CHAPTER - 2

INITIAL ATTEMPTS IN IGBO ENGLISH NOVELS AND THE RISE OF FOURTH WORLD WRITINGS
CHAPTER II

INITIAL ATTEMPTS IN IGBO ENGLISH NOVELS AND THE RISE OF FOURTH WORLD WRITINGS

This research work presents the Fourth world characteristics of the major Igbo writers and their works. For the present purpose, the novels have been divided into three categories in order to trace the growth and development of Igbo literature:

1) Igbo writings at the Onset
2) Igbo writings that gain Peak and Popularity with Recognition
3) Contemporary Fourth World Igbo writings

In this chapter, the writers whose works fall into the “Igbo writings at the Onset” category have been discussed. These writers started writing to show that Igbos had a separate culture, traditions, language etc. from the British who had colonized Africa. Not only did they want to show that their culture sets them apart from the British, but also from other African literature. They started writing to create their own identity in the world of literature. Through their writings they wanted the readers to get an idea of their culture,
traditions, language, songs, poetry, religion, food etc. They wanted to express through their writings the effects of colonization on the Igbo tribes.

Some important Igbo writers initiated Igbo writing. Olaudah Equiano’s *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa the African* and Pita Nwana’s novel *Omemuko* are significant works. One of the most important novels is Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960).

1. Olaudah Equiano

   *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa the African*

This interesting narrative has been written by a Nigerian writer Olaudah Equiano, who is believed to be an Igbo. This book is an autobiography written in 1789 and features the first ten years of the author’s life. He pioneered the slave narrative and his book is considered to be the first written on slavery – a first-hand account. In the 1780’s, the British Parliament discussed whether the slave trade should be ended.

It is at this time that Equiano became actively involved in the anti-slavery movement. He was a wonderful orator and was very popular. Many senior and influential people were impressed by him and they encouraged him to write and publish his life story. He thus started writing a two volume autobiography in which he described his journey from the bondage of slavery to freedom.

This autobiography appeared in England in 1789 and in the U. S. A in 1791. It is a touching account of the injustice inflicted on thousands of enslaved
men and women and their suffering. As Keith Sandiford (author of Measuring the Moment) has rightly pointed out: “Throughout the narrative, [Equiano] makes a conscious effort to delineate the principal incidents and experiences of his life as faithful memory would allow and to appraise his conduct with honest judgement and sober reflection” (mannmuseum.com/Keith Sandiford). Equiano is the founder of the slave narrative which is central to African-American literature. A slave narrative generally traces the journey from physical bondage to escape and finally freedom. It is also a spiritual autobiography. Equiano had been a slave and in his writing he has combined the form of spiritual conversion with that of the three progressive stages usually experienced by a slave. Each stage of Equiano’s life has been described in a distinctive tone, voice and style.

The first section of the autobiography describes Equiano’s bondage, specially the injustice and victimization that he and others of his kind are subjected to. The second part describes his great desire to gain an education, get the benefit of his business pursuits and above all become free from bondage. During this stage he appears confused and depressed. Anxiety and doubt cloud his mind and he even wonders whether he will be able to win his freedom. The third section is a bright narrative. Equiano is seen as a confident individual, who is free. He also fights against injustice. Freedom has enabled him to develop his character and spiritual well-being.

In the first volume, he describes his native African culture. There are detailed graphic descriptions of African customs, food, clothing and religious practices. He compares the Igbo people with the early Jews. He also attributes the dark
Equiano hints that Africans may be the indirect relatives of Christian Europeans through their Jewish ancestry. He argues that slavery is an insult to all humanity:

Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? And should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, No. Language, religion, manners, and customs. Are any pains taken to teach them these? Are they treated as men? Does not slavery itself depress the mind, and extinguish all its fire and every noble sentiment? But, above all, what advantages do not a refined people possess over those who are rude and uncultivated. Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? And should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, no. Let such reflections as these melt the pride of their superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their sable brethren, and compel them to acknowledge, that understanding is not confined to feature or colour. If, when they look round the world, they feel exultation, let it be tempered with benevolence to others, and gratitude to God, who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and whose
Equiano’s hardships begin when he and his sister are kidnapped from their village. He describes his long voyage through African terrain. He is sold to traders who take him to a sea-coast. In the “middle passage” he describes some of his experiences on board a slave ship. Equiano’s journey is between West Africa and the Caribbean island of Barbados. This is an interesting extract from his description:

At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call
it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. Happily perhaps for myself I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from my extreme youth I was not put in fetters. In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself; I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs. Every circumstance I met with served only to render my state more painful, and heighten my apprehensions, and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites. One day they had taken a number of fishes; and when they had killed and satisfied themselves with as many as they thought fit, to our astonishment who were on the deck, rather than give any of them to us to eat, as we expected, they tossed the remaining fish into the sea again, although we begged and prayed for some as well we could, but in vain; and some of my countrymen, being pressed by hunger, took
an opportunity, when they thought no one saw them, of trying
to get a little privately; but they were discovered, and the
attempt procured them some very severe floggings.

One day, when we had a smooth sea, and a moderate wind, two of
my wearied countrymen, who were chained together (I was near
them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery,
somehow made through the nettings, and jumped into the sea:
immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his
illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example;
and I believe many more would soon have done the same, if they
had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly
alarmed. Those of us that were the most active were, in a moment,
put down under the deck; and there was such a noise and
confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before,
to stop her, and get the boat to go out after the slaves. However,
two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and
afterwards flogged him unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer
death to slavery. In this manner we continued to undergo more
hardships than I can now relate; hardships which are inseparable
from this accursed trade. - Many a time we were near suffocation,
from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole
days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried
off many. During our passage I first saw flying fishes, which
surprised me very much; they used frequently to fly across the ship,
and many of them fell on the deck. I also now first saw the use
of the quadrant. I had often with astonishment seen the mariners make observations with it, and I could not think what it meant. They at last took notice of my surprise; and one of them, willing to increase it, as well as to gratify my curiosity, made me one day look through it. The clouds appeared to me to be land, which disappeared as they passed along. This heightened my wonder: and I was now more persuaded than ever that I was in another world, and that everything about me was magic. At last we came in sight of the island of Barbadoes, at which the whites on board gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy to us. (Vassa, The Interesting Narrative 38-39)

The deplorable treatment of the slaves and the cold, calculating, cruelty of the whites is clearly brought out. Such inhuman treatment is a record of a kind. His writing gained instant popularity.

A shroud of mystery covers Equiano's origins. A critic, Vincent Carretta has pointed out that Equiano may not have been born in Africa. Her research suggests that Equiano told people that his birthplace is Carolina. But, as a slave and later as a freed slave he might have had to disguise his true origins for certain reasons. We have no proof to confirm or refute what he has said. So, we cannot doubt his account of his childhood in Africa.

Equiano describes how he sees slaves being sold in the West Indies. He is taken to North America, where he is sold to work on a Virginia plantation. He does light field work and household chores in Virginia. Next, he is purchased by the lieutenant in the British Royal Navy (Michael Henry Pascal)
He buys him as a gift for some of his friends in England. At that time, Equiano was just eleven years old. Pascal renames him – Equiano Gustavas Vassa.

Equiano subsequently makes friends with a white American boy called Robert Baker. After the ship touches the shore of England, he is exposed to Christianity. He sees snow for the first time and asks where it comes from and is told that it is made by God; who is a great “man” living in Heaven. He goes to Church and his new friend Robert instructs him. He further shares that he finds European culture baffling and frightening but starts accepting it: “I ceased to feel those apprehensions and alarms which had taken such strong possession of me when I first came among the Europeans” (Vassa, The Interesting Narrative 47). He is subtly converted.

With the passage of time he becomes attached to his master and slowly but surely starts imbibing English culture. He is also able to speak English better than before. In one of the stopovers Captain Pascal introduces him to two sisters called Miss Guerins. They treat him kindly and make it possible for him to go to school. The Guerins also persuade Pascal to allow Equiano to be baptised in the church.

Equiano continues his academic and spiritual development. He serves his master faithfully for many years, in the course of which they had to pass through many dangerous voyages. The journeys that he describes are always dangerous, and he also describes a number of fights and cordons throughout the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and West Indian Oceans. He is hopeful that Pascal will grant him his freedom. But instead he betrayed him by selling him to
Captain James Doran, the captain of a ship going to the West Indies. Frustrated, Equiano argues: “Could not sell me to him, nor to anyone else... I have served him... many years, and he has taken all my wages and prize-money... I have been baptized; and by the laws of the land no man has a right to sell me” (Vassa, *The Interesting Narrative* 63). His new master, Doran is cruel and Equiano starts believing that it is God’s retribution for his sins. He takes him back to the West Indies and there he again changes hands as he is sold to a Quaker Merchant, Mr. Robert King. He makes him do a variety of work like loading boats, critical jobs, serving as a personal groom and sending him to work for other merchants. One of the King’s boat captains, an Englishman named Thomas Farmer relies entirely on Equiano and used to hire him very often for voyages from the West Indies to North America.

