of the tribe with which he is at perfect ease. The wrestling match, at the village Olympiad, is not only an assertion of the facts of life, but also a creation of possibilities in human character, for it is an event which shows Okonkwo at his best.

Okonkwo, unlike his father Unoka, is a man of action. He is renowned as a great wrestler. He is an important and respected man in Umuofia. In deference to the tribal values of valour and honour, Okonkwo strives to be different from his father and identifies his destiny by his own concept of a usable past which makes his personal world more authentic.

The dynamic of Umuofia is its conviction that
To exist is to live with the group. Its people are united by both natural and human factors. They see things as a group and act as a group. The clan meets and decides the course of action or solves its problems from time to time. Justice at the clan level rests with the elders who are believed to perform the will of the ancestors. Indeed, the Umuofian world is rigorously restrictive, yet orderly and secure. As Emmanuel Obiechina remarks,

Collective participation is the keynote of village activities. Whether in community games, singing and dancing, work on farms or building houses, or what has to do with birth, death, marriage or religious worship, the emphasis is always on group participation. The community takes part actively in the working of social institutions, shares common beliefs, attitudes and values. 3

Solidarity is the vital bond that welds together the traditional West African villagers. Tribal solidarity is manifested in many communal rituals which aim at restoring

the democratic balance between public and private interest, which is likely to be occasionally disturbed by the domination of one by the other under the pressure of events and circumstances. The Yam festival, the week of peace, the etiquette of the Kola-Nut, the Olympiad, and the pageant of the ancestral spirits, are all components of a ritually-conditioned way of life. They dramatise the socially accepted strategies of initiation, manipulation and improvisation whereby the individual is seasonally harmonised into the collective identity. The rituals also emphasise affiliation and continuity as the main factors that affirm the sense of tribal identity. Collective participation, communal sharing and mutual reciprocity are also values supported by a common sense of identity. This world-view is reflected even in the popular folk-songs sung at games and festivals. In the tribal culture man, nature and God are brought together, in harmonious interaction, into a hierarchical frame-work, a kind of Great Chain of Being, to perceive which is to act in perfect alignment with the forces that shape human destiny and potentiate the resources of human accommodation within an inherited environment.
The custom, which adumbrates the romantic heroism as well as tragic hybris of Okonkwo, is the practice of the ceremony of title-taking. Among the Ibo a title is so prestigious a matter that

the economic, social and political significance of title-taking is generally remarkable. 4

Age is respected but achievement is revered. The Ibo intensely strive to possess titles, for the titles are not only marks of social distinction but are sacred, with an almost talismanic power.

The title holders virtually monopolized authority in their village group. The making of major political decisions and the administration of criminal justice were carried out at public meetings at which all the adult males of the community had a right to express their opinions and the decisions agreed upon were ratified and virtually imposed by the lineage heads. 5

The title-holder thus assumes the power and status of an elder statesman, respected, honoured and obeyed as a leader, mediator and hero. He is in a sense the equivalent, among the living, of the ancestor, and exercises the sanctity and authority of the supernatural. At the same time the right of every individual in the tribe to gain election to the coveted status by personal valour, heroic deeds and impartial judgement of men and matters is duly recognised. Okonkwo's activism, as well as his desire to be different from his idle and wastrel father, is motivated and directed by this tradition-oriented desire and ambition for power as embodied in the tribal value of title-taking. A man is known by the number of titles he holds and the resulting status and patrimony he passes on to his lineage. Okonkwo's strength, made perfect by his weakness, is dramatised through his avid title-seeking.

within the old order while the new order is subverting its credibility and legitimacy.

The cult of the Egwugwu is also a fundamental element in the Ibo way of life which aims at emphasizing the continuity of the tribal life and rests on the African belief in the survival and prevalence of the ancestral spirits. Ancestor-worship affirms time as a continuum and history as a cyclical pattern and creation as eternal. As a social phenomenon, the ancestral presence is an assurance of tribal unity and authority, by which the living are made to feel that they inhabit a world beneficially ordered by transcendental forces and a community resting on solidarity, reciprocity and equality with the rest of humanity. The egwugwu, the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan, comprise nine of the greatest masked ancestral spirits in the clan. The Ibo ardently bestow respect on

7. "Each of the nine egwugwu represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest. The nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of the nine sons of the first father of the clan. Evil forest represented the village of Umueru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons" - Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p.81.
ancestral spirits. Achebe elucidates this aspect clearly in his essay entitled 'Chi in Igbo Cosmology':

'The masked spirits who often grace human rituals and ceremonies with their presence are representative visitors from the underworld and are said to emerge from their subterranean home through ant-holes... The masked spirits are only 'symbolic' ancestors'.

