



THE STRUCTURAL PERCEPTION OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

B. M. NGASSAKI

*Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines
Université Marien Ngouabi
B.P. 69, Brazzaville, Congo*

RESUME

Bien que le roman soit un genre littéraire d'origine occidentale, les écrivains africains le manipulent avec une légère différence ; cette manière de faire consacre une touche purement africaine à leurs œuvres. Things Fall Apart dont la structure tire sa substance de la technique organisationnelle du conte africain en est une bonne illustration. Ainsi, l'application de la combinaison de la théorie de Denise Paulme avec celle de Ducrot et de Todorov sur ce roman démontre la présence des caractéristiques morphologiques du conte africain dans la technique de l'élaboration de l'intrigue de Things Fall Apart. L'organisation de ce récit repose sur plus d'un personnage parce que le personnage principal ne peut pas à lui seul bâtir un récit. Dans la plupart des cas, le dénouement de l'intrigue peut être perçu aussi bien sous l'angle du protagoniste que sous celui de l'antagoniste.

Mots clés : Morphologie ; Structure ; Intrigue ; Application ; Type.

ABSTRACT

Although the novel is a Western literary genre, African writers handle it with a slight difference; this approach helps them produce works with African specificity. That is the case with the structure of Things Fall Apart, which largely derives from African tales. And the application of the combination of Paulme's theory and Ducrot and Todorov's one in this novel brings evidence about the presence of the morphological features of the African tale in the structure of Things Fall Apart. The organisation of this story is based on more than one character because the main protagonist alone cannot make the story. In many cases, the unravelling of the plot can be perceived through the protagonist's actions and behaviour as well as the antagonist's ones.

Key words: Morphology; Structure; Plot; Application; Type.

INTRODUCTION

The debate between Léopold Sédar Senghor and Sunday Anozie on the appropriacy of the sociological approach rather than a structural one or vice-versa on African literature is no longer up-to-date because gradual adjustment is made which leads Anthony Appiah quoted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1984: 16) to state:

It is not a structuralist poetics is not applicable in Africa because structuralism is European; so far as it is successful in general, it seems to me applicable to African literary material as to any other. But we should not expect the transfer of a method to a new set of texts to lead exactly the same results...

This implies that any literary approach can be applied to any literary text even if some specificity may be considered. Any piece of work of literature of any part of the world is made of language, theme, characters, setting, and plot. So, it does not make sense at all to claim that the structural approach cannot be applied on works of African literature. But no clear definition is given to the structural approach as stated by Roland Barthes (1970: 3):

Je suppose qu'un étudiant veuille entreprendre l'analyse structurale d'une oeuvre littéraire. Je suppose cet étudiant assez informé pour ne pas s'étonner des divergences d'approche que l'on réunit parfois indûment sous le nom de structuralisme, assez sage pour savoir qu'en analyse structurale il n'existe pas de méthode canonique comparable à celle de la sociologie ou de la philologie, telle qu'en l'appliquant automatiquement à un texte on en fasse surgir la structure ; assez courageux pour prévoir et supporter les erreurs, les pannes, les déceptions, les découragements ("à quoi bon" ?) que ne manquera pas de susciter le voyage analytique ; assez libre pour oser exploiter ce qu'il peut y avoir de sensibilité structurale, d'intuition des sens multiples ; assez dialectique enfin pour bien se

persuader qu'il ne s'agit pas d'obtenir une explication de texte, "un résultat positif" (un signifié dernier qui serait la vérité de l'œuvre ou sa détermination), mais à l'inverse qu'il s'agit d'entrer par l'analyse (ou ce qui ressemble à une analyse), dans le jeu du signifiant, dans l'écriture : en un mot d'accomplir, par son travail, le pluriel du texte.

This quotation explains that there are different ways to tackle a structural analysis. And the critic is free to use any method provided that this one is related to the organisation of the story. Accordingly, a structural analysis is supposed to 'decorticate' a text so as to present its various connotations. Nothing should be taken as granted beforehand. In this respect, Basile Marius Ngassaki (2004: 78-79) writes:

L'illusion empiriste, en revanche, manifeste une complicité entre le critique et l'écrivain parce que l'oeuvre littéraire constitue en elle-même un domaine de recherche.