This gives Equiano an opportunity to develop his side, trade business. He begins buying and selling goods and fruits during each voyage. Here again he is insulted by the whites who refuse to pay for goods or arbitrarily ask for refund. Nevertheless, Equiano is able to gather a small amount of savings, become free and go to England. King encourages him to earn enough to purchase his freedom. “I might have money enough in some time to purchase my freedom and when that was the case I might depend upon it he would let me have it for forty pounds sterling money which was only the same price he gave for me” (Carreta, *Unchained Voices* 236). The first volume ends abruptly after Equiano recounts a few more adventures - a violent encounter while trading in Georgia, his recovery and return to Montserrat.
The second volume maintains the chronological narrative method. The focus is on Equiano as a free man. Further adventures are described and there is an on-going spiritual transformation. Now he is motivated to earn forty pounds to purchase his freedom (as promised by Robert King). He earns forty seven pounds and gives his master the money needed for buying his freedom. Then he receives his manumission papers.

King and the captain implore that he should continue working for them. So, as a free man he sails with the captain, serves him, continues his trade and has the joy of exercising his freedom. He can now choose what he likes to do and refuse what he does not like. He even refuses to get threatened. He becomes good friends with the captain. Their ties become so strong, that when the captain dies an untimely death, Equiano is shattered.

Every man on board loved him and regretted his death but I was exceedingly affected at it and found that I did not know till he was gone the strength of my regard for him. Indeed I had every reason in the world to be attached to him for besides that he was in general mild, affable, generous, faithful, benevolent and just he was to me a friend and father and had it pleased Providence that he had died about five months before I verily believe I should not have obtained my freedom when I did and it is not improbable that I might not have been able to get it at any rate afterwards (Vassa, The Life of Olaudah Equiano 177)
Though Equiano wants to go to England, he continues to sail on merchant ships going to America and West Indies. He continues to sail under King's newly appointed captain, William Phillips. He describes his adventures which include a couple of shipwrecks. But what is note-worthy is the light he has thrown on the treatment of free black men. Prejudices and resentment against them are so strong that it leads to further injustice and ill-treatment.

Equiano is mistreated by patrollers, who do it with malicious deliberation, knowing full well that he does not have a master to protect him against abuse. Further, two white men brand him as a runaway slave and even attempt to kidnap him. Finally, he does go to England and there is a happy re-union with his former patrons, the Miss Guerins. But life is not easy there also. Equiano is unable to find suitable employment and has to work as a hairdresser. The wages are insufficient and so he decides to go back to sea.

He goes to Turkey and the West Indies and gives a graphic description of their culture. He also joins Dr. Irving (whose hair-dresser he has been). This was an unusual journey to the Arctic Circle and he describes how they were trapped in the ice for eleven days. He also gives an interesting description of the arctic landscapes and animals.

After returning to England, he spends his time in his spiritual development. He is determined to be “first-rate Christian”. He begins his spiritual journey in earnest and visits several churches. He reads the Bible carefully. He finds mentors to discuss religious questions and who can guide his religious education. He also does research on other religions. But a period of religious crisis occurs which is resolved in a vision he sees while travelling on a ship.
to Spain: “Lord was pleased to break in upon my soul with his bright beams of heavenly light; and in an instant as it were, removing the veil, and letting light into a dark place” (Carretta, *Unchained Voices* 265). This brings a transformation and he returns to London.

He stays there for some time and then goes to sea again and this cycle continues for some time until in November 1786, Equiano is appointed commissary for the British government’s Sierra Leone expedition. The aim of this enterprise is to allow the return of free Africans to a colony in Africa. He is unfortunately, dismissed but continues to work for the benefit of his fellow Africans. He includes in his narrative a petition to the Queen imploring her, “Compassion for millions of my African countrymen, who groan under the lash of tyranny in the West Indies” (Vassa, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* 288).

In the beginning of the narrative, Equiano’s views on slavery are ambivalent. But in the end he makes his views clear and gives ethical, economic and religious arguments in favour of abolishing slavery. This gives it a political colour and stand. For example, chapter twelve of his narrative contains his arguments in favour of abolishing slavery:

I hope to have the satisfaction of seeing the renovation of liberty and justice, resting on the British government, to vindicate the honour of our common nature. These are concerns which do not perhaps belong to any particular office: but, to speak more seriously to every man of sentiment, actions like these are the just and sure foundation of future
fame; a reversion, though remote, is coveted by some noble minds as a substantial good. It is upon these grounds that I hope and expect the attention of gentlemen in power. These are designs consonant to the elevation of their rank, and the dignity of their stations; they are ends suitable to the nature of a free and generous government; and, connected with views of empire and dominion, suited to the benevolence and solid merit of the legislature. It is a pursuit of substantial greatness.

- May the time come - at least the speculation to me is pleasing - when the sable people shall gratefully commemorate the auspicious area of extensive freedom: then shall those persons particularly be named with praise and honour, who generously proposed and stood forth in the cause of humanity, liberty, and good policy; and brought to the ear of the legislature designs worthy of royal patronage and adoption. May Heaven make the British senators the dispersers of light, liberty and science, to the uttermost parts of the earth: then will be glory to God on the highest, on earth peace, and good-will to men. - Glory, honour, peace, &c. to every soul of man that worketh good; to the Britons first, (because to them the Gospel is preached), and also to the nations. "Those that honour their Maker have mercy on the poor." "It is righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people: destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity, and the wicked shall fall by their own wickedness." May the blessings
of the Lord be upon the heads of all those who commiserated the cases of the oppressed Negroes and the fear of God prolong their days; and may their expectations be filled with gladness! "The liberal devise liberal things, and by liberal things shall stand," Isaiah xxxii. They can say with pious Job, "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble; was not my soul grieved for the poor?"

As the inhuman traffic of slavery is now taken into the consideration of the British legislature, I doubt not, if a system of commerce was established in Africa, the demand for manufactures would most rapidly augment, as the native inhabitants would insensibly adopt the British fashions, manners, customs, &c. In proportion to the civilization, so will be the consumption of British manufactures.

The wear and tear of a continent, nearly twice as large as Europe, and rich in vegetable and mineral productions, is much easier conceived than calculated.

A case in point. - It cost the Aborigines of Britain little or nothing in clothing, &c. The difference between their forefathers and the present generation, in point of consumption, is literally infinite. The supposition is most obvious. It will be equally immense in Africa. - The same cause, viz. civilization, will ever have the same effect.
It is trading upon safe grounds. A commercial intercourse with Africa opens an inexhaustible source of wealth to the manufacturing interests of Great Britain, and to all which the slave-trade is an objection.

If I am not misinformed, the manufacturing interest is equal, if not superior, to the landed interest, as to the value, for reasons which will soon appear. The abolition of slavery, so diabolical, will give a most rapid extension of manufactures, which is totally and diametrically opposite to what some interested people assert.

The manufacturers of this country must and will, in the nature and reason of things, have a full and constant employ, by supplying the African markets.

Population, the bowels and surface of Africa, abound in valuable and useful returns; the hidden treasures of centuries will be brought to light and into circulation. Industry, enterprise, and mining, will have their full scope, proportionably as they civilize. In a word, it lays open an endless field of commerce to the British manufacturers and merchant adventurers. The manufacturing interest and the general interests are synonymous. The abolition of slavery would be in reality a universal good.
Tortures, murder, and every other imaginable barbarity and iniquity are practised upon the poor slaves with impunity. I hope the slave-trade will be abolished. I pray it may be an event at hand. The great body of manufacturers, uniting in the cause, will considerably facilitate and expedite it; and, as I have already stated, it is most substantially their interest and advantage, and as such the nation's at large, (except those persons concerned in the manufacturing neck-yokes, collars, chains, hand-cuffs, leg-bolts, drags, thumb screws, iron-muzzles, and coffins; cats, scourges, and other instruments of torture used in the slave trade). In a short time one sentiment alone will prevail, from motives of interest as well as justice and humanity. Europe contains one hundred and twenty millions of inhabitants. Query. - How many millions doth Africa contain? Supposing the Africans, collectively and individually, to expend 5£ a head in raiment and furniture yearly when civilized, &c. an immensity beyond the reach of imagination!

