

An African Condition in a European Tradition: Chinua Achebe and the English Language of Native Narratives

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Abstract:

This paper intends to investigate the passage from orature to literature in Africa, and the problem of the language used, in the context of the work of the Nigerian novelist and critic Chinua Achebe, whose novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is considered as the first African novel. The problematic dialogism that engaged the African writer with canonical literate traditions evokes the difficulty of writing an African history and narrative while the records are missing, for the Africans did not have a written tradition. It is true that writing about an oral society that did not know writing sometimes turns into a syncretic account, but the African writer is also faced with the paradox of representing the experience of *oral* societies using the colonizer's *literate* language. Accordingly, we are led to question: how can such fiction do justice to the colonized culture? While this paper admittedly tries to figure out how the worldview in oral societies is cyclic since the past and the present are fused, it invites new perspectives by highlighting the empowering effects orature has had on African writers who learnt to revisit their oral tradition and make out of it their emancipating and decolonizing project.

Key words: decolonization, indigenization, notarization, Nigerianization, orature