

by war and a tremendous loss of human life. If Europe is the “center” or perceived itself as the “center,” the poem then announces the end of a phase of history (European or World). The world, or society as the Europeans knew it, was ending because of this cataclysm, symbolized by the widening gyre Yeats references in “The Second Coming.”

The first two lines of Yeats’ poem suggest a situation that is no longer stable, in which the “falcon” has been separated from the “falconer,” that which anchors it. The two can no longer communicate with each other. One may read this as indicative of alienation. For Yeats, it seems to represent a temporal shift or rift whose implications are simultaneously known and unknown. This ambiguity is the source of tension, for while the current phase or past is ending because of alienation from its falconer, the future is unclear.

Let’s consider what it was about the vision of the world projected in Yeats’ poem that appealed to or fascinated Achebe. For twentieth-century individuals who had not before witnessed the scale of violence seen in the events of World War I, Yeats’ poem might seem apocalyptic, an indication of the end of the world, and in fact this is precisely how many people in Europe and North America felt upon the conclusion of World War I. In Yeats’ poem, an apocalyptic ending, however, seems to carry within it the seed(s) of a beginning, one whose nature is uncertain. This ending/beginning seems to be in keeping with Achebe’s narrative.

For the Igbo, the arrival of white people among them marks an ending, the death of their culture and values. Things will never be the same. There is no turning to the past, at least not to a familiar one or one in which they will be comfortable. By the end of Part 3 of *Things Fall Apart*, the death of Igbo culture seems imminent. The people of Abame have been massacred as Obierika informs an exiled Okonkwo. The Christians have arrived at Umuofia and established themselves, followed by new laws and administrative structures, such as the court, the District Commissioner, and *kotma*. This transformation, expressed through the structure and plot of *Things Fall Apart*, helps us understand Achebe’s use of Yeats’ poem as a framing device for his novel.

In Part 1, for instance, Achebe introduces us to Umuofia, Okonkwo, and the various characters, tra-

ditions, and cultural practices of the people. As the novel’s exposition, this section provides the reader with important information about Umuofia, its social and spiritual belief systems, customs, and the values that govern or inform the lives of the people as well as their relationships with one another. Although Umuofia is not a harmonious world, the people recognize themselves as belonging to a community. We witness this as they participate in various activities: village games, a marriage courtship and formalization, funeral rites, the New Yam Festival, a marriage dispute, a spiritual quest, and, by the end of Part One, Okonkwo’s exile. Okonkwo’s exile from his people marks the climax of this section of the novel. One could interpret Okonkwo’s exile from his people as symbolizing the end of a phase in his life, for his people destroy his compound and remove all signs of his presence in the community, thus disconnecting him from all the things that have helped to shape his identity.

The second part of the novel takes place in Mbanta, the home of Okonkwo’s mother and Okonkwo’s place of exile. It is during this period of seven years that Okonkwo—and the reader—begins to hear stories of the effects of the first contact between Africans and whites represented in the news of the destruction of Abame. Okonkwo also hears of the arrival of missionaries in Umuofia and their establishment of administrative offices there. The arrival of the Christian missionaries in Umuofia during his absence affects Okonkwo because Nwoye, his eldest son, finds spiritual refuge in the songs and teachings of the Christians. The missionaries represent a surrogate community for Nwoye and others like him who have felt marginalized or alienated by their society or its practices. Thus, these people become the first converts. Their conversion and association with the missionaries further fragment Igbo society. The people of Umuofia are now a divided people, and a symbolic representation of this division occurs when Okonkwo disowns his son Nwoye. It is important to note that the presence of the missionaries exposes already existing flaws in the community.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of Umuofia is worsened by the presence of the colonial administration, which soon establishes a colonial District Court and begins to impose its own laws, thus discarding existing African laws. For Okonkwo, the