**Marriage is a Private Affair by Chinua Achebe**

In Marriage is a Private Affair by Chinua Achebe we have the theme of modernity, tradition, control, conflict, stubbornness, gender roles, independence, change and remorse. Taken from his Girls at War and Other Stories collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story the reader realises that Achebe may be exploring the theme of modernity and tradition. Though both Nnaemeka and Nene live in Lagos, a modern city in Nigeria, Nnaemeka is very much aware of the importance of tradition particularly when it comes to his father Okeke. Who has arranged for Nnaemeka to marry a girl from his village despite the fact that Nnaemeka is due to marry Nene. If anything there is a sense of conflict between both father and son. With Nnaemeka following a more modern path to marriage and rather than having a wife chosen for him by his father prefers instead to choose who he is to marry. Something that is lost on Okeke who prefers to follow the traditional values that are held by those in the village. There is also a sense that Nnaemeka wishes to control his own life (and destiny) rather than follow the traditions that his father abides to. Something that Okeke does not understand or seems to refuse to understand such is the depth of his adherence to tradition.

Throughout the story Okeke also shows signs of being stubborn. Refusing to even acknowledge Nene either before or after she marries Nnaemeka. So deep is his dislike for Nene that he returns the wedding photo sent to him by Nnaemeka with Nene’s image removed from the photograph. Symbolically this may be important as it suggests that Okeke does not give any recognition to Nene. As far as he is concerned she does not exist and is not Nnaemeka’s wife. Which would further highlight to the reader just how important tradition is to Okeke. Rather than seeing his son happy he remains rooted to tradition. It may also be significant that some of the other men in the village suggest that Nnaemeka should see one of the native doctors as this would also further play on the theme of tradition. The fact that the women of the village (who live in Lagos) are overly polite to Nene may also be important as it suggests they are deliberately alienating Nene and if anything it would suggest that the women believe that Nene is not one of them.

What is also interesting about the story is the role that women play in the village. Ugoye is chosen by Okeke to marry Nnaemeka. She is given no option and is following the dictate of her father and Okeke. Also there is no mention of Okeke having a wife or Nnaemeka having a mother. This may be deliberate as Achebe could be suggesting that rather than Okeke being a widower his wife has no input (like Ugoye). In essence the women of the village are silent. The only woman in the story who has an independent voice is Nene and she does not live in the village. In essence Achebe could be suggesting that just as Okeke wants to control who Nnaemeka marries likewise the women who live in the village are also being controlled by the men in the village. No equality may exist between male and female within the village. The reality being that life in the village may revolve around traditional gender roles with the male being dominant. Whereas in Lagos Nene as mentioned has her own voice and is not hindered by Nnaemeka. She is allowed to express herself. Something that becomes clearer to the reader through Nene’s letter writing to Okeke.

The end of the story is also interesting as Achebe appears to be exploring the theme of change and remorse. When Okeke discovers that he has two grandchildren his view of Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage changes dramatically. No longer is he against the marriage and it is noticeable that Okeke begins to fear that his isolation of Nene has resulted in him also shutting out his grandchildren from his life. It may also be symbolically significant that it is raining when Okeke beings to change his opinion on Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage. Quite often in literature a writer will use the rain as symbolism for change or renewal and this seems to be very much the case in the story. The fact that Achebe mentions in the final line of the story that Okeke feels remorse may also be important as it suggests that not only has Okeke’s opinion of Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage changed but Okeke may also be conscious that he has been wrong. That his own stubbornness and traditional view on marriage has resulted in him alienating his son, Nene and his two grandchildren. At the end of the story there is a sense that not only has Okeke changed his views on Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage but he may also have changed as a person.