In fact, Okonkwo's tragic destiny rests on the polarity between the Egwugwu and his own 'Chi'. The ambivalence of his tragic choice, partly prompted by the open-ended doubleness of the Egwugwu judgement, in a matter of dispute, leads to his fall from tribal grace and sends him on the disastrous course of a drifting recalcitrant personal will. The epiphanic irony, occurring towards the end of the novel, stems from the erosion, and violation, of the sacred authority of the Egwugwu when the western-converted youth unmask the spirits, leaving the tribe in awesome bewilderment and collective confusion.

The sacred Week of Peace is observed by the Ibo before planting any crop in the earth, during which period the great goddess of earth is honoured by maintaining complete peace in the land. When Okorkwo breaks the week of peace by beating his youngest wife, the priest of the earth goddess imposes punishment on Okonkwo. Obiërika, Achebe's man of reasoning, argues with Okonkwo to convince him that his active participation in killing Ikemefuna, the hostage, is hasty and displeasing to the earth goddess.

What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the Goddess wipes out whole families. 9

The desecration of the earth spirit, in the wake of the cultural encounter, brings about the collapse of the tribe in Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo offends the great Goddess many times, particularly when he takes an active part in killing the young lad Ikemefuna, who is sacrificed to the village of Umuofia. In not heeding Ezeodu's advice, in breaking the sanctity of week of peace, and in inadvertently

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killing Ezeudu's son, and in finally committing suicide, Okonkwo indulges in impulsive overreaching actions which alienate him from the community to which he owes heroic allegiance.

As a chronicler of Ibo life before the western confrontation, Achebe thus presents a prelapsarian community which was consistently coherent within the limits and possibilities of its own ethos and world-view. This makes all the more poignant and authentic the story of its fall when the ceremonies of tribal innocence are ended. In the assiduous enumeration of the quotidian details of the old way of life, with its customs, beliefs, practices, observances and its ecological and internal harmony, its egalitarian institutional organisation, its provision for a happy reconciliation between private and public norms of conduct, its festivals, pageants and rituals, the Umuofian community emerges as a paradigm of culture so distinctive in its creative dynamic. The growth, self-differentiation and accommodation of its members are related directly to the demiurge of the cosmic order and find expression in its social poise, democratic elegance and existential harmony. But this society has its own internal contradictions and
imbalance which make it vulnerable to the onslaught of external and historical changes, and this crisis is particularised in the story and character of the hero, Okonkwo. The decline of the society and the fall of the hero are synchronous and equal; and the tragic responsibility is apportioned between both with equal detachment. The world of assets contains within itself the areas of liability which come to the fore disastrously both in the individual and the aggregate. The two absolutes of the novel, the tribe and the hero, are inveigled into the trap of ambivalence and relativity. On one level, in view of this extended polarity of the human situation, the novel becomes a historical work, while on the other level, it becomes a heroic tragedy. Achebe's skill lies in rendering both these strands of human experience with equal impartiality and objectivity and dramatising the tension between them in terms of human universals.

III

Achebe chooses the historical moment of the British encounter to trace and record the way in which 'things fall
apart in the Ibo society. The identity and integrity of the tribal community, when people spoke like one, and acted like one, is lost in the shallows of time and change. In his accusation of the Whiteman Obierika describes, in pain and anguish, the tribal tragedy:

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. 10

The values and concepts of the old traditional society give way to the new ways of thinking and action as the basis of social reality. In consequence, the protagonist of Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo, brought up in one culture and made to confront another, fails in achieving the necessary accommodation. Like his clan, he is forced to react in panic and tumult rather than act in a structured and dynamic manner towards the changed circumstances of his life and situation. The flaws and failings of his own character also contribute to the tragedy which engulfs

him and his clan alike. Achebe offers a dramatised account of the crisis affecting the Ibo society by analysing its impact on the personality and character of the individuals, especially the protagonist, and on the turns in fortune of a whole way of life in the throes of historical mutation.