This I conceive to be a theory founded upon facts, and therefore an infallible one. If the blacks were permitted to remain in their own country, they would double themselves every fifteen years. In proportion to such increase will be the demand for manufactures. Cotton and indigo grow spontaneously in most parts of Africa; a consideration this of no small consequence to the manufacturing towns of Great Britain. It opens a most immense, glorious, and happy prospect
- the clothing &c. of a continent ten thousand miles in circumference, and immensely rich in productions of every denomination in return for manufactures. (Vassa, The Life of Olaudah Equiano 289-293)

Some reviewers saw the book as indulging in political propaganda - a clear message for the abolition of slavery. Suitable arguments and evidence are provided for this. Throughout the narrative, these arguments are interspersed and the conclusion also leaves the reader with this issue in his mind:

According to Carey, to show that a black African had abilities equal to a white European is one implicit political goal encompassed by Equiano's statement early in his autobiography:

“If it affords any satisfaction to my numerous friends, at whose request it has been written, or in the smallest degree promotes the interest of humanity, the ends for which it was undertaken will be fully attained, and every wish of my heart gratified.”

When Equiano refers to 'humanity' he seems to have several things in mind. Firstly he of course means that slavery is inhumane in that it is a cruel business resulting in a great deal of human misery. He is calling for its abolition. But as well as the overt anti-slavery agenda there is a more subtle anti-racist project going on to dispel some of the racist myths
current in eighteenth-century England. Amongst these was an increasingly widespread myth that Africans were either not fully human or were of a less developed branch of humanity. Part of Equiano's project is to dispel this myth entirely by showing the world that he, in common with all human beings, is quite capable of writing a fine book describing a life which would be considered extraordinary and full of talent and seized opportunity regardless of the racial origins of the person who had lived it.

In this respect, we can say that the project of writing autobiography is, in Equiano's case, a strongly political act. Indeed, the book is a rather special sort of autobiography: a black self-representation. In this period this is in itself somewhat unusual, but the work is also an account of the life of a former slave, a particular genre which is known as a 'slave narrative'. By 1789 a very small number of these had already appeared, mostly oral accounts spoken by a slave or former slave and taken down and published by white amanuenses (although a famous exception to this is the Thoughts on Slavery published in 1788 by Equiano's friend Quobna Ottobah Cugoano). But Equiano's narrative was very different from most of those that had gone before. Not only had he written it himself, but he had also published it himself, by subscription, a method which involved getting people to put the money up front. He managed to convince many very
important people to pay in advance for his book, a list which starts with the Prince of Wales and includes no less than eight dukes. Equiano's book is different in another way too. Equiano did not just publish the book and leave it to fend for itself. Instead, he vigorously promoted it by going on lecture tours around England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and by promoting his book he was also promoting the idea of abolition of slavery. Indeed, it was local abolition committees who arranged the lectures and readings at which he was present. During the early 1790s, then, Equiano had not just turned his life story into a document opposing slavery, but had transformed his entire life into a sort of anti-slavery document. (Brycanchcarey.com/Equiano)

The book was published many times in America and Europe and was a bestseller. Equiano addresses a wide audience - of America and Europe and not merely fellow Africans. His approach and style are honest and direct. The tone is balanced and fair. The horrors and inhumanity of the slave trade are depicted in such a way that it influences the reader. So, it crosses the boundaries of being merely an autobiography. It is a powerful social and political document questioning and critiquing the legality and morality of the slave trade.

Through the narrative, Equiano appears to be a complex person. He is intelligent, clever and has great fortitude. He is competent in whatever task he undertakes. He has great determination and compassion. His autobiography
pioneered the genre of the slave narrative and it also marked the beginning of the African canon in literature.

Many important themes can be traced in Equiano’s autobiography. The most prominent is that of freedom and salvation. Power and identity struggles are also prominent themes. Shakespeare said “What’s in a name?” Here, name is synonymous with identity. In his native land he was called Olaudah which means “one favoured, and having a loud voice and well-spoken”. His name was a symbol of his strong anti-slavery voice. In Virginia, he was called Jacob and Michael. When he is given the name Gustauvs Vassa, it shows the conflict between outside control and self-assertion. Thus he says:

While I was on board this ship, my captain and master named me Gustavus Vassa. I at that time began to understand him a little, and refused to be called so, and told him as well as I could that I would be called Jacob; but he said I should not, and still called me Gustavus: and when I refused to answer to my new name, which I at first did, it gained me many a cuff; so at length I submitted, and by which I have been known ever since. (Vassa, The Life of Olaudah Equiano 56)

Through his narrative Equiano also shows that in the final analysis, slavery is power acquisition politics. To have power and prestige people enslave others to show how strong they are. They treat them as possessions and manipulate them and torture them at will. The lust for power leads to uncivilized behaviour. They treat slaves as animals. So, the so-called “civilized” people are the ones who are uncivilized. Equiano says that the world can be a wonderful
place to live in if one can respect other people's rights, dreams, aspirations, hope and faith.

Equiano not only attacks slavery but also racism. He believed that one way to stop this is intermarriage. It seems a revolutionary proposition. Whatever he says, he has conviction and the power to convince. This is inherent in the style. As Adam Potkay in Forum: Teaching Equiano's Interesting narrative says, "Equiano's narrative had a number of persuasive modes, modes such as apologia, allegory, sermon, exhortation... and [criticism] directed to abolishing the slave trade" (mannmuseum.com/Keith Sandiford). Overall, it is a heart touching, thought-provoking book.

For *Africans in America, Part I*, Catherine Ancholou (English Professor, Awuku College of Education, Nigeria) sums up the importance of Equiano's narrative.

Well, for people in Africa, Equiano's narrative is very important because it is the anchor of African studies. In every discipline, you study Equiano. Historians began with Equiano. Social scientists begin with Equiano. Literary artists and literary scholars begin with Equiano. Equiano makes it impossible for you to forget the issue of slavery and the fact that we have millions and millions of our brothers and sisters who are now no longer part of us, but who have now gone through this experience of slavery, who have now become part of another culture, but who are equally part of us, and who are yearning to connect. Equiano's story, more than any other
story, carries that authenticity, that impetus and that imperative
to connect, to not forget, to remember, and to take
responsibility for the actions of our forefathers. (pbs.org)

2. **Pita Nwana**

   *i. Omenuko*

While Equiano has earned the distinction of being a pioneer in the genre of
the slave narrative, Pita Nwana is remembered for being the first writer to
publish a fiction novel in the Igbo language. He has thus won the distinction
of being called “the father of the Igbo novel.”

His novel is called *Omenuko* and was published in 1933. The novel recounts
the experiences of its central character Omenuko. People believe that the novel
is based on real incidents.

Omenuko is the classical story of a quintessential Igbo man,
Omenuko, who lived between the 19th and 20th centuries. He
left home and escaped to a foreign land to escape social
sanctions and economic adversity. In this new abode, he
experienced various daunting challenges and suffered
persecution but survived them all, prospered and rose to the
apex of the leadership stratum. Eventually, he returned to a
hero’s welcome in his homeland. The story of is a timeless
eric. It depicts the life of the typical Igbo man – a
resourceful and courageous man who takes great risks,
migrates to strange lands, suffers discriminations and
The setting of the book is Okigwe, which is a densely populated area in the present Imo state of Nigeria. The main theme of the novel focuses on sin and atonement and penance. In the beginning of the novel we find him on his way to the market. A bridge collapses and along with it, Omenuko’s life. He loses his wealth. To make up for the money he has lost, he commits a terrible sin. He sells all his neighbour’s children into slavery.

This is also a crime against the entire community. The novel recounts its consequences. Omenuko realizes that his crime is too big to hide, and so he plans to kill the parents of the children. But the members of his family advise him to run away. So he takes his three wives and brothers and shifts to another town.

The chief there is impressed by him and even though he has a son, he grooms Omenuko to succeed him. He does. But when the son grows up, he is resentful and plans to expel him. So, to avoid a clash, Omenuko decides to return to his own town. He tries to compensate for the crime he has committed by buying back the slaves he had sold.

It is interesting to analyze the importance of community in the novel. Most of the action takes place in the village squares and market centers of remote communities. The typical activities of bargaining and haggling go on in street corners. Communities converge by a tight network of interesting paths which come together at the market place. Here, the clan meets to discuss common issues and also to iron out disputes. The setting is relevant to the action.
because it portrays the conflicts that the protagonist has to go through. To live life, one has to live in harmony with the group or community by going against its tenets.

