

Introduction to Twentieth-Century Literature

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(Murray 019, Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30–4:30)

April 17, 2017. Head, Ngũgĩ, Coetzee.

review: Quayson on Achebe's realism

Reading "culture" out of a novel is valuable but inadequate. (133)

- ▶ Achebe is a realist, but realism is not documentation
- ▶ novel's metaphorical level crosses feminine and masculine

liminality (being on the threshold)

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It did not occur to him [Achebe] that he was the first great African writer in the English language...Shortly afterwards he came to London on a course at the BBC. He showed it [TFA] to his course officer who sent it round to Heinemann's. Heinemann's normal fiction reader read it and did a long report, but the firm was still hesitating whether to accept it. Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There were no precedents.

Alan Hill, interviewed by Kristen Holst Petersen in 1990, rpt. in *Things Fall Apart*, ed. F. Abiola Irele (New York: Norton, 2009), 148–49.

why a historical novel?

- ▶ reconstructed past, against “Orientalist” timelessness
- ▶ nationalist repurposing of tradition for modernity
- ▶ auto-historicization (what makes the Anglophone intellectual)
- ▶ could it have been otherwise?

quiz

Write your name and your answers on a piece of paper.

1. What are the national origins of Head, Ngũgĩ, and Coetzee?
2. Where is "The Deep River" set?
3. What is a significant plot similarity between "The Deep River" and "Wedding at the Cross"? (A few ways to give a good answer.)
4. Briefly describe a thematic connection among these three texts. (Many good answers.)

Each question is worth one point; the score out of four is your grade.

Extra credit (0.25 point): what does *freigebig* mean, and in what language?

Head: irony

The old men there...say they lost their place of birth over a woman. They shake their heads and say that women have always caused a lot of trouble in the world. (1104)

- ▶ What relation to tradition does Head adopt via the external narrator of this story?

Ngũgĩ: irony

He attended classes in baptism and great was the day he cast away Wariuki and became Dodge W. Livingstone, Jr. (1044)

(They [his sons] affected to find it difficult speaking Kikuyu, they made so many mistakes.) (1046)

He consulted Rev. Clive Schomberg's still modern classic on good manners for Africans. (1046)

Coetzee: irony

Egudu obeys, bringing his show to an end. (1269)

“Show me what an oral poet can do.” And he laid her out... (1275)

next: Caribbean writers

- ▶ Kincaid, "Girl"
- ▶ Naipaul, "One out of Many"