Referring to this quotation, the critic needs to identify the nature of the text first in order to split it into parts in order to understand its organisation, and then to re-make it to render its structure more comprehensible. After doing all this, he can now refer to an appropriate method which is going to be applied on a text so as to present the evaluation criteria which will help to plunge into the intimacy of the story to reveal its hidden features. In search of the African structural characteristics in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, I resort to the combination of both theories which appear to be successful once applied to Amos Tutuola's tales. They provide enough room for the didactic analysis which any other morphological approach fails to convey. In order to achieve my study, this paper is divided into three parts: Genesis of the morphology of a tale, the combination of Paulme's theory with Ducrot and Todorov's one, and its application on *Things Fall Apart*.

I.- GENESIS OF THE MORPHOLOGY OF A TALE

The development of the applicability of Vladimir Propp's theory of the morphology of a tale backs up Anthony Appiah's statement. Referring to the works of Vladimir Propp and then Alan Dundes who found only similarities in the analysis of the morphology of a tale, Claude Bremond brought two important modifications which are based on grouping functions into triads which are also called elemental sequences. This has been a great achievement over Propp's original syntagmatic schema because he added that all plot sequences present a satisfactory state and through a procedure of degradation they resume their initial state of deficiency. Denise Paulme, on the one hand, went further in analysing African tales. She suggested seven forms of structures whose first three forms are considered as simple because there is only one protagonist. They are ascending, descending, and cyclical. The other four types are complex because their structures depend on more than one single protagonist. They are: mirror, sandglass, spiral, and complex. But all these analyses bear a feeling of incompleteness because didactic issue is not taken into account.

Exploring different paths from the American neo-proppian syntagmatic analysis through syntagmatic-paradigmatic-generative approach to the generative transformational analysis of a folktale, Jay Edwards could not find any appropriate solution to this problem. Actually, he confesses (1984: 101-102) that:

What I have tried to show is that an expansion of both of these stories is needed if we are successfully to account ... Although I have not completed this task here, I hope that I have helped to point the way.

In my article entitled "Contribution to Denise Paulme's theory on the morphology of the African tale" I give more didactic substance to the structural analysis and provide greater consideration to individual character's actions. This shows that the movement of a

story can be related to more than one character. Since the purpose of the present study is to find out the African structural characteristics of *Things Fall Apart*, it sounds interesting to see how far the morphological features of the African tale can be relevant to the structural organisation of Achebe's novel. First of all, a brief account of the combination of Paulme's and Ducrot and Todorov's theories will be presented in the following section.

II.- THE COMBINATION OF PAULME'S THEORY WITH DUCROT AND TODOROV'S ONE

Denise Paulme's classification of structures into seven categories does not give any clue about the didactic value of the story so that various themes with different connotations could be classified in the same group provided that their respective structures are identical. Such is the case with "the orphan child" and "the African theme of the impossible restitution". Regarding the shortcoming of her theory, Denise Paulme herself (1972:134) asserts:

Enfin – nous rejoignons ici la mise en garde de C. Lévi-Strauss – ce sens n'est jamais réductible à la seule morphologie qui n'en est en quelque sorte que la syntaxe. Cette première étape doit être complétée par l'étude des transformations de thèmes, des structures et des éléments des contes. L'analyse de leur combinatoire est précisément l'une des ressources essentielles pour une plus juste appréhension du sens véritable de chaque variante.

In this quotation, Denise Paulme confesses the weakness of the morphological approaches which do not reveal at all the didactic dimension of a story. However, the combination of Paulme's theory on the morphology of the African tale with Ducrot and Todorov's plot of destiny can be considered as a solution to this problem. It springs out the exact moral lesson of a story. Accordingly, the following associations can be made.