Okonkwo's role in *Things Fall Apart* stems from his two basic emotions: *Anger and Fear*, motivating all his actions. Though Okonkwo has risen to be a prominent leader of Umuofia because of his *solid personal achievements*, he is impelled by the fear of failure to kill Ikemefuna, the innocent lad who is committed to his trust as hostage and who has grown up to call him father. Underlying the fear-psychosis lies Okonkwo's obsession with his own father's personal and social failure.

'Indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death'. 11.

In placing himself in an adverse relation to his father, Okonkwo misjudges the latter's artistic accomplishment as well as the tribal society's capacity to tolerate deviant behaviour. In fact his oedipal hostility is extended to the tribe when it seems to go against his personal 'chi'.

Okonkwo reacts over-violently against his father's incompetence, cultivating in himself all the qualities of success and suppressing everything that is like his father. He is hard to himself and merciless to his family, and has no forbearance for the soft strain in his eldest son Nwoye. 12

When the elders of the clan decide to kill the hostage, Ikemefuna, according to the pronouncement of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Ezeudu, the oldest man in Umuofia warns Okonkwo not to partake in the tragic act, for the boy has been with him (Okonkwo) for three years in his compound and has come to call him father. Despite the warning, Okonkwo acts in a manner at once impulsive and inexorable.

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his matchet, Qkonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Qkonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. 13

This is the critical turning point in the protagonist's character. His own son Nwoye revolts against his father's heartless action and the tribal code of justice that seemingly justifies it. He becomes an easy convert to Christianity which seems to offer him the freedom, independence and possibility that his father's religion could ever offer him. Personal feeling and public virtue, which are in conflict, confront the son with a choice that reverses his father's. Thus the generational gap aggravates the tragedy of incomprehension and impercipience embodied in Qkonkwo.

Qkonkwo's practice of public virtue is ironically rooted in his own private feeling, namely his personal fear of weakness shown in public conduct. He is in fact never

free from subjectivity, deliberately suppressing his capacity for all emotion except anger, which too is a fatal weakness. Anger manifests itself in even trivial incidents. Many instances of Okonkwo's overreaching himself in emotion are narrated in the novel. During the Week of Peace, he breaks the peace of the clan by beating his youngest wife for the trifling matter of not cooking the afternoon meal early. Emotion blocks reason. He is not afraid of even the Earth Goddess, Ani, whom he would propitiate later. The rigid personal code of Okonkwo takes on an anti-traditional dimension in such blasphemy. In violating the law, he compels the law to recoil on himself.

Deliberately Okonkwo intends to shoot Ekwefi, his second wife, who had merely cut a few banana leaves off to wrap some food. Again an insignificant reason. Pleading that the tree is absolutely killed, Okonkwo in his reaction kills the joyous spirit of the New Yam Festival by giving the woman a sound beating and going to the extent of aiming a gun at her. Had the gun hurt the woman, Okonkwo would have committed the 'male crime', but the situation puts off the calamity. The pattern of angry,
impulsive reactions to situations in which his male-ego is threatened culminates in his last stubborn action towards the end of the novel. When Okonkwo encounters the head messenger who has come to the market place along with four other court messengers to stop the meeting as per the order of the Whiteman, he invites self-disaster.

'In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's matchet descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body. The waiting backcloth jumped into tumultuous life and the meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: 'Why did he do it?'

The answer is unmistakably that Okonkwo set the whole mechanism of Nemesis by his original sin, shooting at his wife and disturbing the peace of Ani, thereby isolating himself from community and arrogating to himself its authority, which would take its collective decisions only after a long and wise deliberation. Thus, breaking the tribal code, Okonkwo

He is alienated from the very culture which he seeks to exemplify by his own deeds. Ezeani, the priest of Ani, sums up, pointing an accusing finger at him.

