# Rationale

A progressive, liberal high school literature teacher called Peter Mark Jr. writes a blog targeted at his students and other interested readers alike that, as a supplement to his classes, provides some further information, a place for discussion, aspects of a story to think about, etc.

The work is separated into two portions: The first describes the introduction of his analysis of The Headstrong Historian by Adichie (cut off by the “Show More” button); and the second, this post’s comment section in the blog.

As the teacher wants to engage his target audience, he attempts to mix the informality of his teaching style with the formality that would be expected from analyses. Furthermore, his texts often include some kind of call-to-action, attempting to push the students to either think of a specific aspect of the story – demonstrated through his understanding that Michael will be disliked, but calling the students to think of why that is; the author; or the context – seen here through suggesting Adichie’s context with other Igbo writers, specifically Achebe.

The comment section is populated by a mix of students, so the level of their English and the amount of effort they put into writing an online comment varies greatly – from simple grammar mistakes to the average student with good language skills.

# Work

# The Bookletter – The Headstrong Historian

Posted on 15 September 2017

In continuing with our series on Chimamanda Adichie, I’ll be discussing The Headstrong Historian. It tells the life story of Nwamgba, a Nigerian woman who marries a man whose family might be cursed by miscarriages. After many miscarriages, she does have a boy, and in order to protect him, moves him away to a Catholic missionary school. He becomes too good a catholic and turns away from his cultural roots, and eventually has his own children – the most important of which is Grace, or Afamefuna as we come to know her, who not only turns back to her roots, but attempts to turn the spotlights onto it. This short story deals with gender, religion, history, change and loss, grief, personal empowerment, cultural roots and internationalism.

In many ways it is very hard to discuss modern Nigerian, and specially Igbo, literature without the mention of Chinua Achebe. Often other Igbo writers are not only compared to his work, but that their work “deepens his legacy” and discussion on African identity and history. A link will be made available at the end so you can read more about it, and perhaps share what you think. It will be a little TOK, but think of it in terms of attempting to isolate a writer’s work from its context and whether that is possible at all.

The aspect of change is explored through multiple facets in the story: On the one side, we have Anikwenwa, who becomes Michael; and on the other, Grace, who becomes Afamefuna. Anikwenwa’s transition is largely painless to himself. Through his zealous indoctrinating education, he denies his culture, and eventually pleads with his mum on her deathbed to be baptised, as “he could not participate in a heathen ceremony” (referring to the burial of his mother). Most of you might find yourselves really disliking this character, and that’s almost expected – but don’t just blindly dislike him, instead try to find exactly what makes you dislike the character and what aspects of his behaviour might be justified – if any. On the other hand, we have Grace, or rather Afamefuna. She is the character I personally enjoy the most in this story, as she neither has “[Michael’s] incurious rigidity”, nor Mgbeke’s “limp ridigity”. Her whole story is presented as the future that is yet to come, and in this incredibly compressed format, yet Adichie is able to convey her “fighting spirit”, the struggle she has with her…

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Comments (3)

**BobMcbobby1996** – commented 20:16 on 18 September 2017

great post! I tried to write down some things you mentioned in class and now again here, and sort of list the reasons why I hate michale. what do you think? he likes his religion more than he likes his family. shows that he isn’t his own man and just follows what others tell him to do. he also sees himself as better than everyone else because of it. we usually like characters that are relatable, not this holier-than-thou attitude that he has.

**Johnny Orbison** – commented 19:30 on 16 September 2017

The thing that most stuck out to me was the whole overlap between her and Achebe. The Newrepublic link you posted mentions them sharing this educational background and environment, as well as his work showing her that her stories could also be books. I think it might be possible to separate Adichie from her context, but why should we? Specially looking at Headstrong Historian and your last time’s blog about Jumping Monkey Hill we have this glimpse into “traditional” culture, which is exactly what Achebe dealt with. In a way it’s possible to see her, like you said, as a continuation of his legacy, but any two people who write about a similar subject could be seen as continuing each other’s legacies. Do we even talk about legacy with western writers, or is it because we are dealing with an “exotic”, new topic?

**Peter Panushikov** – commented 16:43 on 16 September 2017

Something I found super interesting in this story was how Grace’s teachers see her grandmother’s poetry as primitive “call-and-response”, but Grace’s story is, like you said, told in a really compressed way. Not only that, but it has a bit of a call-and-response vibe to it with the whole “It was Grace who…” storytelling style. This to me is a bit ironic. Do you think that’s what she meant?

**Peter Mark Jr’s** (response to Peter Panushikov) #139583

Hey, Peter. That’s a very good observation! I think that everything Adichie includes in her stories is intentional, and describing Afamefuna’s future life in a call-and-response fashion is definitely an allusion to Nwamgba’s poetry.