A descending morphology with a punishment plot refers to a story of one main character who intends to harm other people but fails. He is punished at the end of the story. On the other hand, a descending structure with a tragic plot deals with a hero who is responsible for the worsening of his own situation. Still, the reader feels admiration for his courage or his ideas. At last there is a descending type with a melodramatic plot because the protagonist undergoes a series of misadventures without being responsible at all of what is happening. And the reader feels pity for him. Furthermore, the progression of a story with an initial situation of lack to reach a state of full satisfaction through gradual improvement fits into an ascending type with a sentimental plot. Here, the hero overcomes a series of misfortunes before finding a solution to his problem. Moving from a state of deficiency to a better position also features the ascending structure with an apologetic plot. The hero's strength and self-confidence generate readers' admiration. An ascending morphology with a cynical plot, on the other hand, is the story of a wicked hero who succeeds in his wrongdoings.

All the other five types of morphology are respectively composed of more than one plot. The cyclical structure, for instance, presents an initial situation which is identical with the end situation through two plots. In this case, two combinations are possible with the plot of destiny. One is made of a cyclical structure with an ascending morphology first and then with a descending order. The first type has got an apologetic plot whereas the second one has got a punishment plot. The other is built on a cyclical structure with a descending morphology first and then an ascending type. Respectively they have a punishment plot and a sentimental one. The last case is also built on a cyclical structure with a descending order first and then an ascending morphology. The first type has got a melodramatic plot and then an apologetic one.

The mirror type is also composed of two episodes with opposite achievements. If one sequence is ascending, the other one is descending or vice versa. Both sequences

appear successively and the actions can be performed either by a single character or two of them. The following combinations with the plot of destiny are possible. In the first category, the first episode has a cynical plot whereas the second one has a sentimental plot. The second group is also made of two episodes having respectively an apologetic plot and a punishment plot. Regarding the sandglass type, actions are performed simultaneously by two distinct characters that change their respective position through the course of the events. This means that if the action of the first performer is ascending, the action of the second one is descending or vice versa. Two combinations are then possible with the plot of destiny. A sandglass type can be made of a cynical plot and a melodramatic one or an apologetic plot and a punishment one. The spiral type is composed of more than two episodes that are alternatively ascending and descending or vice versa. All the combinations are then possible with the plot of destiny. The complex type, however, is subject to any variation that is the reason why many combinations are possible with the plot of destiny.

The success of this enterprise was achieved on tales and this study purports to explore the applicability of this theory on novels so as to see how much the African novel borrows from oral genres.

III.- THE APPLICATION OF THE COMBINATION OF THESE BOTH THEORIES ON ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

Things Fall Apart is a novel which has been variously examined by many critics, Africans or non-Africans. Much has been said about characterization, language, setting, and theme but less has been written on the plot. Works like "The structure of order and disorder in *Things Fall Apart*" by Opata (1969) and "Symbolic structure in *Things Fall Apart*" by Weinstock and Ramadan (1969) are mostly concerned with the linguistic aspects. However, the analysis of plots is scarcely made in works like *Achebe's Things Fall Apart* by

Ode Ogede (2007: 17) where the following comments are expressed:

The infrastructural frame is evidently Western, modelled as Things Fall Apart's plot is on the Aristotelian convention of tragedy, but the dominant rhetorical ploys used by Achebe are derived from oral tradition, one of the favourite indigenous arts of his people. Remarkably, Things Fall Apart does not merely carry traces of the oral storytelling performance situation; it replicates, evokes and simulates oral events in a raw form – not only through proverb rhetoric, contrary to the impression given by early commentators on the novel, important as proverb admittedly is to the novel's structure.

This statement does not give enough clues to grasp the key elements of the structure of *Things Fall Apart*. The connection made between proverbs and the structure of this novel needs more evidence because they seem to stand as an interesting linguistic input rather than features of the plot of the novel. Actually, Amos Tutuola's *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* is a good illustration to show how a proverb is the skeleton of the whole story. 'Remember the day after tomorrow' is the piece of advice given by Ajaiyi's late father in which all the different events of the story are linked to make the structure move from a stable situation to a situation of total lack. In *Things Fall Apart*, the mixture of Aristotelian convention with some characteristics of oral storytelling performance could be an indication for further explorations. In fact, Ogede falls into the common trap of mixing up discourse analysis with structural study as warned by Roland Barthes. Since no clear definition is made about structural analysis, anything can be put into this category. Nevertheless, I am mostly concerned with the impact of the African specificity on the organization of this novel. Referring to that specificity, Lalage Bown (1975: 40) states:

Because of the oratory in African tradition when Africans started writing in English it is arguable that some of the most interesting things they put on paper were those designed to be presented verbally ...