The novel is very popular among the Igbo people because it is well written and edifying. It is considered as a classic by them. Many Igbo children start their reading with this novel. It is understandable as it follows linear progression and the story is told in third person singular. Another distinctive feature of the novel is that it uses many Igbo proverbs:

1. *Awo anaghi agba oso ehilne n'efu* (nigeriavillagesquare.com) (A toad does not run in the afternoon without a reason)

2. *Oji oso agbakwuru ogu amaghi na ogu bu onwu.* (nigeriavillagesquare.com) (One who runs to join a war does not realize that war is death)

3. *Uka akpara akpa bu isi k'eki ekwe ya.* (nigeriavillagesquare.com) (Further discussion of an issue already settled is done with the nodding of the head)

4. *Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya.* (nigeriavillagesquare.com) (May both the eagle and the kite perch but if one does not want the other to perch, may his wings break)
5. *Onye no n’ulo ya n’echi mmadu, ukwu anaghị eji ya.*

(nigeriavillagesquare.com) (One who is in his house waiting for a visitor does not get tired or develop waist pain.)

6. *Onye mwe ozu n’e bu ya n’isi.*

(nigeriavillagesquare.com) (The relative of the dead person is the person who carries the corpse at the head)

7. *Onye a na agbara ama ya na anuri, onye eboro ohi okwere la.*

(nigeriavillagesquare.com) (While you rejoice at the news from an informer remember that the accused has not admitted it)

8. *Emee nwata ka emere ibe ya obi adi ya nma.*

(nigeriavillagesquare.com) (Treat a child as his peers were treated and he will be happy)

9. *Kama m ga erijuo afo dachie uzo ka m buru onu.*

(nigeriavillagesquare.com) (I will rather remain hungry than eat so much that I collapse on the roadside)

10. *Nwata ruru ima akwa ma n’anu ara nne ya, gini ka anyi g’eme ya?* (nigeriavillagesquare.com) (What should we do to a child old enough to tie loin clothes if he continues to suck on his mother’s bosoms?)
The complex traditions and the culture of the Igbo’s can be understood if one can read the text in the Igbo language. Most of the proverbs in Igbo used by later authors like Achebe are to be found here. But *Omenuko* did not receive the acclaim like other novels. This is probably because it is written in the Igbo language and it is a difficult language to learn.

The story has a universal appeal and is a timeless epic. It is the tale of a resourceful and brave man who commits blunders, falls into sin, suffers discrimination, and yet bounces back with tremendous spirit. It shows the importance of one’s roots and the message is, especially to migrants to stay at home and develop one’s homeland and give it due respect.

The message of *Omenuko* is encapsulated in a terse ‘*Isi ihe edere*’ (introduction) which the author presents at the beginning of the book. It counsels every sojourner to remember that however long he may reside in his new abode, whatever fortune may come his way, he remains an alien and must return to his homeland one day. From a spiritual perspective, the message is a universal reminder to all men of the inevitability of the eternal recall. In a secular sense, it is a message to the author’s Igbo brethren - whose migratory
tendencies are legendary - to think home, invest at home, and
to develop the homeland because every migrant must
necessarily eventually return to his homeland dead or alive
(nigeriavillagesquare.com/Omenuko)

3. Chinua Achebe

i. No Longer At Ease

Achebe is a Nigerian writer and his book No Longer at Ease was published
two years after his much applauded novel Things Fall Apart. It was published
in 1960. The story of No Longer at Ease revolves around a twenty six year
old young man, full of dreams and aspirations. His name is Obi Okowanko.
He goes to England for four years to study, after which he returns to Nigeria.
The novel is set during the eve of Nigeria’s independence. The novel shows
moral degradation brought about by colonization and the opposing pull between
a foreign culture and one’s own native culture and values:

Obi’s story is as much about the clash between the old and
the new, as it is an attempt to probe the roots of Africa’s
problems in the post-colonial period. Through Obi’s experience,
the author explores the tensions in post-colonial Nigeria, more
especially the clash between modernity and traditional values.

The book explores important but difficult questions – Can
western values co-exist with African traditions? Why it is that
Nigeria and many other African countries remain poor despite
having thousands of western educated men and women? Are
there contextual factors that explain the failure of western institutions in post-colonial Africa?

Achebe does not provide answers, but through Obi’s own story he explores these questions.

In the end, nobody can quite explain Obi’s tragic end, when he is trapped and arrested for taking bribes. To quote from the book, “Everybody wondered why.” (africabookclub.com)

Obi is an idealistic young man who comes back home full of hope that he and young men like him could work towards the progress of their native land. The first step towards progress would be to remove corruption and he is determined to do this. But, due to circumstances and his own pride and lack of foresight, he, ironically gets involved in corruption himself.

If we examine each chapter, we can get an idea of the skill of Achebe as a novelist. The initial chapters of the novel establish the problems very effectively. They tell us about Obi’s trial and then the story is built up through flashback techniques, as we are taken to the past to understand what kind of a person Obi is. He is caught between two cultures - his own and the one he is exposed to as a result of English education.

This conflict is a by-product of colonization. In the beginning itself, the scene between Mr. Green (Obi’s boss) and the British councilman and the scene involving the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU) are juxtaposed skilfully to reveal their differences and similarities. This enables the reader to understand the contrary pulls within the main character Obi, who is caught between the
British (his education) and the Umuofians (his homeland). It is also significant to note that this novel is among the first writings of the Igbo literature which merges Nigerian culture with the popular English novel form.

Mr Green is a symbol of the colonizer, making his presence felt in Nigeria in the late 1950's. He is Obi's boss and has the typical British colonizer attitude. With a high and mighty air he declares that it was the British who brought education into Nigeria and other places in Africa. He believes that the Nigerians are fully corrupt and only education can enable them to fight corruption. This British presence is a typical feature of Igbo fourth world writings. The language employed by Achebe further builds on this. When the Englishmen order their beers one of the men says, "One beer for this master" (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 3). This reveals the language of the powerful and the superior people.

The scene with Mr. Green is posed against that of the Umuofia Progressive Union. This scene in the novel is filled with a number of proverbs and colloquialisms. The power play has been subtly brought out. The English and the Umuofia Progressive Union, both try to control Obi. The union wanted Obi to study Law so that Obi could help them in the future with their land cases. But Obi changed his major subject from law to English.

The second chapter exemplifies the famous dictum: "Absence makes the heart fonder". It is only when Obi goes far away from his country to England that he realizes the importance of his country and people. This is another typical feature of post-colonial Fourth World Literature. Obi misses his home-town so much that he writes romantic, lyrical poems about Nigeria. But when he
comes back to Nigeria after completing his studies, he finds that the country he has returned to is a completely different place from the Nigeria of his dreams. His illusion is shattered when he sees the slums. He writes a very nostalgic poem about Nigeria.

How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree
At eventime and share the ecstasy
Of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies;
How sweet to leave our earthbound body in its mud,
And rise towards the music of the spheres,
Descending softly with the wind,
And the tender glow of the fading sun. (Achebe, No Longer At Ease 14-15)

Further, the sweetness is juxtaposed with the carcass of a dead dog. This helps the reader to understand the difference between Obi’s imagined Nigeria and the real place.

Another important focus in this chapter is Obi and Christopher’s discussion, especially about bribery in the civil service. This strain continues throughout the novel, till Obi is arrested. This is just the beginning of Obi’s journey towards change. The romantic element is also introduced in this chapter through Clara. However, though Obi and Clara love each other, the future of their relationship is foreshadowed by the quarrel they have.

Chapter three tells us more about Obi and Clara’s relationship. We get to know that their first meeting had been rather awkward. While dancing, Obi kept on stepping on Clara’s feet. Later, they meet on a boat, which is rocking
due to the unstable waters. This makes Obi sea-sick. They both meet on watery ground, both literally and symbolically.

Both the episodes symbolize their unsteady relationship. Their relationship is unstable even though there is a lot in common between them. First and foremost both are Igbo. Besides this, both studied abroad in England. Both are caught between English language and culture and their own traditions and culture. They also speak to each other in Igbo which establishes a special connection and closeness. Macmillan is also Clara’s suitor, but she chooses Obi probably because both are Igbo.

The importance of language is reinforced and of course the Igbo language is an integral part of Igbo culture. Clara’s discussion with an officer from Ibaden focuses on language. This discussion gives a hint to the readers to pay attention to the language used in the novel. The officer is trying to explain the difference between language and dialect. It is also clear that the language of the heart is the native language-Igbo, between Clara and Obi. Another interesting feature is that in Igbo Obi’s name is spelt backward. This may indicate symbolically how his world is turned upside down.

Adjustment problem is also highlighted. When Obi was in England he was a Nigerian living in England, but when he returns home, he is trapped between two cultures. There is an enlightening conversation between Obi and Macmillan while they are having drinks together. Macmillan is an Englishman going to Nigeria and it seems that he is involved in some way with the colonial government. He is not as arrogant as Mr. Green but he is very curious and keeps asking questions which makes Obi defensive. He wants to know what
Obi's name means in his language and what he has studied in England. Obi feels uncomfortable.

