

A Comparative Study on the Cause of a Curse in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a comparison of two characters that bring the main characters into a terrible fate, the curse, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto*. Using New Criticism theory, Miner's comparative literature and close reading method, the study shows that though both characters in the novels are categorized as brutal leaders, however, Okonkwo is more brutal than Manfred shown in the diagram which has five kinds of crime than Manfred, only one crime. The former heartlessly takes the head of the enemy home and drinks the blood and kills the innocent kid and his family because they are weak people as well as regret for the society change instead of killing the kids and the family, whilst Manfred only kills somebody else and regret for his daughter as the off target. Accordingly, Okonkwo gets the curse more sorrowful by killing himself than Manfred who only mourns for his murdered daughter. The study then is worth a conduct as it has a novelty of the excluded theory in the previous studies and gives the researcher moral lesson that character can determine our future life.

Keywords: New Criticism; Comparative Study; No Compassions; Curse

INTRODUCTION

Novalis states that character is fate (Fanani, 2022). This opening philosophical thinking means that somebody's character leads them to their bad or good future life. This philosophical background also proves the gap of the study that no studies analyze characterization using new criticism that becomes the destiny of the main characters' future life. Okonkwo and Manfred are examples of characters experiencing fate because of their characters. Both of them are men of no

compassions just to maintain their reign. Accordingly, the researcher is interested in comparing their character.

Character is what a person like (Eagleton, 2013, see also Cuddon 2013), a behavioral representation (Lina Varotsi 2019), a literary life that make the readers understand about himself (Bennet, 2014). Thus, character is the creation of a concealed human performance with the unquestionably partial form of a fiction (Figlerowicz, 2016) together with the readers' involvement with fictitious characters to be an important part of the practice of literature (Thomsen, 2017). Character of fiction, then, can be seen broadly in a movie, and a novel (Euron, 2019) with the picture of universal humankind with the actions as well as values having a universal human sense, apart from what their real personal, social as well as historical characteristics probable are (Owen, 2021).

The difference between character of fiction and human in real life is so apparent that fictitious characters can be identified by their articulation, predictable and knowable performance in the plots either happy or sad. Accordingly, from the signature, the readers make up characters in any work of literature. The real human being cannot be as recognizable or as foreseeable as characters in literature (Saje, 2014).

Therefore, the researcher is into comparing Okonkwo, the character in *Things Fall Apart* and Manfred, the character in *the Castle of Otranto*, as they experience the proverb what goes around comes around. Both of them are rulers in their kingdom. Because they do not rule their kingdom wisely, they face the curse in the end of the story. How unwise ruling they perform and the similarities as well as the differences are the researcher's focus of this study. The novelty of the researcher's study also triggers the researcher to conduct this study. That the important role of the New Criticism is excluded from the previous studies by Xiaobin, Thoriqussuud, and Al Humairoh is clear. All of them conduct comparative study on literature using descriptive and dramatic method as well as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Recently, some researchers conducting comparative study on literature are available; first of all, Xiaobin (2022) compares the cause of the tragic love in *A Dream of Red Mansions* and in *Wuthering Heights* that analyzes and compares of the tragic life of two love stories. Second of all, Thoriqussuud, et. al, (2024) compares women's betrayal in Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* and Atiq Rahimi's *the Patience Stone*. Using descriptive and dramatic method, the study finds that the term betrayal has a positive meaning since through betrayal the women fight for their own kind. Last of all, Al Humairoh, et. al, (2025) compares love and belonging across culture in Xi Xi's *A Woman Like Me* and Agus Noor's *Kisah Cinta Perempuan Perias Mayat*. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the study finds that

the culture of Hong Kong and Indonesia reject the lovers' intimacy that drive them to their death.

From the previous studies above, it is clear that the researcher's study has the novelty insomuch as it compares the main characters' behaviors that lead them to get the curse from the society, whilst, no previous studies above compare the characterization in their comparison study. Thus, characterizing the main characters is a thing that the previous studies are missing. In other words, this is the novelty of the study. It is then another reason of the researcher arising comparative study on the cause of a curse in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto*.

