

ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE- 27
I SEMESTER OPTIONAL ENGLISH
MID-SEMESTER EXAMINATION: AUGUST 2019
OE: 113 Optional English Literature I : World Literature

TIME: 1 Hour

Max marks: 30

This paper contains THREE printed pages.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. You may use a dictionary

- I. Here are extracts of an interview that Chinua Achebe gave to a magazine in 2009. Read them carefully and respond to the questions that follow:

BRADFORD MORROW: In your essay "The Truth of Fiction," you define a difference between fiction and what you term beneficent fiction. As I understand it, you equate fiction with superstition and reserve for literary fiction the term beneficent. In light of what extraordinary political events are happening today in the Soviet Union and given how central politics is to your novels, I wonder whether you think that there must always be a political element for beneficent fiction to be truly beneficent?

CHINUA ACHEBE: The notion of beneficent fiction is simply one of defining storytelling as a creative component of human experience, human life, as something we have always done which has positive purpose and a use. Whenever you say that, some people draw back. Why should art have a purpose and a use? But it seems to me that from the very beginning, stories have been meant to be enjoyed, to appeal to that part of us which enjoys good form and good shape and good sound. Still, I think that behind it all is a desire to make our experience in the world better, and once you talk about making things better you're talking about politics.

MORROW: How do you define politics?

ACHEBE: Anything to do with the organization of people in society. That is the definition. Whenever you have a handful of people trying to live harmoniously, you need some organization, some political arrangement that tells you what you can do and shouldn't do, tells you what enhances harmony and what brings about disruption.

MORROW: So there is a politics of family, politics of love relationships, politics of religion, politics of walking across the street.

ACHEBE: Exactly. What we're talking about is power, the way that power is used.

MORROW:.. In your novels the interest in politics in its narrower meaning, i.e. state politics, is crucial. Do you think that a novel that does not in an overt way address state politics, the politics of organizing a country or culture, is less beneficent than a political novel—entertaining, perhaps, well-written even, but ultimately of lesser value?

ACHEBE: No, I wouldn't try to exclude any work. My purpose is not to exclude. If a book qualifies, I wouldn't exclude it because it doesn't deal with politics on the state or world level. I would simply say that's one way of telling a very complicated story. The story of the world is complex and one should not attempt to put everything into one neat definition, or into a box. But also I want to insist that nobody can come to me and say, your work is too political. My instinct is to talk about politics in my work and that is your instinct too. That is the sense in which *Come Sunday*, too, is a very powerful story. An effective, powerful and moving depiction of the modern world with its politics in all its various dimensions. One should not attempt to avoid that because of this superstition that politics somehow is inimical to art. There are some who cannot manage politics in their fiction, so let them *not*. But they must not

insist that everybody else must avoid politics because of some superstition built up in recent times that defines art as only personal, introspective, away from the public arena. That's nonsense. Fiction in the West has suffered in recent times by that limitation. When I see a book like yours which is grappling with the big issues—violence, injustice, victimization—that also has the scope of the whole world, that goes from the center to the periphery and back, that's great. It's difficult to do, but difficulty is no reason not to do it.

MORROW: Given how thoroughly world politics in the last several years has charged and even changed the atmosphere of our personal lives, one wonders how it is possible that so many contemporary American novelists have, if not eschewed, at least marginalized, the political in their work.

ACHEBE: That's something I would like to understand myself. All I can say is that an apolitical stance was not there at the beginning of the novel. It is something that's happened during the last two hundred years. I don't think it has been a good thing for the world or for fiction. We can hope for the beginning of a reversal of that belief on the part of artists. I think they've been conned into apoliticism by those who have a vested interest in keeping us out. The emperor would prefer the poet to keep away from politics, the emperor's domain, so that he can manage things the way he likes. When the poet is pleased to do that, the emperor is happy and will pay him money to stay within his aesthetic domain. But you and I don't have to agree with the emperor. We have to say no. Our business involves the peace, happiness and harmony of not just people but the planet itself, the environment. How we live in the world is extremely important. How we see our relationship with the environment is important. If we see it in terms of conquest, if we go out and conquer Mount Everest, what are we doing? Even the language becomes significant. If somebody climbs a mountain, they *conquer it*.

MORROW: You were born at a particularly interesting moment in that the culture of your forefathers was being infiltrated by an alien culture. It was a pivotal historical moment... You then were able to experience the impact of... the imposition of English on Nigeria as a centralizing language... You're on record as having said that the choice of writing in English rather than in Igbo was strictly a practical one. I'm wondering, though, how it's possible for you not to feel any bitterness about this... Do you feel that you could have written an even better book than *Things Fall Apart* if you'd written it in your native language? Do you think the book would have had more impact on your countrymen had it been composed in Igbo?

ACHEBE: The answer is no. I have no doubt at all about that. My countrymen now are Nigerians. Nigerians as a whole are not Igbo-speaking. The Igbos are just one of the major ethnic groups. I'd written *Things Fall Apart* in the Igbo language, only the Igbo would have had access; not the Yorubas, not the Hausas, not the Ibibio, not to mention all the other Africans, not the Kikuyus, the Luos, etc., all over the continent who read the book. *Things Fall Apart* has made a wide impact over the last thirty years. This I know for a fact because I've traveled through the continent. So it would not have been the same if I had written it in Igbo. But this is not the only argument one could raise for writing a book in one language or another. There are some people who would say even if only a few people would have had access to it, it still would have been preferable to write it in Igbo because you would have given the power of your talent to an African language, to help to create a new literature. The answer to that would depend upon what kind of person you are and what you think literature is there to do. I have no regrets, especially since I also write in the Igbo language. I have written several things in Igbo. If I thought that a novel in the Igbo language would serve a certain purpose, I would do it.

MORROW: Have your novels been translated into Igbo?

ACHEBE: No, not yet. Which shows, perhaps, that we are not ready for the novel in the Igbo language. I've written some poetry in Igbo and intend to do other things. But no matter what, I can assure you that the literature we have created during the last forty years in Africa had enormous influence which would have been much less if we had all retreated into our own little languages.

I.A. Answer ALL the following questions in about 150 words each:(2x10=20)

- 1) Explain how Chinua Achebe defines the very nature of Fiction in current human experience. From your reading of Achebe in class, show how he demonstrates this definition in his fiction. Provide suitable evidence wherever necessary.
- 2) Explore how Achebe argues about his choice of English language over Igbo in his fiction about Africa. How is it different from Ngugi's view of language and its uses (as you have studied in class)? Which of the two views do you resonate with and why? Give suitable reasons for your answer.

II. Answer any ONE of the following in about 150 words each: (1x10=10)

- 3) From your reading of Mahasweta Devi's short story, show how the myth of Draupadi is used to comment on current social experience in the contemporary Indian context. What lessons do you draw from the re-telling of the story? Substantiate your answers with suitable evidence from your reading
- 4) Explain how "Dopdi" raises serious questions about gender and related social violence. Comment on the implications of such violence on current society.