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AN OUTLINE SUMMARY OF ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

Okonkwo's rise to the position of a respectable clansman in Umuofia

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

The arrival of Ikemefuna in the household of Okonkwo

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

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

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

take part in the boy's death. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that they must return him to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

The assassination of Ikemefuna

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

Okonkwo's depression after the murder of Ikemefuna

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

The tragedy that overtakes Okonkwo during the funeral of Ezeudu

The death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu is announced to the surrounding villages by means of the ekwe, a musical instrument. Okonkwo feels guilty because the last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in Ikemefuna's death. At Ogbuefi Ezeudu's large and elaborate funeral, the men beat drums and fire their guns. Tragedy compounds upon itself when Okonkwo's gun explodes and kills Ogbuefi Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

Okonkwo's exile for seven years in his mother's natal village, Mbanta

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

The warm reception of Okonkwo's maternal uncle, Uchendu

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

Obierika's visit to Okonkwo during the second year of his exile

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

The arrival of Christian missionaries in Mbanta with their leader Mr. Brown

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

The replacement of Mr. Brown by Reverend James Smith and its offshoot

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

The District Commissioner's humiliation of the leaders of Umuofia including Okonkwo

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

Okonkwo's killing of the messenger of the British administration

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

Okonkwo prefers honorable suicide to shameful surrender to the white administrators

When the District Commissioner arrives at Okonkwo's compound, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself. Obierika and his friends lead the commissioner to the body. Obierika explains that suicide is a grave sin; one of Okonkwo's clansmen may touch his body. Obierika believes that

Things Fall Apart
A Study of Characters in *Things Fall Apart*

(a) Major Characters

(i) Okonkwo

(ii) Nwoye

(iii) Obierika

(iv) Unoka

(v) Ikemefuna

(vi) Mr. Brown

(vii) Mr. Smith

(viii) District Commissioner

(b) Minor Characters

(i) Ekwefi

(ii) Ezinma

(a) Major Characters

(i) Okonkwo

Okonkwo is stoic to a fault

Okonkwo, the son of the effeminate and lazy Unoka, strives to make his way in a world that seems to value manliness. In so doing, he rejects everything for which he believes his father stood. Unoka was idle, poor, profligate, cowardly, gentle, and interested in music and conversation. Okonkwo consciously adopts opposite ideals and becomes productive, wealthy, thrifty, brave, violent, and adamantly opposed to music and anything else that he perceives to be "soft," such as conversation and emotion. He is stoic to a fault.

Okonkwo is unable to adapt to changing times

Okonkwo achieves great social and financial success by embracing these ideals. He marries three wives and fathers several children. Nevertheless, just as his father was at odds with the values of the community around him, so too does Okonkwo find himself unable to adapt to changing times as the white man comes to live among the Umuofians. As it becomes evident that compliance rather than violence constitutes the wisest principle for survival, Okonkwo realizes that he has become a relic, no longer able to function within his changing society.

Okonkwo is a tragic hero in the classical sense

Okonkwo is a tragic hero in the classical sense: although he is a superior character, his tragic flaw—the equation of manliness with rashness, anger, and violence—brings about his own destruction. Okonkwo is gruff, at times, and usually unable to express his feelings (the narrator frequently uses the word "inwardly" in reference to Okonkwo's emotions). But his emotions are indeed quite complex, as his "manly" values conflict with his "unmanly" ones, such as fondness for Ikemefuna and Ezinma. The narrator privileges us with information that Okonkwo's fellow clan members do not have—that Okonkwo surreptitiously follows Ekwefi into the forest in pursuit of Ezinma, for example—and thus allows us to see the tender, worried father beneath the seemingly indifferent exterior.

act of bringing Nwoye out of his supposed ignorance and into enlightenment through Christianity. It begins to quench his thirst for answers that Igbo religion has not been able to provide him.

(iii) Obierika

Obierika, though a close friend of Okonkwo is not a blind follower of the traditions of the Igboland; In this he resembles Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo

Obierika is a close friend of Okonkwo. But unlike Okonkwo, he does not follow the traditions of the clan blindly. Nwoye's questioning of Ikemefuna's death and of the practice of throwing away newborn twins is understandable: Obierika, too, frequently questions tradition. In fact, Obierika refused to accompany the other men to kill Ikemefuna, and Okonkwo points out that Obierika seems to question the Oracle. Obierika also has reservations about the village's practice of tapping trees. Okonkwo, on the other hand, accepts all of his clan's laws and traditions unquestioningly. Interestingly, Obierika's manliness is never questioned. The fact that Obierika is skeptical of some Igbo practices makes us regard Nwoye's skepticism in a different light.