The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase and we shall all perish. 15

Inwardly, Okonkwo is not to be blamed as he is repentant. He has acted as the priest of Ani bids him. His neighbours have no conviction of his faith in the Gods of the clan because he remains silent, leaving his inward repentence unexpressed in public for having violated the sanctity of the week of peace. They have thus no evidence of his reserved and taciturn nature which conceals a genuine, if unverbalised, core of kindness and affection. In fact, Okonkwo's concern for his wife Ekwefi is clearly indicated in his keeping vigil with her over Ezinma, their daughter, when she is carried away by the possessed priestess Chielo to the shrine of Agbala.

Okonkwo considers himself a man of action rather than a man of words, and he is averse to show his feelings in the open because he believes that such a public expression of emotion would be a betrayal of weakness. He places a high value on manliness and virility and believes in demonstrating himself as a man of strength. The slaying of Ikemefuna proceeds from this complex ordering of his psyche in terms of a heroic self-conception which in part at least has the sanction of tribal custom and convention. As a matter of fact, there develops a strong paternal tie in him with Ikemefuna whom he loved even more than his own son. But he imagines that a ruthless rectitude in personal matters must be practised in order to uphold public virtue.

Another aspect of Okonkwo's personality is his drive for power, status and respectability, and his longing to become one of the chiefs of his clan, by adding to his many titles for valour and bravery. But always something stands between him and ambition, preventing him from achieving a full flowering of his potential genius. The ambivalence of the prompting of his "Chi" is an expression of the innate
contradictions within his personality. In obeying one as­pect of "Chi", he violates the other, and the tragic error of choice leads to unforeseen difficulties in the world of action. He commits offence after offence against the sacred and rigid laws and traditions of his clan even in his attempts to abide by them, and cannot escape from the moral and existential responsibility for disturbing the order of the clan. The irony of his destroying what he loves adds to the poignancy of the tragedy, besides revealing a fatal lack of self-knowledge on his part. What he considers to be strength turns out to be a catastrophic weakness, and isolates him from the magnetic chain of reality. He is unable to anticipate and foresee the consequences of his impulsive sort of strength directed to a wrong, and a morally reprehensible action. In this he differs from his friend Obierika who, with all his insight and wisdom, advises him against participating in the pursuit and chase of Ikemefuna, which counsel Okonkwo firmly sets aside. Like his tribe, his actions proceed from panic and conclude in tumult.

The flaw and the crisis in the personality of Okonkwo
are compounded by the inherent stresses and strains within his tribal culture whose traditional ways of life and outlook are in the process of being discredited by the new order of things under the western impact. The tribal customs and traditions have lost their appeal to the younger generation who are attracted by the apparent rationalism, orderliness, efficiency and modernity of western culture.

The centrifugalism of the tribal society is contrasted with the unity, homogeneousness, and practicality of the western institutions, the government, the religious establishment and the educational system. Obierika, the wise man of the novel, offers a clear-eyed view of the situation, when he observes:

> But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? 16

In the process of detribalisation, the old solidarity of the group is replaced by the primacy of the individual,

and the communal character of social action is lost, thereby shifting the moral responsibility for one's undertakings to the isolated individual. This results, in the African context, not in romantic self-assertion, but in an anguish of ambivalence, an anxiety brought about by the need to own responsibility for actions on one hand and to preserve the freedom to avoid the consequences of a wrong choice on the other. All this inevitably leads to the loss of identity in a self-sustained system of social imperatives and to the alienation of the individual by cutting him off from the old realities of corporate life and leaving him in an uncertain reality, not yet fully evolved in respect of the new ways of the west. Okonkwo inhabits this kind of a world in crisis, which, apart from his own flaws in character, is responsible for his tragedy. As William Walsh observes:

The society of the nineteenth century Ibo was one which existed in a kind of trance, perfect in the present. It could retain only bits of the immediate past, those which could be encompassed by an individual memory or those which were embodied in the modes of social intercourse. It had not within it the resources for assuming new intellectual postures, so that when the context which supported it began to be
altered by the intrusion of missionaries and the imposition of British law and administration, the nucleus itself was modified and quickly enfeebled. 17

There seems to be a special tragic irony at work in the fortunes and circumstances of Okonkwo's life, which is revealed in his inadvertent shooting of the old man Ezeudu's son at the father's funeral. An intended act of ceremonial reverence goes awry, resulting in the accidental slaying of the youth, and leads to the exile of Okonkwo. There is a radical flaw in the tribal society itself, whose consequences are visited on the protagonist by punishing him ironically enough for conforming to its own customary observances. That the old way of life has an equal share of responsibility in the hero's downfall is a perception which is made available through Obierika, who, in many respects, is a choric, mediating presence in the novel, representing a distancing narrative voice and point of view. Obierika shows an exceptional perspicacity in his analysis of the situation. His role is described by Achebe as follows:

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess has been done, he sat down in his Obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed.