The fourth chapter focuses on Igbo society, which is an important feature of Fourth World literature. It also presents skilfully the conflict between expectation and individual desire and behaviour. When Obi returns he forgets the beliefs and customs of his people. He is expected to be in formal dress and to use formal language. But, when Obi returns he prefers to wear informal clothes because it is very hot. Besides this, he uses informal English as he is well conversant with the language. The people disapprove.

Obi is treated differently by different groups of people because of his education in England. The Umuofian Progressive Union is proud of him because they feel that he has brought a special status to Umuofia by his English education. They book a hotel and special room for him. But Obi wants to stay with a friend. Joseph and his group feel that it is not in-keeping with his status to share a room with someone. Obi wants to eat Nigerian food as he is fed up of English food. This surprises Joseph.

The issue of corruption in the form of bribery is also shown in this section of the novel. At his reception, the chairman of the Umuofia Progressive Union asks him whether he has been offered a job by the government. They also feel that he would not have any problem in his English education and the British presence in Nigeria would favour him. The Vice President of the Umuofia Progressive Union says that if Obi had not studied in England, he would have advised him to "see" someone. This means to offer a bribe. Besides, it is also shown that the very people, who disapproved of Obi's
behaviour during the reception for not following Igbo traditions and customs, appear to participate freely in bribery. They later claim hypocritically that they would not accept such behaviour from someone with his education.

The European presence in Nigeria is also highlighted. Obi and Joseph go to a restaurant owned by an English woman. Achebe’s description of the woman is far from pleasant. She is described as bossy, fumbling and old. The restaurant is mainly for Europeans. This scene recurs as a kind of motif throughout the novel.

Chapter five reveals Obi’s views and values and also brings up the issue of Christianity. The readers see Obi as a person with idealistic views and thoughts. Obi wants to bring change in his hometown by replacing the old fangled ideas of the older Africans by the more open and progressive viewpoint of the younger generation who had studied at the universities.

Obi is strongly against bribery. An incident highlights this. On the way to Umuofia in a wagon, the police are about to take a bribe, when Obi tells the driver’s companion firmly not to give the money. The person who is about to give the bribe thinks Obi is impractical and not at all worldly-wise.

Obi’s opinions also differ from his friend Joseph, as is evident in the interview scene. After Obi has finished his interview Joseph tells Obi that he should not have been angry in the interview as he was looking for a job and cannot afford to get angry. Obi, however, considers this slavish submission a “colonial” mindset, which is akin to an insult. Achebe has criticized colonialism in the chapter.
The chapter ends with a wonderful critique of old, superstitious beliefs, conversion and Christianity. Obi’s father had converted, as he did not believe in indigenous out-dated traditional practices. The people of the town are angry with him for this and for not giving an offering to the town’s rainmaker so that it would not rain during Obi’s homecoming. The most interesting part of the chapter highlights an intermingling of cultures when an elder uses the Kola nut as an offering, but offers it in a Christian fashion, following Obi’s father’s ways. This episode shows a mixing of the two cultures. The episode also shows the reader a person can survive happily in finding the beauty inside the complexity of two cultures combined.

The next chapter explores indigenous roots and what happens in the intermingling of cultures. Obi is brought up by Christian convert parents. So his mother does not tell him any African folktales. As a young boy he thus could not relate folktales in class. Folktales are a medium to pass on traditional beliefs, practices and values. Obi however, loves folktales and pursues his interest to become well-versed in folktales even though they are not handed down by the elders of his family.

It could be possible that his love for story-telling makes him change his major subject from law to English. He disobeyed his father’s Christian religion to get back to his African roots through discovering African folktales on his own. The listening, discovering and telling of folktales becomes a literary device. In the name of progress, one should never forget one’s roots.

The device of foreboding has also been used in this chapter. Obi’s worries, fears and hesitations are also brought to light. He is worried about how much
he would have to pay out of his salary to pay his debts, for the education of his younger brother and for the needs and well-being of his parents. Under such pressures, the thought of Clara would bring relief. But he is not able to tell his parents about her.

The rain at the end of the chapter is symbolic. It is no doubt refreshing, but also overwhelming. It is refreshing at one level as it brings down the temperature. It is refreshing metaphorically as Obi is back home (Lagos) and is “washed” by pleasant memories of his childhood and the wonderful time he had spent with his sisters. But the flip side is that it is not regular rain but a strong downpour which also brings negative thoughts and connotations in the reader’s minds. It reminds us of problems and also unpleasant consequences - financial and emotional which might drown the protagonist.

The next chapter develops the character of Sam Okoli (a well-liked politician) and of Obi’s relationship with his mother. Obi shares a special relationship with his mother. There is a flashback to a moment in Obi’s childhood when he had left a razor-blade (used to sharpen pencils) in his pants pocket. While washing his clothes his mother cut her hand and she returned drenched in blood. Obi thinks of this incident in an affectionate way. She was hurt unintentionally. Now he wants to persuade her to allow him to marry Clara (who is an outcaste) Both the Umuofians and his friend Joseph are against him marrying an outcaste.

Obi’s English education also makes him a stranger in his own country. Besides this, he cannot understand why Clara should suffer for being an outcaste. He would pioneer the change and marry her, but the UPU and
Joseph feels that the time is not ripe for drastic changes of this kind. So Obi feels alienated.

The tension between Obi and the UPU is heightened in the eighth chapter. The UPU represents the village and its ideals, values and expectations. They look upon him with respect and believe that he is wealthy because of his position, class and above all education. As far as Obi is concerned, he is thankful for his education but does not like many of the ways of the Umuofian Progressive Union. He hates their intrusion into his life. They offer him a "scholarship" which in actual practical terms is a loan. Obi is also at odds with tradition. Joseph's character is also further developed.

The centre of the novel is chapter nine. In this section Obi is shown as a successful idealist. If the novel were to end here, it would have been a happy ending and Obi, a hero. He is happy and successful in his endeavours. But Achebe does not believe in happy endings. He has designed a realistic novel where trials and tribulations attack the protagonist.

The threat of temptation is seen when Obi mentions his financial crisis. In this section some light is also thrown on Sam Okoli, who is the minister of state. He is liked by all and is a good person. But under the influence of alcohol there are confessional "unguarded" moments. In one of these he states that taking bribes is all right. Thus, Achebe wants to show that corruption and bribery form a part of even the "good" men.

Another character in this chapter, who is brought into perspective, is the English lady Miss Marie Tomlinson. She is Mr. Green's secretary. She keeps on repeating things about her boss like, "Isn't he odd? ... But he's really not
a bad man” (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 77). Obi distrusts her because she is English and he finds her very inquisitive. He even believes that she may be a spy sent to gather information about the Africans. So, he was always careful around her. But she is sympathetic towards Obi and Clara and supports their relationship. She feels that Clara is a lovely and attractive young lady and that they should get married quickly. After this Obi thinks that she is a genuine person. Obi, found a connection with Miss Tomlinson because she seemed to be an antidote to the Umuofian Progressive Union and its opinions about Clara. But later, the interest she shows in his dealings with Mr. Mark, make Obi doubt her once again. Thus his attitude remains ambivalent.

The next chapter slowly builds up towards the crisis by acquainting us about Obi’s financial problems. He has to pay back his loan, give money and support his parents, pay insurance premiums, license renewals, pay electricity bills, maintain his car, give money to the steward for food and so on. This is very difficult. But till this point Obi has been successful in fighting against corruption. He resolves not to let the people down.

The chapter ends on a hopeful note (a temporary respite) when Obi finds a poem that he had written about Nigeria when studying in England. It’s a nostalgic piece of writing calling for the ideals of unity, purity, peace and joviality. The poem cheers his mood. He had written it two years ago and had even dated it. He finds the poem inside as A.E Houseman’s book. The poem reminds us of Obi’s displacement, but it also helps Obi develop a new attitude.
God bless our noble fatherland,
Great land of sunshine bright,
Where brave men chose the way of peace,
To win their freedom fight.

May we preserve our purity,
Our zest for life and jollity.

God bless our noble countrymen
And women everywhere.

Teach them to walk in unity
To build our nation dear;
Forgetting region, tribe or speech,
But caring always each for each. (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 136)

Problems, however, arise in the relationship between Obi and Clara. They quarrel once again because Obi has not told her about the overdraft he has taken. Being engaged to him she feels she has a right to know these things. Obi, however, is too proud to tell her about his financial difficulties. The quarrels are an important device to reveal their character.