Obierika's efforts to help his exiled friend Okonkwo to rehabilitate himself into Umuofia again

Obierika feels sad when his friend Okonkwo is exiled to mother's village for killing one of the sons of late Ezeudu during his funeral by sheer accident when his gun goes astray. Though he participates in the burning of

90 (ii) Nwoye
Nwoye struggles in the shadow of his powerful, successful, and demanding father

Nwoye, Okonkwo's oldest son, struggles in the shadow of his powerful, successful, and demanding father. His interests are different from Okonkwo's and resemble more closely those of Unoka, his grandfather. He undergoes many beatings, at a loss for how to please his father, until the arrival of Ikemefuna, who becomes like an older brother and teaches him a gentler form of successful masculinity. As a result, Okonkwo backs off, and Nwoye even starts to win his grudging approval. Nwoye remains conflicted however: though he makes a show of scorning feminine things in order to please his father, he misses his mother's stories.

The murder of Ikemefuna turns Nwoye against his father and the tyrannical ways of the clan to seek his peace in the new religion of the white man

With the unconscionable' murder of Ikemefuna, however, Nwoye retreats into himself and finds himself forever changed. His reluctance to accept Okonkwo's masculine values turns into pure embitterment toward him and his ways. When missionaries come to Mbanta, Nwoye's hope and faith are reawakened, and he eventually joins forces with them. Although Okonkwo curses his lot for having borne so "effeminate" a son and disowns Nwoye, Nwoye appears to have found peace at last in leaving the oppressive atmosphere of his father's tyranny.

Nwoye like Obierika begins to question the harmful tradition of the Igbo clan; Nwoye a contrast to his father

Nwoye shows promise because he voices chauvinist opinions, but his comments are really aimed at Okonkwo. In fact, Nwoye loves women's stories and is pleased when his mother or Okonkwo's other wives ask him to do things for them. He also seeks comfort in his mother's hut after Ikemefuna's death. Nwoye's questioning of Ikemefuna's death and of the practice of throwing away newborn twins is understandable: Obierika, too, frequently questions tradition. In fact, Obierika refused to accompany the other men to kill Ikemefuna, and Okonkwo points out that Obierika seems to question the Oracle. Obierika also has reservations about the village's practice of tapping trees. Okonkwo, on the other hand, accepts all of his clan's laws and traditions unquestioningly.

Interestingly, Obierika's manliness is never questioned. The fact that Obierika is skeptical of some Igbo practices makes us regard Nwoye's skepticism in a different light. We understand that, in Umuofia, manhood does not require the denigration of women. Like Nwoye,

close to his biological father. Rather, his primary emotional attachments to his natal village are to his mother and little sister.

Achebe tells the story of Nwoye's conversion with humour and irony

The narrator tells the story of Nwoye's conversion: six missionaries, headed by a white man, travel to Mbanta. The white man speaks to the village through an interpreter, who, we learn later, is named Mr. Kiaga. The interpreter's dialect incites mirthful laughter because he always uses Umuofia's word for "my buttocks" when he means "myself." He tells the villagers that they are all brothers and sons of God. He accuses them of worshipping false gods of wood and stone. The missionaries have come, he tells his audience, to persuade the villagers to leave their false gods and accept the one true God. The villagers, however, do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. They also cannot see how God can have a son and not a wife. Many of them laugh and leave after the interpreter asserts that Umuofia's gods are incapable of doing any harm. The missionaries then burst into evangelical song. Okonkwo thinks that these newcomers must be insane, but Nwoye is instantly captivated. The "poetry of the new religion" seems to answer his questions about the deaths of Ikemefuna and the twin newborns, soothing him "like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate."

Nwoye reasons for embracing Christianity

Nwoye is drawn to Christianity because it seems to answer his long-held doubts about his native religion, specifically the abandonment of twin newborns and Ikemefuna's death. Furthermore, Nwoye feels himself exiled from his society because of his disbelief in its laws, and the church offers refuge to those whom society has cast out. The church's value system will allow twins to live, for example, which offers comfort to the pregnant woman who has had to endure the casting away to die of her four sets of newborn twins. Similarly, men without titles turn to Christianity to find affirmation of their individual worth. The *osu* are able to discard others' perception of them as members of an ostracized caste and enter the church as the equals of other converts.

Achebe describes the pleasure that Nwoye finds in Christianity poetic language

The language that Achebe uses to describe the pleasure that Nwoye finds in Christianity reflects Umuofia's seeming need to be soothed physically as well as spiritually. Achebe sets up, from the beginning of the novel, a system of images that accentuate both the dry land and the tense atmosphere in the village. The image of the words of the hymn as raindrops relieving Nwoye's "parched soul" refers not only to relief from the arid, desert-like heat with which Africa is commonly associated but also to the