It is in obedience to the tradition that the people of the tribe throw away the twins not heeding the agony of the mothers and the reasoning of the wise. In the old order the slaves and outcasts, 'efulefu', were so much despised that they found soothing comfort in the western religious order. The earliest converts included Osu, the outcasts, the weaklings and the mothers of the unfortunate twins. And the very structure of a sound society began breaking up and falling apart. The idyllic pastoral picture of the Ibo society presented in the earlier parts of the narrative is slowly made to show its ugly underside with all its internal inconsistencies and dissensions, its banality, crudeness.

and inhumanity. No society is absolutely perfect, or just, or exempt from the laws of historical inevitability, and may eventually fall apart because of the gap between its professed ideals and its practised cruelties. The Ibo society is thus presented in a double focus by Achebe, with warts and wrinkles and all.

An aspect of the decline of the tribal society is the distortion of its time-honoured rituals to a point of losing their purpose and meaning. The violation of ritual, once deprived of its social content, may also result in disambiguating the sense of reality sought by the new generation, although it may reflect the embarrassment and consternation of the older generation in the face of a taboo transgressed, or a tradition desecrated, or a custom flouted. For instance, unmasking the Egwugwu is considered a heinous crime, with ominous implications for the tribe, but it also has the quality of exorcism whereby the new, undeluded facts of life may be confronted. When Enoch, the Christian convert, indulges in such an act, it is viewed as a serious offence never heard of before. But his defiant gesture reveals the vulnerability of the traditional world-
view which stretches the code of public virtue far beyond the contingencies of situational morality. Enoch, an overzealous convert, who is always erupting into fights, when he tears off the sacerdotal mask in public, throws the entire clan into confusion.

It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming - its own death. 19

The next day the entire Umuofia assembles under the tribal leadership of the Egwugwu and decides to destroy the church and reduce it to a heap of earth and ashes. This is viewed by the clan as an appropriate act of tribal revenge and as a feat of heroism and daring, but to the adherents of the church and the western administration it is an act of sacrilege and vendetta entailing bitter consequences. The six leaders of Umuofia are arrested and humiliated and a heavy collective penalty is clamped on the entire village.

The uneasy co-existence of the old and the new orders

weakens the Ibo ethos and style of life. The white men in Mbanta were given a plot of land in the evil forest to build their temple of worship assuming that they would be killed by the evil spirits beyond doubt. But to the dismay of the inhabitants of Mbanta, not even a single person among the white, contrary to expectation, dies even after four days, the time limit, during which the natives predict a dire, retributive disaster. This is interpreted as an evidence and sign of the white man's superior power over the traditional gods of the tribe leading to the further demoralisation of the clan.

In the initial stages of the encounter with the west, the Ibo entertain an amused tolerance of the white man's religion as having some method in its madness. Though its religion is perverse, they realise that the economic and commercial activities of the west are quite efficient. For instance, the white man's trading store, which promotes business activity, is lucrative, with an impressive flow of money and influx of wealth. Added to this, the western missionaries' aggressive and determined pursuit of proselytization and conversion, backed by
imperial power and patronage, constitutes a pressure that cannot be resisted by the already weakened will of the clan to believe and survive. Mr. Brown, the white evangelist adopts a wise and benign policy of befriending the leaders and other important members of the clan by making frequent visits to the neighbouring villages and also drawing the disaffected sections and the youth of the clan into his fold. Indeed, he asks his new converts to be gentle and not to provoke the wrath of the clan. These positive traits of his personality exercise an impressive charm on the people, especially the underdogs and the socially disadvantaged, drawing them in increasing strength to the new faith. His preachings encourage in certain persons like Enoch an excess of zeal to ignore the tribal taboos as a matter of irrational superstition and to defy the very power of the sacred python. While the demonstration of the white man's superiority weakens the morale of the traditional culture by bringing its internal contradictions and anomolies to the fore, and creates a favourable atmosphere for religious conversions, the process of detribalisation also involves the gradual disorientation of the group spirit of the people embodied in other structural affiliations of
The traditional Ibo joint family system, with its intricate kinship relations is affected, creating a crisis in patriarchal authority and eroding the patterns of social behaviour based on group allegiance and loyalty. There also appears a schism between the generations. Okonkwo's son Nwoye has developed an antagonistic tendency towards his own father, a man of action and person of set norms. He could neither please his father, who expects him to be more promising, nor understand his own tribal values and customs. His recalcitrance makes him an easy object of conversion and leads to the adoption of the western values in preference to those of the tribe. His grievances and doubts have made him all too acutely aware of the lapses and deficiencies of the traditional way of life. He seeks to fulfil the omitted possibilities of his tribal inheritance by adopting the western faith and ways of life. In a sense, his conversion represents for him a psychological compensation as well as a cultural opportunity to achieve a meaningful selfhood denied to him by his own tradition.