New Criticism as the Analytical Framework

As the researcher would like to conduct comparative analysis of characters in novels that have nothing to do with the author and the background of history when the novel is composed, then, the researcher goes to New Criticism meaning that the analysis refers to the meaning of the text called the formal features of literature (Berterns, 2014) apart from certain authorial or historic backgrounds (Upstone, 2017). Through New Criticism, then, the researcher focuses on the characters' behaviors in both novels that make them similar as well as different. Besides, in literary comparison, principally, the topics, situation as well as the elements are to be identic (Miner, 1990) through which the researcher is convinced that Miner's theory is applicable as the researcher's comparison study is derived from the similarities and can be extrinsic as well as intrinsic aspects (Jost, 1974, see also Sariban, 2009). The novels are with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto*.

METHOD

Design and Sample

Because the researcher compares the characters of the novels excluding the background of the author's life and society as well as history, therefore, close reading method is worthy of an application. Close reading method refers to the researcher's comprehending of the text or passage (Pickering, 2019). Through close reading, then, the researcher splits up in his notes the characterization of the main characters in the first and second novel, analyzes and compares clearly which one has more brutal character leading to the curse. Further, by understanding the characters through reading closely, the researcher can elaborate the comparative study of the cause of a curse to Okonkwo, the main character in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* referring to chapters 1, 2, 7, 14, 21, and 25 and to Manfred, the main character in Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto* referring to chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Instruments and Procedures

The researcher himself is the instrument of the study as the study the researcher conducts is literary one. To group the data, the researcher refers to the research questions, that is, how unwise ruling the main characters perform and the similarities and the differences of the described characters. It means that the researcher selects the main characters' characterization referring to their brutality, find their similarities in their brutality and their difference from the similarities in a table note. To convince the reliability of the interpretation, the researcher connect to the comparative and new criticism theory. Accordingly, the researcher is easy to do the study.

Data Analysis

To conduct the analysis of the data, firstly, the researcher characterizes the main characters regarding their unwise ruling by quotation from both novels. By unwise ruling, the researcher means the policy of the rulers that endangers the others. Secondly, the researcher compares the characterization of both characters by elaborating the similarities and the differences of the characterization both of which refer to the brutal characterization leading to their curse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Though the curse itself is not explained in the different sub-title, however, the researcher includes the curse as the effects of the characterization of the characters within the following sub-titles. Instead of further understanding of the meaning of the curse in a book of theory, the researcher understands that the characters undergo a curse from the quotation of the novel itself that has been by explained by Chinua Achebe, the author of *Things Fall Apart* that Okonkwo undergoes a tufia meaning a curse (Achebe, 1959). That the character in the other novel has the curse because of the similarity in the ending of the character's life. Then, how the characters are described is the cause of the curse.

The Cause of A Curse in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Okonkwo is described as a man of no compassions that he gets from his clan of war training him to kill lots of enemies from his boyhood, eating the blood of the enemy, taking home the enemy's head several times to drink as wine of palm. Even, his experience of killing is more than his own father and those being old.

"He was not afraid of war. He was a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was fifth head and he was not an old man yet. On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm-wine from his first human head" (Achebe, 1959:3).

The quotation above shows that how harsh Okonkwo is characterized. It is the society making him heartless, the outer society as well as inner society. The former refers to the society beyond his family that the society is in the condition of harsh

war. Whilst, the latter refers to the society within his family. It turns out that Okonkwo hates the clan and his father, because both of whom have so much compassion. He considers compassion as weakness leading to a disgraceful and dishonorable decease (Achebe, 1959:5).

Okonkwo's heartless character is supported by his commanding words in that everything he says is sanctioned by the people. "But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi says yes also. Okonkwo says yes very strongly, so his chi agreed. And not only his chi but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work or his hands" (Achebe, 1959:8). It turns out that chi, the Chinese term for an inner strength is believed by the people of Umuofia. As he 'says yes very strongly,' the people are encouraged to obey his words, even respecting him as an honorable person.

His feeling no compassions falls on every one not just those beyond his family member. He hates looking at his family as weakness. Without reluctance, he points a gun at them to put them an end. It is because Okonkwo wishes to inherit his reign to his own springs and the springs should not be weak.

"Unfortunately for her Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children" (Achebe, 1959:11).

The quotation above shows Okonkwo's feeling no compassions falls on his own family because his family is considered as weak people. He heartlessly threatens his family by pointing a gun at them and then shoots them.