Referring to the importance of oral characteristics in African literature, I would like to examine how much *Things Fall Apart* have taken from the structure of the African tales through the application of the combination of Paulme's theory and Ducrot and Todorov's one which establishes a close link between the morphology and the moral lesson. Since *Things Fall Apart* is divided into three parts and twenty five chapters, this study will be made on micro stories first which refer to individual chapters and then to macro stories which concern the three parts and the whole story as one entity.

Analysis of micro stories

It is interesting to find out the structure of each individual chapter because it is the element with which the whole story is made of. And at the same time, it will help to understand that each chapter bears its own message and can stand on its own.

In the first chapter, the story is about the fight between Okonkwo and Amalinze 'the Cat'. Okonkwo overcame and gained fame throughout nine villages and even beyond. Since his father, Unoka, was so poor that his wife and children had barely enough to eat, Okonkwo did all his best to break these chains of poverty. The narrator says:

When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things... And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. (pp. 20-21)

This shows that Okonkwo moves from a situation of total lack to a state of completeness. This implies that the structure of this micro story is ascending with an apologetic plot because Okonkwo's strong determination to eradicate poverty leads to

self-confidence which attracts the reader's admiration.

The second chapter describes the inner conflict experienced by Okonkwo through his obsessive fear of failure. Accordingly, he rules his household with a heavy hand generating a gloomy atmosphere making life unbearable for his wives and children. This micro story has a descending order with a tragic plot because there is no actual peace in Okonkwo's household although he does not experience lack of financial means anymore. Here, the plot of the story works at the psychological level which shows that the protagonist is fully responsible of the worsening of his situation. In the meantime, another key figure in this chapter is Ikemefuna who moves from the state of liberty to that of slavery. He is given to Umofia by his father to replace the killed girl in order to avoid war. This micro story has a descending structure with a melodramatic plot because Ikemefuna is weak and he is not responsible of what is happening to him. He is still a young teenager that is why he has no means to take care of himself. Both stories stand as two distinct ones. This means that there are two different plots in this chapter without any tight link binding them.

Chapter three presents some flashback features because it starts with the genesis of Okonkwo's struggle for better life up to the stage of yam borrowing from Nwakibia. Unfortunately, it pours down unexpectedly throughout the rainy season so that the harvest was bad. In failing to make profit from what he borrowed, Okonkwo resumes his initial status through a cyclical structure which stands as follows: the first part of the story is made of an ascending order with an apologetic plot because the protagonist moves from a situation of need to the completion of this lack in borrowing yams and the reader feels admiration for him for his courage to use all means to avoid poverty. The second part of the story has got a descending order with a melodramatic plot. He does not deserve this misfortune.

The descending movement goes on in chapter four because the story focuses on

Okonkwo's breaking the rule during the Peace Week in beating one of his wives. As a consequence, he has to be punished as follows "And that was also the year Okonkwo broke the peace, and was punished as was the custom, by Ezeani, the priest of the earth of goddess" (p.36). Although Okonkwo is inwardly repentant, some people feel resentment towards him because they think that "good fortune has gone to his head" (p.37). Accordingly, this chapter has a descending order with a punishment plot because from fame to punishment, the protagonist experiences a kind of disgrace.

In chapter five, this moral uneasiness is expressed through the neurotic breakdown of Okonkwo when beating his second wife at the eve of the New Yam Festival. Actually, he was looking for a pretext to discharge his bad stimulus on somebody else. This event has a descending structure with a punishment plot because Okonkwo is once more punished for his wrongdoings. Actually, the whole community fears to experience a bad harvest because no harm is supposed to occur during the New Yam Festival.