It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not under-
stand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul — the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth.

Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled. 20

The young man's natural yearning for self-differentiation finds a romantic outlet in the white man's religion in which he finds a new poetry of selfhood.

What one of the oldest members of the Umunna (a wide group of Kinsmen) says while thanking Okonkwo, when the latter arranges a feast as a mark of gratitude to his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta, proves to be prophetic.

.... I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result?

An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you, I fear for the clan. 21

Okonkwo notices the many-sided radical changes which have affected his tribe during his absence in exile. But his own return to his native village goes almost unnoticed. The white man's religion, his government and the trading stores have now become the chief matters of discussion, not valorous deeds, legendary wars, ceremonious assumption of titles, and ringing counsels of great leaders of the clan. What had once been a movable feast of corporate life has become an uninspiring routine of a dull, subjugated existence. Okonkwo finds his return to his native village to have turned out to be an extension of the exile, an internal exile. He mourns for the clan, for the warlike men, for the bond of kinship, all of which had made tribal life a grand and awesome paradise in the past.

The District Commissioner's handling of the situation is a bitter and shocking one, which Okonkwo and the five other leaders of Umuofia fail to comprehend and hence strongly resent. They are looked down upon, and their anklets of title are mocked at. They are asked to pay a heavy penalty for burning the church. Umofia is thrown into confusion.

It was the time of the full moon. But that night the voice of the children was not heard. The village Ilo where they always gathered for a moon-play was empty. The women of Iguedo did not meet in their secret enclosure to learn a new dance to be displayed later to the village. Young men who were always abroad in the moonlight kept their huts that night. Their manly voices were not heard on the village paths as they went to visit their friends and lovers. Umofia was like a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to run. 22

This vividly portrays the pall of desolation that has descended on a prosperous and thriving village which has somehow gone out of touch with its own genius. The identity

The conflict between the old and the new takes on the form of generational misunderstanding and hostility. The new breed of western-oriented young men rebel against the elders and resent their authority. They are lured by the power and the glory of the western way of life and freely and openly court the rewards of the new dispensation. Okonkwo, the great wrestler, is not properly received and his heroic abilities go unrecognised when he returns to his native land after a seven year exile in Mbanta. The younger generation does not show any interest in his return, for it no longer holds any special meaning for it in the changed context. While the older generation continues to hanker nostalgically after the age-long traditional values and customs, the new generation of youth turns expectantly to the new opportunities and adventures held out by an alien culture. Educational institutions, employment and regular religious preachings and meetings divert the attention of the younger generation, affecting and eroding the vital element of traditional tribal life, its inherited
sense of oneness. As a matter of fact, the older generation by clinging to the old order, invites the calamities inherent in a tradition which is not in a position to adjust itself to change. The younger generation tends to move away from tribal innocence towards the bustle and excitement of experience provided by the west. In contrast to the rigid and inflexible conservatism of the old cultural heroes, the younger generation keeps itself open-minded and resilient in regard to the new faith and the alien influences. The colonial power takes opportune advantage of the generational gap and succeeds in gaining ground among the young with whom the future lies. The tactical superiority of the western administrators and evangelists outclasses and outstrips the traditional leadership of the clan.