Achebe criticizes Mr. Green again and shows more sympathy towards the Umuofian Progressive Union. Both are representations of two different ideologies. A distinguishing feature of an Igbo novel is its special focus on characters. This focus is particularly keen in chapter eleven. Mr. Green seems
an enigma. He is a representative of the British colonial power with all its pride, cunning and arrogance. Yet, his secretary asserts that he is not altogether a bad man.

He pays for the education of his stewards. This is rather complicated because on the other hand he leaves no stone unturned to insult educated Africans. It is thus extremely ironic that he should participate in what he himself criticizes. He carries the white man’s burden to civilize the natives, but they don’t appear to be so “savage” as “Dark Africa” would portend. Green’s mentality does not change with the changing times and so all that he can do is curse and swear. Finally he appears to be a pathetic and tragic figure.

The characters of two of Obi’s friends - Christopher and Joseph are juxtaposed. Christopher is educated and an economist, while Joseph is not educated and is more of a “bushman” (according to Obi). He belongs more to the traditional African world. But it is not that he was not affected by the English and colonialism. Both are bearers of what Achebe terms a “double heritage”.

Obi and Clara’s relationship also pass through a lot of ups and downs and now, particularly downs. Problems, especially financial are compounded slowly yet surely as the nets are drawn tighter. Just when things seem to be going well, they start crumbling.

Clara gives Obi a gift of fifty pounds. He is rather uncomfortable in taking it. He lies to Clara but things become alright when he reveals the truth. But unfortunately the money is stolen. This creates tension in their relationship and adds to Obi’s financial woes. Now he finds himself trapped from different
sides. He owes fifty pounds to the bank and fifty to Clara. He also has to return the loan he has taken from the UPU. Achebe skilfully intensifies Obi's struggle until it reaches a point where inevitably he falls into the trap of bribery.

Chapter twelve carries the plot forward through three main incidents - Obi receiving an urgent letter from home, Mr. Green reigning like an old colonial lord and Obi and Christopher's escapade with Irish girls. The Irish girls are missionaries and they illustrate an all-pervading western presence. But they are more anti-English than Obi. This makes him uncomfortable and his indeterminate status as in-between is further heightened. First, the girls refuse to interact with them because they are Africans. Then when Christopher pokes fun at the Catholics, Obi jumps to the defence of Roman Catholics because his father had converted. Nigeria was changing, but certain things remain static like old fashioned beliefs.

The incident of the Irish girls also indirectly critiques morality. The morality and virtue Obi displays over certain ideas, as for example, not taking bribes, does not seem to apply in the case of women. By going out with the girls he is in a sense cheating his steady girl friend. His strict virtue and morality over certain ideas like bribery do not seem to apply in the case of women. He does not think it wrong to see other women while having a serious relationship with Clara. Obi does not love or care for Nora (the Irish girl). He is simply using her to take his mind off his troubles. His friend Christopher has three women in his life simultaneously. Christopher feels that a woman offering her body as a bribe is not as bad as Obi thinks.
All the while Obi is also thinking of the letter he has received from home and is afraid it would be about his hopeless relationship with Clara and her problematic outcaste status. In trying to escape from his problems, Obi gets tangled in them slowly but surely and inescapably.

In the next section (chapters thirteen and fourteen) there is a skilful use of foreshadowing creating a sense of foreboding. First Clara starts crying, considering herself responsible for ruining Obi’s life and creating tension and strife in his family. This is because of her, though not her own fault. It is because of traditional old-fangled ideas which refuse to be changed. Another important incident revolves around Obi’s mother falling ill. Some women come to sing for her. It is significant that they have come from a funeral. Achebe here foreshadows Obi’s mother’s death and the song they sing is a foreboding of Obi’s own end. The Song is called “The Song of the Heart”:

A letter came to me the other day.
I said to Mosisi: “read my letter for me.”
Mosisi said to me: “I do not know how to read.”
I went to Innocenti and asked him to read my letters.
Innocenti said to me: “I do not know how to read.”
I asked Simonu to read for me. Simonu said:
“This is what the letter has asked me to tell you:
He that has a brother must hold him to his heart,
For a kinsman cannot be bought in the market,
Neither is a brother bought with money.”
Is everyone here?
Hele ee he ee he
Are you all here?
Hele ee he ee he
The letter said
That money cannot buy a kinsman,
Hele ee he ee he
That he who has brothers
Has more than riches can buy.
Hele ee he ee he. (Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* 117)

This is the first time in the novel that Obi is not able to stand up with confidence to assert his values and beliefs. His will power has weakened and he does not want to have his mother’s blood on his head. The story about the razor blade has an ominous connotation here. The blood is no longer a bond but a threat.

An important section is the conversation that Obi has with his father. He thought he would understand about him and Clara as he himself had been a rebel who walked on his chosen path by converting to Christianity. The way he had been treated that time was similar to the way Obi was being treated for wanting to marry an outcaste. Obi has hopes that he can make his father understand, but he has given up hope in convincing his mother.

Obi’s life is falling apart. He is losing his faith, confidence and strength to stand up against odds. Nothing seems to be going right. He has lost Clara and has to find a way to pay for her abortion and to pay back her fifty pounds. His mother’s ultimatum and sickness puts him in a terrible mental and
emotional state. Because of this he cannot concentrate on driving and crashes into the bushes. He has become numb. He is told that he is lucky to be alive, but he does not care.

The death wish is foremost in his mind. So when he meets Clara his explanations and pleas sound insincere and hollow. She senses this and breaks off the engagement. Obi does not know what to do and starts writing pessimistic English poetry. The final indication of his fall is symbolized by his crumpling and throwing away the poem of joy and unity he had written in England about Nigeria. It is like destroying his idealism.

Throughout this crisis Christopher also has an important role to play. He is the first person to whom Obi turns to when he faces the trauma of his break-up with Clara and her pregnancy. In the second half of the novel, interestingly, it is Christopher who predominates and not Joseph. This is symbolic. In this section Obi is becoming more and more estranged from his family traditions and his roots. Christopher has received a similar education and so Obi thinks that he will be able to understand him better. But he is also opposed to him marrying an outcaste. Thus, even education is not able to nullify deep-rooted prejudices in many people. Even his friend does not support him and Obi is left alone, surrounded by opposition from all the sides.

The last three chapters bring the novel to a conclusion and it ends where it had begun. The novel is cyclical. The judge, the people of Umuofia, the British Council man fail to understand why a man with so much potential falls so low as to go against his principles and accept bribes. Though the novel
tries to trace individual lives and relationships to answer this question, in the end there are really no answers. This is one of the reasons why it is a pessimistic book. In the end Obi finds both his idealism and complacency shattered. The cyclical pattern of the book emphasizes this and it also reiterates stagnation and anxiety. It is thus thought provoking and disturbing.

One of the important focuses of fourth world literature is the eroding of traditional culture and values dying to modernization and urbanization. The novel is set in Umuofia in Lagos. This is Obi's hometown. Lagos is the capital of Nigeria and a big, bustling city. In Lagos the 'twain' generally do not meet, where Europeans' and Africans live in segregated neighbourhoods.

In the 1950's a handful of Africans like Obi started living in Europeans' quarters because they could afford to escape from the poverty and sordidness of African neighbourhoods. Achebe has contrasted city and village life - the modern juxtaposed with the traditional ways. Pitted against the colonizer, Nigerian traditional values slowly get eroded. The city has more poverty than the villages because there they lacked the safety nets provided by community culture and traditions. The brutal and un-caring attitude of city life is shown when Obi goes to the dressmaker with Clara:

His car was parked close to a wide-open storm drain from which came a very strong smell of rotting flesh. It was the remains of a dog which had no doubt been run over by a taxi....Here was Lagos, thought Obi the real Lagos he hadn't imagined existed until now. (shmoop.com/No longer at ease)
The villages have their own problems. They are afraid that there is no scope for growth and progress in villages and so sent their young people to cities to get college education. An important insight gained is that some cultural concepts, traditions and above all prejudices are so deep-rooted that neither education nor modernization can uproot them. Once case in point is Clara being treated as outcaste because she is an osu. Even though Christopher and people like him live in the modern world of cars and technology, yet they do not accept the outcastes.

There are many themes interwoven in the novel. One of the major themes focuses on identity and its problematic nature when sandwiched between two cultures. Obi’s identity has been shaped by two forces - Western culture and values and Igbo culture and values. His acceptance or Western culture distances him from many Igbo practices like polygamy, paying for a bride, honoring a man for acquiring titles won from competition, religious rituals etc. Obi develops his identity through an English education and his interest in Igbo folk tales. He is progressive and he shapes his identity as a pioneer to change the corrupt system of bribery in Nigeria. He is also ready to marry Clara an outcaste woman, but family and society do not allow him as is shown in the trail scene. When the judge asks how a man of such “education” and “promise” could have committed such a crime as accepting bribes, Obi burst into tears because he has failed in his ideals. Failure then creeps into his identity.