Chapter six is different from the previous ones because Okonkwo is a passive spectator. Such is the case with Ekwefi who is just talking with Chielo during the wrestling party. Those who are really involved in the course of events are Okafo and Ikezu. Both wrestlers are the key characters in this chapter, even if they appear only at the end. Since the fight is the main issue of this chapter, the structure of this micro story depends on the situations of Okafo and Ikezu which are completely opposite. Okafo moves from a stable state to an ascending one through an apologetic plot. Ikezu's defeat generates a descending structure from a stable one with a melodramatic plot. Accordingly, the story has a sandglass order where both characters have opposite final situations which change simultaneously. Their positions are inversely proportional.

In chapter seven, the elders of Umofia decide to kill Ikemefuna and Okonkwo does not stand against it. He even participates.

Nwoye and his mother are awfully sad about it but they cannot say a word. Referring to Ikemefuna's situation, which drastically improved once in Umofia, his death provides a story with a descending structure and a melodramatic plot because the protagonist does not deserve what is happening to him.

Chapter eight emphasises the aftermath of Ikemefuna's death. Actually, Okonkwo is psychologically disturbed because he is haunted by this murder. The chapter has a descending order with a punishment plot because the hero undergoes moral and mental destabilisation. Although he does not want to show that he is seriously affected by Ikemefuna's death, his behaviour is no longer the same: he looks strange.

Chapter nine is built up on Ezinma's personality. It starts with her ill state, and then moves back recounting the story of Ekwefi's dead children up to the birth of Ezinma and her present state of illness. From good health to illness, Ezinma's health situation drives the story to a descending type with a melodramatic plot because a sensitive reader should feel pity for her.

In chapter ten, a traditional trial is led by Ekwugwu, where Uzowulu is condemned for beating his wife. Reconciliation requires him to beg his in-laws in giving them gifts so as to take his wife back home. The movement of the story has a cyclical order. In the first part of the story, Uzowulu is punished for wrongdoing. This fact gives the event a descending structure with a punishment plot. The second part of the story has an ascending movement because his wife comes back to him. In general, the protagonist resumes his initial situation, which provides the story with a cyclical order.

Chapter eleven is also different from the others as for a story within a story. Ekwefi and Ezinma who are the main characters in this chapter are telling stories to each other. Regarding the moral impact of these stories, they should be taken into account. Ekwefi's story is about a tortoise and birds which were hungry. In their search for a solution, the birds

helped the tortoise to fly to the sky to attend a party so that it can also provide food for them. They lent it their feathers. Unfortunately, the tortoise was so cunning that it kept the best part of the food for itself and the poor birds were starving. In order to punish the tortoise for its bad action, the birds took back their feathers to prevent it from flying back. Consequently, it fell down on hard rock and broke its shell. Even cured, its shell won't be smooth any longer.

The movement of this story should refer only to the tortoise's position because the birds' situation has not changed at all. Its structure has a cyclical type because the tortoise experiences first a lack of food and then the completion of this lack. At the final position, it lost all its privileges and was hurt. The first part of the story has an ascending order with an apologetic plot because the tortoise was courageous enough to undertake this trip. The second part of the story has a descending order with a punishment plot.

In addition, there is the story told by Ezinma. Unfortunately, she cannot go further because Chielo started prophesising on behalf of Okonkwo and mentioned Ezinma's name and Ekwefi's heart pounded. Actually, the following part would be about her own story. Chielo picked up Ezinma for Agbala. Ekwefi tried to stop her but in vain. So, she followed them in hiding herself. Finally Okonkwo joined her at the threshold of the cave. Here the story has a descending structure with a melodramatic plot.

Chapter twelve is a relief for Okonkwo's family because Chielo brought back Ezinma who was sleeping. But she jumped on her feet when she realized that the other children were going to fetch water for Obierika's feasts. The bride ceremony went also well and the in-laws took the bride away with them.

This story is twofold. Both parts have an ascending type. For Ezinma, Ekwefi and Okonkwo, the story ends well because Ezinma is back home. Ezinma who had been taken away, in chapter eleven, was brought back to

her parents by Chielo. That is the reason why this part of the story has an ascending order with a sentimental plot. Regarding the bride ceremony, it has also got an ascending type with an apologetic plot because Obierika's daughter left her parents' home for her husband's. For a girl who is aiming at being a full woman, marriage is a great fulfilment.