Okonkwo is described as a man of fear. In contrast to his father, Unoka, who is so compassionate as well as loving, Okonkwo do not have resemblance to his father at all in matter of love and compassion. He hates his father so much because of loving others and he thinks that it is his father's weakness and idleness.

"But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness....." (Achebe, 1959:4).

When a man has no fear of anything, he will without reluctant do anything to satisfy himself whether or not what he does ruins others. Such a character has usually been built from the place he lives since his childhood. This is the character leading him to be a person in the future will.

In spiritual belief, Okonkwo turns out not to be a man of tolerance. When a new belief enters his clan, he fights against the new belief all out. He has to keep his own belief, his gods he has made as well as worshipped safe from the interference from other.

"Near the barn was a small house, the "medicine house" or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal gods and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped with sacrifices of kola nut, food and

palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children” (Achebe, 1959:4).

The quotation above shows that the gods are not those believed by people in common that are believed coming from heaven but made by Okonkwo’s hands. It is the pagan life that Okonkwo offered to his clan to worship. Accordingly, the rule of the spiritual life is the rule Okonkwo makes that surely supports and protects his reign. Eventually, no tolerance in other belief is within his characterization. As a result of having no tolerance to others, he is so fanatic to his own clan. He has to kill his adopted child from other clan as the rule of the custom says so. “Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak” (Achebe, 1959:19).

Though commonly speaking he is a man of no compassions, there is still a conscience within. He takes a deep regret after the killing of the boys, both of whom belong to his own clan and other clan. As to killing the boy of his own clan, he has to be away in exile in his mother’s house according to the custom’s regulation. Coming back to his mother’s home is regarded as a weakness (Achebe, 1959:44). Therefore, his people no longer respects him and gradually he comes to his downfall.

“His life had been ruled by a great passion—to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things” (Achebe, 1959:43).

The quotation above shows the beginning of his curse that he has to live away from his clan in his mother homeland because when a man is with his father’s homeland, he is considered as being prosperous instead of being with his mother. His other curse is followed by one of his sons who does not follow his spiritual teaching. His son embraces another belief, instead.

“What are you doing here?” Obierika had asked when after many difficulties the missionaries had allowed him to speak to the boy.

“I am one of them,” replied Nwoye.

“How is your father?” Obierika asked, not knowing what else to say.

“I don’t know. He is not my father,” said Nwoye, unhappily.’ (Achebe, 1959:47).

Thus, Okonkwo experiences the westerners’ proverb what goes around comes around meaning that any kind of deed, good or bad, will address you though you do not believe in the proverb. His uncivilized ruling and no compassions to weak people are paid by the people’s disrespect to him as well as his son belonging to other belief which leads him to the end of his reign in Umuofia.

Why, he cried in his heart, should he, Okonkwo, of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or chi,

for how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son's behavior? (Achebe, 1959:50).

It turns out that all the people of Umuofia turns their belief to a new one. When Okonkwo cannot maintain the belief he creates in the society (family and society in general), he is in complete downfall. He no longer has power. Accordingly, he tries to kill the new belief spreader. But his people hates him doing that. The people of Umuofia are no longer the people of war that he leads. They are now traders, prosperous, peaceful without Okonkwo's spiritual teaching. They are now falling apart.

"Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably soft like women" (Achebe, 1959:59).

The quotation above means that Okonkwo experiences a complete downfall. People have no longer respects him in the way they make a life as well as the God they worship, nothing meets with Okonkwo's ideas. It is because of his characters that are not human. He faces the curse from the characters within himself that character is fate. He has to swallow the bitter fate in the end of his life. Not being able to stand with his bitter fate, the last curse addresses him. He kills himself.

"That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words (Achebe, 1959:68).

The Cause of a Curse in Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto*

As explained above that the meaning of curse is taken from Chinua Achebe's words, the author of *Things Fall Apart* that the main character gets the curse after his unwise policy. The curse also falls on Manfred, the character in *the Castle of Otranto*, with unwise policy like Okonkwo. Manfred is a king of no compassions. Firstly, to keep reigning the kingdom through his side, heartlessly, kills his own family especially a born daughter because a daughter cannot be a king and if he has a daughter instead of a son, his power will end naturally. It is a son whom he dreams so much to be continuing his power through generations. However, his son dies young.