The older generation had been achievement-oriented, considering its members as men of action. The younger generation, beneficiaries of western education, conceive of themselves as men of thought, as an intellectual elite, and have no use for the irrational and superstitious customs of their elders. In the result, the sense of group solidarity which had held the old tribe together, is utterly lost. The young are inclined towards freedom, a sort of
freedom that endowed them, especially the efulefu, social equality, prestige and, above all, self-confidence. Traditional culture appears to them to be obscurantist, sterile and tyrannically authoritative, which makes them disdain all tradition. It is as though the tribe falls apart not due to western intrusion, but on account of internal atrophy. The old contexts of culture which had facilitated the meaningful interaction between individuals and society have been eliminated or rendered ineffectual and the forces of change tend to operate against traditional patterns of life. The recovery of a usable past, a historical homecoming, would be possible only when the attitudes of the younger generation could once again be oriented towards a future freed from the rigidities of the past and the uncertainties of the present. In this situation, the creative temper, represented by art, may lend a helping hand in forging a new vision of human dignity and purpose which lies at the root of Achebe's treatment of the theme of change and crisis in Ibo society in Things Fall Apart.

In rendering the historical experience of his people
Achebe, while maintaining an attitude of sympathetic detachment towards his characters, nevertheless points a finger of admonition both at Ibo traditionalism and the exploitative nature of western colonialism as well. He also takes care, as an artist mainly concerned with the texture of life shaping human character, to concentrate more on the felt life of individuals and their complex responses to social change and crisis, than on the undramatised details of social history. Hence he lends perspective to the narrative by depicting the crisis in the personality of his protagonist Okonkwo as the central premise of his account of Ibo society and throws the main burden of tragic responsibility on his inability to achieve accommodation and integration. In presenting the character of Okonkwo, Achebe explores the possibilities and limitations of his hero's posturing ego as the main spring and source of the events and action in the narrative. Given any other kind of social situation or cultural context, the type of individual that Okonkwo happens to be would have generated the same kind of fate and destiny. In other words, Achebe shows the universality of human experience that underlies the particulars of social action and thereby lends a high
Okonkwo is a kind of abstraction in search of a personality, an individual hankering after an immense notion of himself and seeking to demonstrate the viability of such a grand self-conception through appropriate actions and gestures of heroism, which are partly authorised by the traditions of his tribal culture and are partly derived from his own sense of a historic role in sustaining them. He is at once a rebel and a conformist in the sense that he deliberately casts for himself a role different from that of his father while at the same time clinging to the Olympian ideals of tribal excellence. "Chi" becomes his code and cue-word in terms of which he seeks to rationalise this dual role. "Chi" is the personal God, the oracle within, which prompts all the choices and contingent actions of an individual, and is the ultimate reference of existential discrimination. But like all oracles it is double-faced, enigmatic, inconclusive and open to the ambiguous gloss of human expediency. Consequently, both the narcissistic compulsions of Okonkwo's personality and the solipsistic rationalisations of his actions can be freely
related to the "Chi" which denominates for him his perception of reality and accommodates both right and wrong, the absurd and the authentic in a single metaphor. But Okonkwo's tragedy is that he lets metaphor usurp reality, leading to a cognitive dissonance in his outlook and understanding.

Clearly his personal God or Chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his Chi. The saying of the elders was not true that if a man said Yea his Chi also affirmed. Here was a man whose Chi said nay despite his own affirmation. 23

The ideal self of Okonkwo is at war with his real self; both, however, are represented as aspects of "Chi" which also embodies the neutrality of judgement voiced by the community as expressed by the elders' cold and almost horrified reception of Okonkwo's actions. Okonkwo is afraid of being thought weak, which becomes a magnificent obsession haunting him throughout his life, foiling all his attempts to seek status and power through heroic deeds.