Obi’s listlessness did not show any signs of decreasing even when the judge began to sum up. It was only when he said:

“I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education
and brilliant promise could have done this” that a sudden and marked change occurred. Treacherous tears came into Obi’s eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. But he did it as people do when they wipe sweat. He even tried to smile and belde the tears. All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal had not taken him unawares. He had expected it and rehearsed this very scene a hundred times until it had become as familiar as a friend.

In fact, some weeks ago when the trial first began, Mr. Green, his boss, who was one of the Crown witnesses, had also said something about a young man of great promise. And Obi had remained completely unmoved. Mercifully he had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely on each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man, able to look words like ‘education’ and ‘promise’ squarely in the face. But now when the supreme moment came he was betrayed by treacherous tears. (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 2)

The above passage from the novel shows that Obi is basically an ethical person. He is convinced that his education makes him less prone to corruption and he would be able to progress in his chosen path without bribery. But circumstances against which he could not fight make him accept bribes and he is caught. He has to admit that the brilliant promise that he showed is forever blotched and failure becomes part of his identity.
Everybody wondered why The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either. (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 154)

This passage shows that Obi's reputation is stained forever. Obi has the classic tragic flow – hubris – excessive pride. This makes him blind to his other weaknesses and further circumstances combine to make him prone to accepting bribes.

Duty is another important theme of the novel. When he returns home from England after finishing his studies, Obi is surrounded by obligations. He has to pay for his brother's school fees, support his parents financially and pay the education loan he has taken from the UPU. Besides this, he has to buy and maintain a car (to keep up his status), keep a boy to do the cooking and shopping and dress appropriately for social functions.

Obi did not sleep for a long time after he had lain down. He thought about his responsibilities. It was clear that his parents could no longer stand on their own. They had never relied on his father's meagre pension. He planted yams and his wife planted cassava and cocoyams. She also made soap from leaching of palm ash and oil and sold it to the villagers for a little profit. But now they were too old for these things...
“I must give them a monthly allowance from my salary.” How much? Could he afford ten pounds? If only he did not have to pay back twenty pounds a month to the Umuofia Progressive Union. Then there was John’s school fees.

“We’ll manage somehow,” he said aloud to himself. “One cannot have it both ways. There are many young man in this country today who would sacrifice themselves to get the opportunity I have had.” (Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* 154)

Obi disliked being indebted to the UPU. It was his duty however to come appropriately dressed and fulfil his social and financial obligations to the Umuofia Progressive Union. This was especially during the reception which included members of the press. But he is informally dressed.

Since Obi has to support his parents financially, he finds it difficult to repay the loan and asks for some extra time until he is settled. Thus he tells them, “As you all know, it takes a little time to settle down again after an absence of four years. I have many little private matters to settle. My request is this that you give me four months before I start to pay back my loan ” (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 74).

It is a simple, practical request. But others do not think so. Obi hears someone ask what he is going to do with the money he is likely to get from the government – “I know what Government pays senior service people. What you get in one month is what some of your brothers here get in one year. I
have already said that we will give you four months. We can even give you one year. But are we doing you any good?” (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 75)

Hearing this, a lump catches Obi’s throat and soon the sorrow turns to anger when he hears the following comment:

‘What the Government pays you is more than enough unless you go into bad ways.’ Many of the people said: ‘God forbid!’ ‘We cannot afford bad ways,’ went on the president. ‘We are the pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny ourselves many pleasures. We must not drink because we see our neighbours drink or run after women because our thing stands up. You may ask why I am saying all this, I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her....’ (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 75)

Obi leaps to his feet trembling with rage and asserts that he will start paying back the loan instantly. But later when he comes face to face with his financial problems, he regrets his decision which he has taken to nurture his ego.

Corruption is also one of the themes of the novel. The irresistible pull of bribery is shown and how needy and greedy people relent and succumb. Corruption is shown as an inextricable part of the Nigerian civil and business system. Bribery is a passport to getting a scholarship or a job. Obi holds the idealistic view that education is the only way to end corruption. But his
idealism is shattered in the end when he himself has to take bribes because of his financial problems. His salary is insufficient to fulfil his financial obligations. He used to feel that it is easy to reject bribe offers:

After his encounter with Mr Mark he did feel like a tiger. He had won his first battle hands-down. Everyone said it was impossible to win....It was easy to keep one's hands clean. It required no more than the ability to say: "I'm sorry; Mr. So-and-So, but I cannot continue this discussion. Good morning."

One should not, of course, be unduly arrogant. After all, the temptation was not really overwhelming. But in all modesty one could not say it had been nonexistent. Obi was finding it more and more impossible to live on what was left of his forty-seven pounds ten after he had paid twenty to the Umuofia Progressive Union and sent ten to his parents. Even now he had no idea where John's school fees or next term would come from. No, one could not say he had no need of money. (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 80)

Initially, Obi is smug and confident about not accepting bribes. When he is first offered a bribe, he promptly rejects it. He is self-satisfied and looks down upon those who accept bribes.

He rose to his feet, placed the wad of notes on the occasional table before Obi. "This is just small kola," he said. "We will make good friends. Don't forget the name. We will see again. Do you ever go to the club? I have never seen you before."
"I'm not a member."

"You must join," he said. "Bye-bye."

The wad of notes lay where he had placed it for the rest of the day and all night. Obi placed a newspaper over it and secured the door. "This is terrible!" he muttered. "Terrible!" he said aloud... .

Obi steered her towards his bedroom. She made a half hearted show of resisting, then followed.

Obviously she was not an innocent schoolgirl. She knew her job. She was on the short list already, anyway....

Others came. People would say that Mr. So-and-so was a gentleman. He would take money, but he would do his stuff, which was a big advertisement, and others would follow. But Obi stoutly refused to countenance anyone who did not possess the minimum educational and other requirements. On that he was unshakeable. (Achebe, No longer at Ease 152)

Obi starts taking bribes after his mother's death and his break-up with Clara. He seems to have abandoned his principles and idealism. But he still keeps up appearances by refusing to accept bribes from those who did not have a chance in the first place. Ironically, it just brought more bribes to his doorstep, since he earned the reputation of following through with the bribes.
"Of course those of you who know book will not have any difficulty," said the Vice-President on Obi's left. "Otherwise I would have suggested seeing some of the men beforehand."

"It would not be necessary," said the President, "since they would be mostly white men." "You think white men don't eat bribe? Come to our department. They eat more than black men nowadays." (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 30)

The men first ask Obi whether he has found a job. They further comment about the rampant corruption and that it is impossible to get a job for an uneducated person without paying a bribe. This shows how corruption was an integral part of Nigerian society.

In Fourth world writing education has been shown as important for social position and status. However, there is another glaring truth which is made evident in the novel *No Longer at Ease*. Education gives Obi money, status and respect, but to maintain a lifestyle and fulfil obligations more and more money is required. As is pointed out in the novel through the reaction of important individuals:

He spoke of the great honour Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia, which could not join the comity of other towns in their march towards political irredentism, social equality, and economic emancipation.
"The importance of having one of our sons in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic."

(shmoop.com/No longer at ease/society quotes)

This shows that the town of Umuofia has confidence and hope that an educated youth can enhance economic and social status. A typical feature of Fourth world writing is to give a picture of the society and class of a particular country. Here, Igbo society, class and culture are presented.

In Igbo culture, family in its broadest sense has tremendous importance. It includes close family as well as extended family. This is an important theme in the novel. Obi’s parents, siblings and the women and men who came from the region are considered kin. This meant that he had a good support system, but it also increased his obligations. Obi finds his duties as a member of the Umuofia and his family obligations burdensome:

In recent weeks the [Umuofia Progressive] Union had met several times over Obi Okonkwo’s case. At the first meeting, a handful of people had expressed the view that there was no reason why the Union should worry itself over the troubles of a prodigal son who had shown great disrespect to it only a little while ago.

‘We paid eight hundred pounds to train him in England, ’said one of them. ‘But instead of being grateful he insults us because of a useless girl. And now we are being called together again to find more money for him. What does he do
with his big salary? My own opinion is that we have already
done too much for him.

This view, although accepted as largely true, was not taken
very seriously. For, as the President pointed out, a kinsman in
trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother
was felt in the flesh, not in the bone. And so the Union
decided to pay for the services of a lawyer from their funds.