"I have lost my only hope, my joy, the support of my house—Conrad died yester morning" (Walpole, 1998:57).

Upset by Hippolita, his wife, who only gives him a weak son, Manfred no longer cares her as well as his daughter, he focuses on marrying Isabella, his future in law.

"My own and the safety of my people, demand that I should have a son. It is in vain to expect an heir from Hippolita. I have made choice of Isabella" (Walpole, 1998:40).

Secondly, ambitious to have a son by marrying Isabella, he has to kill Theodore, a peasant who protects Isabella from the romantic pursue of Manfred. However, Theodore is safe from the killing. Accordingly, Manfred sacrifices everything; his relationship with his daughter, Matilda and Hippolita, his wife. However, Isabella refuses Manfred's love. Then, his life is apparently to have no hopes as there is no one to be his male generations to proceed his power.

“Power and greatness have no longer any charms in my eyes. I wished to transmit the scepter. I had received from my ancestors with honors to my son—but that is over! Life itself is so indifferent to me” (Walpole, 1959:58).

Lastly, blind by his jealousy of being rejected by Isabella, Manfred is in pursue of her to kill. Yet, he makes a mistake to the killing. It is his own daughter, Matilda, instead of Isabella who protects Isabella in her hiding that he kills. By the death of Matilda due to his terrible ambition, his reign comes to an end. Theodore and Isabella become king and queen, leaving Manfred to the repentance.

“Forgive thee! Murderous monster!” cried Manfred, “can assassins forgive? I took thee for Isabella; but heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child. Oh, Matilda!—canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?” (Walpole, 1998:98).

The quotation above shows that Manfred's character leads him to repent himself. He cannot get away of the effects of his behaviors to others. That he has to face a very deep sorrow in the end is a fact. The deep sorrow then is the curse of his bad characterization.

The Similarities and the Differences of the Cause of A Curse in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto*

The Similarities

From the analysis above about the characterization of Okonkwo and Manfred, the researcher comes to know that both of them are characterized as people without compassions to sustain their reign. To sustain the existence of their power, they have to ignore their family. Likewise, they have to abolish people who are considered as hindrance of their goal. Okonkwo has to kill his adopted boy that belongs to other clan because it is his clan's rule. “Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak” (Achebe, 1959:19). Okonkwo also has to kill his family because they are weak. “Unfortunately for her Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children” (Achebe, 1959:11) as weak people cannot be leaders, therefore, they cannot continue his leadership.

Whilst, Manfred ignores his wife and daughter as women do not deserve leadership in spite of the fact that his only son dies. “I have lost my only hope, my joy, the

support of my house—Conrad died yester morning” (Walpole, 1998:57). He tries to kill Isabella because she rejects Manfred’s proposal to a marriage to her. Unfortunately, it is Matilda, his own daughter, becomes the victim of the murder. “Forgive thee! Murderous monster!” cried Manfred, “can assassins forgive? I took thee for Isabella; but heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child. Oh, Matilda!—canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?” (Walpole, 1998:98).

To get the clear cut understanding of the similarities, the researcher puts in the following table:

Similarities of the Cause of A Curse of Okonkwo and Manfred
having no compassions to sustain their reign ignoring their family to sustain their power Ambitious about power by killing the obstacles

The Differences

Though in the end of the story they both grieve of what they have done by killing people, however, the differences are that Okonkwo feels grieved not of what he has done, that is, the killing, but of the changes of the people of Umuofia. They no longer follow the rule of the clan that the clan should be men of war. They become weak like women, instead. They fall apart. “He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably soft like women” (Achebe, 1959:59). Whilst, Manfred mourns for his daughter as being off-target. He has to murder Isabella but indeed it is Matilda, his own daughter, he kills. “Forgive thee! Murderous monster!” cried Manfred, “can assassins forgive?” (Walpole, 1998:98). To make a clear cut understanding about the difference, the researcher puts in a table as follows:

The difference of the cause of a curse between Okonkwo and Manfred

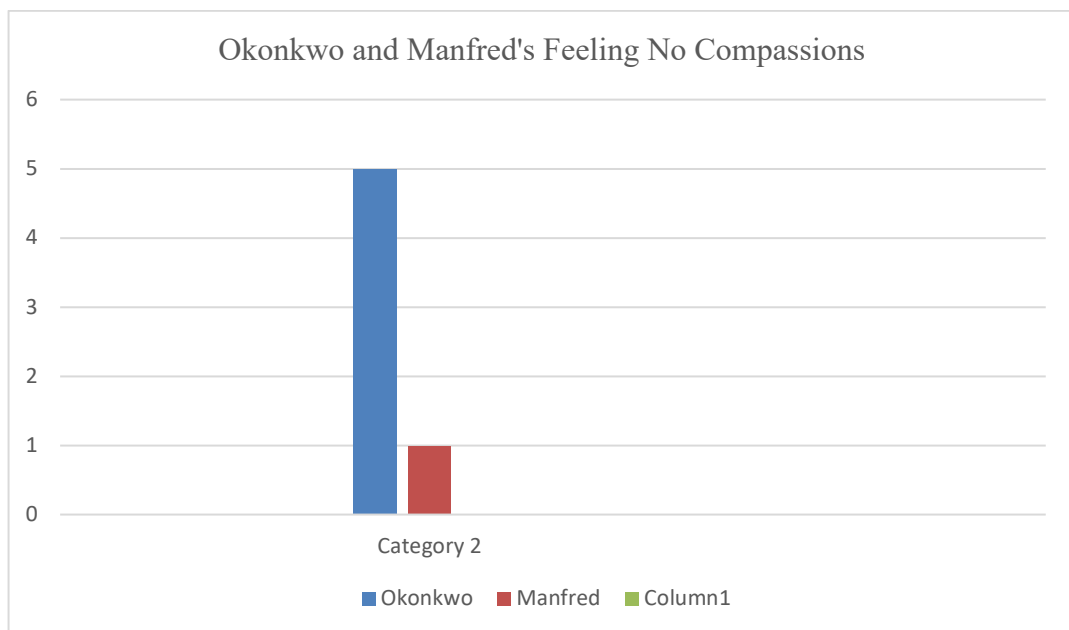
Okonkwo	Manfred
More mourning for the clan changes than what he has done by the killing	More mourning for his murdered daughter than his lost power

Analyzing the effect of the behavior of the characters, it is quite proper to use new criticism because new criticism is the study of elements within the literary work, one of which a character (Figlerowicz, 2016). The use of new criticism further gives the researcher more understanding about the future fate the characters causes from their behaviors that is quite appropriate what Bennet has said that the readers or in this case the researcher himself understands about himself (2014).

Therefore, in this sub-title, the researcher would like to explore more about both characters, Okonkwo and Manfred, because in the analysis above the researcher analysis the differences derived from the similarities. Therefore, the researcher needs to explore further differences between both characters, to know which one is harsher. Still, the way the researcher performs their differences is derived from their feeling no compassions. In spite of the characterization in the analysis above,

Okonkwo kills more people in war, brings their heads, and drinks their blood than his former warrior, i.e. his father. Accordingly, he regards his father as the weak one and he hates him (Achebe, 1959:3).

Further, Okonkwo has no tolerance for other religion. Instead of warmly welcoming the new religion, he is completely against it (Achebe, 1959:3). Whilst, for Manfred, the researcher does not find further brutal characterization. Then, the researcher puts their feeling no compassions in the diagram as follows:



The diagram above shows that Okonkwo is more brutal than Manfred because Okonkwo without feeling guilty drinks the blood of the enemies and taking their head home. Though both of them are in deep sorrow, yet, Manfred's sorrow refers to death of his daughter accidentally by his hands. Okonkwo does not feel sorrowful of his murdered adopted son by his hand. It is the society changes he regrets.

CONCLUSION

In this sub-title, the researcher comes to the finding that first of all, Okonkwo and Manfred have brutal characterization to sustain their reign from generation to generation in their side. However, Okonkwo performs his characterization more brutal than Manfred. Second of all, both characters are narrated heartlessly, therefore, they have to confront their fate sorrowfully, the curse. Though both of them no longer have power in the society but only Okonkwo ends his life by committing a suicide. Last of all, the researcher is in a considerable hope that there will be researchers conduct on the same novels with different theories or different novels with the same theories in order that literary study develops significantly.

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