Ezeulu's death in chapter thirteen does not bode well for Okonkwo as well as for the whole community of Umofia. When everybody is concerned with the funeral ceremony, Okonkwo shoots inadvertently one of Ezeulu's son who dies on the spot. In this respect, the narrator says "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess" (p.15). This story has a descending order because it starts with a tragic event and things are getting worse for most of the other characters. Okonkwo's story in this chapter is a turning point for the whole book because it is the beginning of his social decline. From fame, glory and honour, Okonkwo is experiencing disgrace. Accordingly, the movement of this story has a descending order with a tragic plot.

As it was forecast in the previous chapter, chapter fourteen shows the different steps of Okonkwo's decline. He left his father's village for his mother's where he is welcome by his late mother's youngest brother and the other kin people. The structure of this story is gradually ascending with a sentimental plot because Okonkwo could find peace and rest even if he lost most of his belongings and his dignity. The most important aspect here is to save life from being slaughtered out of revenge.

After two years of exile, Okonkwo is visited by Obierika in chapter fifteen. The latter tells the story of Abame village which was wiped out because its inhabitants had killed a white man. The colonial administration ordered a shooting which caused heavy casualties. Then, Obierika gave Okonkwo the money he got from the selling of Okonkwo's yams. Okonkwo is now happy.

The structure of this story is twofold. One part of the story is descending with a punishment plot because all the inhabitants of Abame were killed for revenge whereas the other part is ascending with a sentimental plot because Okonkwo is very happy for the money he gets and for Obierika's visit.

Chapter sixteen is also about Obierika's visit in Mbanta. The purpose of this visit is different. Nwoye joined the white man's missionary group which settled in Umofia and he claimed that Okonkwo was not his father any longer. Nwoye's mother tells the story of the arrival of the missionaries in Mbanta and the conversion of Nwoye into Christianity.

The movement of the story is a sandglass one because Okonkwo is shocked and experiences hard times with the loss of the traditional values whereas Nwoye is experiencing freedom with his new religion and he is no more under his father's authority. The part of the story concerning Okonkwo is descending with a tragic plot whereas Nwoye's story has an ascending structure with an apologetic plot.

The impact of the Christian religion is well depicted in chapter seventeen where many local people are joining it. The following quotation summarises well what is happening these days: "That week they won a handful more converts. And for the first time they had won a woman" (p.125). Accordingly, the story has an ascending order with an apologetic plot because the missionaries are doing all their best to convert more people.

The narration on the new religion goes on in chapter eighteen where it cares for the twins and requires the destruction of all the traditional gods on behalf of the Christian one. The slaves also joined the new religion. One "Osu" killed a royal python which is considered as the totem of the clan. As a punishment, Okoli who killed the sacred python died. Later on, the converted women were prevented from going down to the river

and some Christians were molested. The structure of this chapter is a sandglass one because the clan moves from a descending order to an ascending one with an apologetic plot whereas the new religion moves from an ascending type to a descending one with a punishment plot.

Chapter nineteen deals with the end of Okonkwo's exile. He organises a farewell party to thank his mother's kin people. The chapter has got an ascending type with a sentimental plot because Okonkwo is supposed to recover fame and glory. The success of his life is grounded in his father's land and community.

Chapter twenty deals with the sad story of Umofia where all the main ingredients of traditional values are falling apart. The following quotation illustrates well this point: *"Umofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile. The church had come and led many astray. Not only the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man had joined it."* (p.143). The movement of this story is a sandglass one because the implementation of Christian values and the traditional ones are inversely proportional. It is clear that tradition is drastically losing ground on behalf of Christianity. The part of the story concerning Missionaries' actions is ascending with an apologetic order whereas the story of the traditional community of Umofia has a descending structure with a tragic plot.