(Achebe, No Longer at Ease 4)

This passage shows that though things were not good between Obi and his
union of fellow expatriates from Umuofia, the men supported him because he
was family. Though these people are less educated than Obi, they have
stronger ethnic ties than Obi. Their care, concern and warmth are shown in
the following passage from the novel:

The guests then said their farewells to Obi, many of them
repeating all the advice that he had already been given. They
shook hands with him and as they did so they pressed their
presents into his palm, to buy a pencil with, or an exercise
book or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling there and a
penny there—substantial presents in a village where money
was so rare, where men and women toiled from year to year
to wrest a meager living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.

(Achebe, No Longer at Ease 10)
This is when Obi is going to England. They show this generosity because they are investing in their “collective” child. Even when Clara finally expresses her resolve not to marry Obi, it is mainly for family reasons:

Clara begged him not to misunderstand her. She said she was taking her present step because she did not want to ruin his life. “I have thought about the whole matter very carefully. There are two reasons why we should not get married.”

“What are they?”

“Well, the first is that your family will be against it. I don’t want to come between you and your family.”

“Bunk! Anyway, what is the second reason?” She could not remember what it was. It didn't matter, anyway. The first reason was quite enough. (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 113)

In African culture, the family plays a major role in selecting a spouse and also play a vital role in the continuation of marriage. The marriage theme is an important ingredient of these novels. Obi, following western ideals wanted to marry someone he loves. He falls in love with Clara, who is an outcaste, whom the family does not accept. They did not want to change marriage traditions. Eventually, Obi agreed and gave in to the pressure of the family and friends.

“I am going to marry her,” Obi said.

“What?” Joseph sat up in bed
"I am going to marry her."

"Look at me," said Joseph... "You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an osu is? But how can you know?" In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country—the most painful thing one could say to Obi.

"I know more about it than yourself," he said, "and I'm going to marry the girl. I wasn't actually seeking your approval."

(Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 32)

From this passage we realize that Obi wants to go against customs and traditions, but the time is not ripe. If he marries Clara he would bring grief to his family and the entire community. Another tradition that Obi wants to go against is the custom of paying money for a bride.

"When you have paid a hundred and thirty pounds bride-price and you are only a second-class clerk, you find you haven't got any more to spare on other women."

"You mean you paid a hundred and thirty? What about the bride-price law?"

"It pushed up the price, that's all."
“It’s a pity my three elder sisters got married too early for us to make money on them. We’ll try and make up on the others.”

“It’s no laughing matter,” said Joseph. “Wait until you want to marry. They will probably ask you to pay five hundred, seeing that you are in the senior service.”

“....I’m not paying five hundred pounds for a wife. I shall not even pay one hundred, not even fifty.”

“You are not serious,” said Joseph. “Unless you are going to be a Reverend Father.” (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 37)

Here there is a discussion between Obi and Joseph regarding marriage traditions. Marriage is seen as a kind of trade – an exchange of goods and money from the groom’s family to the bride’s family. This tradition was a sort of agreement by which the reproductive capacities of the woman born out of wedlock would be considered as part of the lineage of the groom’s family and not the bride’s family. Obi wanted to completely refute this tradition. But Joseph pointed out that if he did this, he would remain unmarried.

An underlying strain of the novel is the shattering of dreams, hopes and aspirations. Dreams are broken by stark reality. Obi’s dream was to achieve elite status without resorting to bribery. His dream of marrying Clara is broken when confronted with the reality that an outcaste will never be accepted by family and community. The shattering of dreams is symbolically portrayed
through the poem on Nigeria written by Obi in the beginning of the novel. The poem expresses his dreams and ideals:

God bless our noble fatherland
Great land of sunshine bright,
Where brave men chose the way of peace,
To win their freedom fight.
May we preserve our purity,
Our zest for life and jollity.
God bless our noble countrymen
And women everywhere.
Teach them to walk in unity
To build our nation dear;
Forgetting region, tribe or speech,
But caring always each for each.


The poem reflects his dreams for his country. But in the end they are all shattered because of Obi's personal failings, financial problems, family problems and a broken relationship. This is symbolically suggested as Obi crumples the poem in the end and throws it away.

Love is another important theme of the novel. But the treatment is not romantic but realistic. Love does not conquer all. The novel shows that love cannot stand against society and family expectations. Love has to succumb to
these more important pressures. This is shown in the following interaction
between Obi and Christopher.

“You know, Obi,” he said, “I had wanted to discuss that
matter with you. But I have learnt not to interfere in a matter
between a man and a woman, especially with chaps like you
who have wonderful ideas about love...That was why I didn't
tell you anything about Clara. You may say that I am not
broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage
where we can ignore all our customs. You may talk about
education and so on, but I am not going to marry an osu.”

(shmoop.com/no-longer-at-ease/love-quotes)

Christopher further adds that Romeo and Juliet is a wonderful story to read
and hear, but in real life, love needs more than just romance to sustain it. He
also confidently asserts that though colonialism, western education and
Christianity have changed Igbo culture, there are some cultural traditions which
are rock-solid and are impossible to dislodge.

Obi had been exposed to western education and had absorbed western values
and customs. Accordingly, he firmly believed that he is fine to choose his
own wife and that education could bring an end to corruption. No Longer at
Ease suggests that although Western values and culture have made inroads into
Igbo culture, the core of some values and traditions of the Igbo people is so
strong and solid that it has the power to submerge western values.
Obi feels that education makes people principled and thus honest. Those who lack education and still are ambitious, resort to bribery and other corrupt means. He also believes that the older people should be replaced by the younger generation.

"The civil service is corrupt because of these so-called experienced men at the top," said Obi.

"You don't believe in experience? You think that a chap straight from university should be made a permanent secretary?"

"I didn't say straight from the university, but even that would be better than filling our top posts with old men who have no intellectual foundations to support their experience."...

"To most of them [educated young men] bribery is no problem. They come straight to the top without bribing anyone. It's not that they're necessarily better than others; it's simply that they can afford to be virtuous. But even that kind of virtue can become a habit." (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

When Obi left Nigeria to study in England, he was very young. He was isolated and lonely and missed his people and his homeland. This made him create an idealized picture of his country in his mind. This picture was actually far from reality. So, when he returned to Nigeria, he was not prepared
to face the corruption and other problems. He thus became alienated. It is ironical that when he was alone in England, he longed for his country, family and culture. But while being educated abroad, he absorbed western values and culture. This makes him criticize his own culture.

Achebe’s style is plain and straightforward. He does not use flowery language or excessive metaphors. Thus Achebe is straightforward in his description. For example he describes Obi’s thoughts thus:

Obi felt very sorry for her. She was obviously an intelligent girl who had set her mind, like so many other young Nigerians, on university education. And who could blame them? Certainly not Obi. It was rather sheer hypocrisy to ask if a scholarship was as important as all that or if university education was worth it. Every Nigerian knew the answer. It was yes. (Achebe, No Longer at Ease 84)

Achebe has chosen to write the novel in third person narrative. This technique allows the readers to analyze Obi’s life and thoughts. It also creates closeness to the character and thus the reader can sympathize with him - Obi caught between two different worlds, as the society around is being rapidly transformed.

No Longer at Ease can also be viewed as a classic tragedy. It is the story of a person who tries to change the world. But because of the tragic flaw of pride, ends up destroying himself or becoming part of the system he wanted to destroy. Obi believes that he has the power to change society and remove
corruption as he is empowered with western education. But he is a failure. His hubris (pride) is so great that he does not listen to the criticism and wise advice of family and friends.

The novel has been made richer by the use of symbols and motifs.

Symbols

a) Mr. Green

Mr. Green is a representative of the “white man’s burden” - to bring education, enlightenment and civilization to the less fortunate and backward people of the globe. He is a symbol of the European presence in Nigeria. He is the supreme “paternal colonizer” who has definitely brought good but more of superiority and arrogance. He thought that he could direct people how to live their lives.

b) The Umuofian Progressive Union

This union is a representation of the stubborn, traditional ways of the indigenous population.

c) Mr. Omo

Omo stands for the older generation of Nigeria. He represents the submissive “old African” who is afraid of the British.
Motifs

a) Songs and Poetry

Songs and poems form an integral part of the narrative. They express mood and deep inner desire. In England, when Obi feels homesick, he writes poems in English expressing his longing for his motherland. His use of English expresses the way he is caught between two pulls - native and English tradition and culture.

b) Proverbs

Achebe has used several African proverbs which brings the African colour to the novel. In fact he has used the novel form to express an African ethos.

c) Language

Language issue emerges out of a colonial society, where the language of the colonizer is used for power and empowerment. Obi struggles between two languages - English and his native language Igbo. The struggle between both languages is evident in the novel.

In the final analysis, *No Longer at Ease* is as powerful and thought-provoking novel which shows the African point of view - the aspirations, dreams, struggles and pressures which colonization brings. Adjustment in both worlds is not easy. A person like Obi is often left in a no man’s land.
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