Okonkwo, the dauntless wrestler, holder of many coveted titles, and ideal farmer, runs to seed because of his overreaching vanity and irrational fear of losing his public image. A much deluded man, acting on vainglorious impulse, he enters the evil forest which is an externalisation of his own complex psyche. In seeking to avoid his father's feelings, he becomes the victim of a different type of failing and deficiency. Ashamed of womanish behaviour or womanliness, whether in action or in spirit, he is ironically forced to seek shelter during his exile in Mbanta, the village of his mother's kinsmen. Indirectly his creed of manhood brings destruction to his own tribe by spreading the germs of his own internal conflict to the community as a whole. His aggressive actions, so disconcertingly out of tune with the facts of circumstance, throw the village into confusion. Achebe dramatises here the polarity suggested by Yeats' s poem from which the titular epigraph of the novel is taken, by showing how the best lack conviction and the worst act in passionate intensity, and by localising the paradox within a single personality. Okonkwo is the best and the worst at the same time, in terms of the shifting perspectives of the tribe's historical situa-
tion. Nearer home, Okonkwo's double nature creates a barrier of incomprehension and puzzlement among the kinmen of his family and clan. Although never showing any emotion except that of anger outwardly, he was inwardly a kind and gentle being, and in fact this subjects him to severe mental agony and psychological conflict as, for instance, when he has to kill Ikemefuna whom he loves. His own son Nwoye, and his fellow clansmen, do not recognise the dormant gentleness within him, for they only go by the outward signs of his behaviour. Okonkwo views others' actions from his own high standard of perfection and aggressive masculinity. His treatment of his son Nwoye indicates how all his undeclared paternal concern comes to be viewed as a kind of petty, meddlesome tyranny. The furtive animosity of the boy finally erupts into a filial revolt when he shatters the design of greatness cut out for him by his father, by joining the alien Church. Pondering over the matter in mute terror and bewilderment, Okonkwo attributes the personal tragedy to some inexplicable quirk of Chi.

He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal God or Chi. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and
now his despicable son's behaviour? He was a flaming fire. How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye degenerate and effeminate? A woman for a son? At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had already become famous throughout Umúofía for his wrestling and his fearlessness. 24

Okonkwo fails to see that he has had his own share of responsibility for his son's rebellion as well as the fact that there is a vast difference between his concept of assertive manliness and his son's quest for a manly freedom.

Achebe provides an objective correlative for Okonkwo's psychological crisis through the ambivalence of the tribe's psychology. The traditional Ibo society nurtured and supported the values of manliness, duty and responsibility for which he stood, by conceiving of itself as an ideal social organisation that made them valid. Its rituals, its ceremonies and even the uneventful normality of its daily activities are motivated by its ideal self-image. Even Yam stands for manliness. Achievement has to be respected, only when it conforms, not when it tends to deviate

from the prescribed norms of the clan. The solidarity of the group is placed above the fulfilment of the individual. The strength of the tribe becomes its weakness in the changed circumstances. The disparity between its ideals and the actual facts of its hierarchical structure, the inherent injustice and discrimination of its social practices, have been the causes of an internal combustion, which flares up into an engulfing holocaust under the western impact.

The double crisis of the Ibo society consisting in the tragedy of the protagonist and the disintegration of the tribal community is presented by Achebe from within, in terms of mutually shared responsibility as well as in the perspective of an outer frame which brings into contrast two differing views of history and individual human achievement. This outer frame emerges from the irony implied in the British chronicler's summing up of the events of the story as a pattern of mutiny and pacification, which represents the imperial attitude to African culture as being uncivilised, primitive and barbarian, hardly
deserving more than a casual reference in a weighty history of the Empire. The opposite view of the events implies a recognition of the tragic loss of the identity and continuity and of a once peaceful, creative and harmonious way of life brought about by time and change and the affirmation of the heroic nature of Okonkwo's personal tragedy which calls for not episodic, but epic treatment. Obierika, the authorial persona and central consciousness in the novel eulogises Okonkwo:

"That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia". 25

The messenger's 'yes, Sah', on the other hand, indicates a new political order and social hierarchy under which Okonkwo is considered a criminal and traitor disgraced by his grotesque act of suicide, and as such one whose name may not even be mentioned in the imperial gazette and the official chronicle of the Ibo society. The District Commissioner is in a hurry and has no time to examine the signi-

ficance behind the events or the heroism behind the sacrifice, and his report can never hope to bounce into life. The contrast between "that man" of the tribal encomium and "this man" of the colonial scorn marks the difference between the varying conceptions of history which are both employed as dramatising devices by the fictional artist. In the result, Things Fall Apart emerges as a sensitive saga of racial consciousness enacted as a matter of universal significance.