In chapter twenty-one, there is a gradual integration of Mr Brown and his religion into the people of Umofia. Now drastic changes have entered into Umofia on behalf of the new religion. All this makes Okonkwo sadder. Accordingly, the story has a sandglass structure because Okonkwo's moral state is gradually going down because of the loss of the traditional values. All this is happening through a descending structure with a melodramatic plot. The missionaries have a better position which gives to this part of the story, an ascending order with an apologetic plot.

Chapter twenty-two shows how things get worse between the two communities. The climax is reached when Enoch profanes one of the Egwugwu. Because of the lack of compromise, the Egwugwu followers destroys the church. Once more, it is a sandglass

structure where Mr Smith and his church are facing a descending order with a punishment plot while the local people are experiencing an ascending order with an apologetic order.

In chapter twenty-three, the representatives of the village of Umofia are jailed by the District Commissioner because they have destroyed the church. They have to pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries and must endure ill-treatment when in jail. And the whole population of Umofia is collecting cowries for that. The movement of this event takes a sandglass structure with an ascending order with an apologetic plot for the missionaries and a descending type with a punishment plot for the traditional community of Umofia.

The aftermath of the White man's action is being analysed in chapter twenty four. A meeting is convened to examine what happened to the leaders of Umofia. Okika who has also experienced jail speaks first and recommends people of Umofia to go to war against the White Man. In the meantime, the White Man sent messengers to stop the meeting but Okonkwo kills one of them, and commits suicide. This story has a sandglass structure because Missionaries have managed to destroy one of the symbols of rebellion through an ascending order with an apologetic plot whereas it is the end of Okonkwo's story with his death which gives this part of the story a descending structure with a tragic plot.

Chapter twenty-five is about the burial of Okonkwo and the District Commissioner confesses that he has learnt a lot from his stay in these alien lands. He is planning to write a book on this experience. The structure of this chapter is a sandglass one because it shows the rise of the Christian religion on the one hand, and on the other hand, the fall down of the

traditional values. In short, it can be said that the structure of this story is made up with a descending type with a tragic plot referring to Okonkwo and his country-fellows whereas an ascending order with an apologetic plot refers to the colonizers.

Analysis of macro stories

In the analysis of macro-stories, tiny details will not be considered because all the attention will be devoted to the main character of the book: that is Okonkwo. So, the movement of the story will be closely related to his life only. Since *Things Fall Apart* is divided into three parts, I will examine each individual part first before dealing with the structure of the book as a whole.

Part one is made of the first thirteen chapters which relating the story of Okonkwo who succeeds in breaking the chains of poverty to gain a high social status in his community. His victory against Amalinze symbolises the apex of his success. Unfortunately, the following eleven chapters relate the story of Okonkwo's psychological disturbances, which seriously affect his household. And then chapter thirteen describes how he kills inadvertently Ezeulu's son and his departure for exile. The course of the events takes a unidirectional descending movement with a tragic plot because the protagonist is fully responsible of the negative outcome of his own reactions.

Part two starts with chapter fourteen and ends with chapter nineteen. The story of this part relates Okonkwo's exile in his motherland. Here, Okonkwo experiences a kind of hibernation. Life is meaningless for him. Nevertheless, he is overwhelmed with affection from his late mother's kin people and he feels safe and secure in this place. Accordingly, the story has got an ascending order with a sentimental plot.

At last, part three starts with chapter twenty and ends with chapter twenty five. Okonkwo is full of expectations when he is joining his father's kin people but he will soon

be disappointed and shocked by the drastic changes undergone by Umofia. He has to kill himself to avoid being tortured and killed by the white administration. Obviously, this story has a descending order with a tragic plot.

When all these three parts are put together, the whole story of Okonkwo can be examined and he is the only character referred. Other characters are considered as minor even if some of them are round. The novel starts with the victory of Okonkwo on Alinze and a detailed account is provided on how he climbs successfully the social ladder. It can be said that Okonkwo's story has reached its climax before starting because the book relates only the aftermath of his winning social recognition. Considering the fact that a plot is composed of three stages: rising action, climax and falling action, this means that Okonkwo's story has a downfall movement because all the actions are placed after the climax and in the stage of the "falling action". In short, it can be said that *Things Fall Apart* has a descending structure with a tragic plot. Some important events can be considered as key facts which drive the movement of the story down. The first strength which draws the story down is the paranoiac attitude of Okonkwo who experiences a permanent fear to fail. This leads to a kind of collective nervous breakdown within his family. Since affection is a rare commodity in this environment, life becomes unbearable. Concerning Okonkwo, a few instances can be given to show the descending movement of this story. First, he is punished because he beats one of his wives. Unfortunately, he is so stubborn that this punishment does not teach him anything because he does not hesitate to shoot at another wife. Once more, he is punished. The downfall movement takes a point of non return with the death of Ezeulu's son. He is shot dead by Okonkwo. As a punishment Okonkwo is expelled from Umofia and he goes to exile in his mother's community for seven years. This series of misfortunes does not stop there because he faces another blow with his son's conversion to Christianity. Once back in Umofia, he experiences jail for destroying a church. And his misadventure reaches its utmost with the killing of a white man which drives him to commit suicide.

Since Okonkwo is fully responsible of his own fatal error, the story has a tragic plot and definitely makes him a tragic hero.

CONCLUSION

The application of Paulme's theory and Ducrot and Todorov's one in *Things Fall Apart* eases some worries about the reliability of the structural approach. For instance, Jay Edwards (1984:86) wonders:

While the analyses of Bremond and Paulme represent advances over simple syntagmatic analyses of the African folktales, such as those of Dundes and Haring, they still leave open questions. Neither description deals with the important problem of the nature of the ... what principle are we to adopt to determine which of the characters is the most basic?

His concern lies on the fact that a story may have more than one key character and it is always difficult to select one and neglect the others. He has the feeling that something was wrong when trying to define any particular plot. But throughout this study, I demonstrate that all important characters, protagonists' actions as well as antagonists' ones are taken into account. The solution is found in the sandglass structure, the cyclical one, the mirror one and the spiral one. Furthermore, the plot of destiny has helped a lot to consider the didactic dimension of the story.

Applying the morphology of the African tale elaborated by Denise Paulme (1972) in her article entitled "Morphologie du conte africain" in the structure of *Things Fall Apart* shows that Achebe borrows from the African tale. Since moral lesson is always embedded in African literary work, the use of Ducrot and Todorov's theory helps a lot to bring out the didactic dimension of this novel. Further studies can be carried out on other

African novels to see how well the full implementation of the combination of both theories can help to bring out their structural specificity.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

1. Achebe, Chinua, 1988. *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, Arrow of God*. London: Picador.
2. Appiah, Anthony, 1984. "Structures on structures: The prospects for a structuralist poetics of African fiction" in *Black Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. London: Routledge.
3. Barthes, Roland, 1970. "Par où commencer" in *Poétique* 1. Paris : Editions du Seuil.
4. Bown, Lalage, 1975. "The development of African Prose-Writing in English: A Perspective" in *Perspectives on African Literature* edited By C. Heywood. London: Heinemann.
5. Ducrot, Oswald et Todorov, Tzvetan, 1972. *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Sciences du Langage*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
6. Edwards, Jay, 1984. "Structural analysis of the Afro-American trickster tale" in *Black Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. London: Routledge.
7. Ngassaki, Basile Marius, 2004. "Analyse structurale de l'oeuvre d'Amos Tutuola" in *Annales de l'Université Marien Ngouabi*, Vol.5, n°1.
8. Ngassaki, Basile Marius, 2006. "Contribution to Denise Paulme's theory on the morphology of the African tale and its application on Tutuola's *The Witch-Doctor and Other Stories*" in *Annales de l'Université Marien Ngouabi*, Vol.7, n°1.
9. Ogede, Ode, 2007. *Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. London: Continuum.
10. Opata, D. U. , 1969. "The structure of order and disorder in *Things Fall Apart*" in *Neohelicon* 18 (1), pp. 73-87.
11. Paulme, Denise, 1972. "Morphologie du conte africain" in *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. XII-I : 45
12. Weinstock, D. and Ramadan, C., 1969. "Symbolic structure in *Things Fall Apart*" in *Critique*, vol 11, n°1, pp.33-41