Appropriations and manifestations challenge accepted norms to transform cultural values and who we really are.

Society's influence on cultural identity

Contextual practices embedded within individual identities strip subscribers of their autonomous capability to reflect on and critique the deficiencies of society. Such deficiencies disprove the further discernment, discovery, and celebration of the mutable nature of humanity to adapt to the malleable social façade that transcends time and space. An appreciation of the flexibility of cultural identities allows individuals to find discontentment in the substance of the socio-cultural condition, thus heightening the criticality of their examinations to enhance society. These ideas are explored in Chinua Achebe’s post-colonial novel Things Fall Apart that positions audiences at the crossroads of English and Igbo cultures to heighten individual's cognitive criticisms to celebrate and denounce practices of varying societies. These practices are further scrutinised in Derek Walcott’s epic poem A Latin Primer which encourages Creole descendants to commemorate their colonial history thus provoking individuals to embrace the hybridity of social and individual identities. Tara June Winch critically examines this concerning Indigenous Australian cultures in her novel The Yield as a vehicle to preserving a fragile culture that has been victim to cultural genocide imposed relentlessly by institutions. Ultimately, probing through the ambivalences of the social condition and understanding its impact on individual and cultural identities allow individuals to decimate the disconnections in local and global contexts that have been fostered through the ignorance of universal predicaments.

The unconstitutional influence of the social landscape on the human condition fosters a societal doctrine of ignorance towards universal predicaments. Achebe addresses these predicaments through the cultural lens of Umuofia, a patriarchal society that ironically identifies faults within other cultures without autonomously reflecting on their own, “it is a bad custom which these people observe because they lack understanding,” emulating the hypocrisy of contextual societies that uphold an image of superiority against other individuals, thus Achebe masterfully invites audiences to critically examine the deficiencies of their society and its embedded practices. These practices are observed through Achebe’s exploration of colonialism through mirroring its impact on Igbo culture against “locusts” whose arrival in Umuofia was illustrious, effectively celebrating the benefits of education that arrived with Britain colonialism, however, the anthropomorphic language suggests that colonials practised a devouring nature of which tradition and culture were victims; thus Achebe encourages audiences to broaden their understanding of historical contexts and challenges individuals to denounce the impacts of social interferences. The root of this shift in societal practices is demonstrated in the lack of knowledge Umuofia leaders have in foreign cultures, “It is like the story of white men (...) And these white men, they say, have no toes,” Achebe’s humour sustains audience’s interest of the boundaries that circumference individuals who yield to ignorance and authority, therefore Achebe successfully implore individuals to refute unjustified social standards. Ultimately, Achebe educates audiences on the influences of colonialism on culture to critique social doctrines that tolerate the visceral nature of society that limit individual’s autonomous actions.

The duality of human nature continues to be marred by latent standards engineered by society. Walcott criticises this through examining the Caribbean natural and cosmological worlds that have been marginalised within the Caribbean education system, “arranging the thrown sticks/ of stars to sine and cosine,” metaphorically reflecting the diversity of literary texts that have become constrained, hence Walcott effectively exposes audiences to society’s corruption of individuals’ through ostracising the variety of literature to minimise individuals’ ability to critically examine the machinations of human nature. This nature and its vulnerability to institutions is examined through the persona’s St. Lucian pupils whose “lithe black bodies/ beached, would die in dialect,” replicating literary texts that become desiccated under the colonial discipline as a vehicle to strip individuals of
consciousness, hence Walcott urges audiences to discern society's ploy to mould and homogenise individuals. This scheme is studied as Walcott acknowledges the substance of nature which cannot be subdued by social manipulation, "I had nothing against which/ to notch the growth of my work/ but the horizon, no language/ but the shallows in my long walk/ home," addressing the stability of nature in a context where Caribbean identity is defining and establishing itself, thus audiences are drawn to appreciate social independence as a catalyst to establishing an autonomous identity. Ultimately, Walcott reveals the inner machinations of society that attempt to homogenise culture through stripping individuals of the diversity of texts that nurture autonomy and institutional emancipation.

A thorough observation of social predicaments broadens individuals’ cognizance of societal ills, therefore catalysing a universal advancement towards emancipation. Winch extrapolates on this by bluntly exposing the animalistic experience Indigenous Australians were subjected to throughout history as a result of colonialism, "several unfortunate Natives chained like so many dogs to each other around the neck," provoking audiences through anthropomorphic language to hold political institutions accountable for its misdemeanours in depriving Indigenous peoples of their humanity, effectively modelling the necessity of critically examining the social landscape and its corrupt use of authority. The influences of these authorities are amplified as Winch emulates the contextual endangerment of Indigenous cultures through the loss of Wiradjuri language, "English changed their tongues, the formation of their minds," probing through the shrewd impact of assimilation on cultural identity, further amplifying the relations between language and psychology to assess the dangers of a homogenised society as it shreds an individual’s autonomy. Winch offers a solution to this jeopardy through the epistolary of Poppy’s dictionary which allows him to “control my (Poppy’s) own head. It seemed the most sensible thing to do was to learn to read well. So in a country where we weren’t really allowed to be, I decided to be. To get water from the stones,” inciting deep insight into audiences of the pertinence of literary texts to revive the autonomous capabilities of individuals and therefore, to instigate a shift in the dynamic relationship between society and individuals. Ultimately, Winch delves into the contextual history of Australia to initiate social rejuvenation through challenging conventions established by institutions to attain higher human ideals that emancipate individuals.

Establishment of the post-colonialism genre

Achebe is one of the first authors of the post-colonial genre that sheds light on the perspective of native peoples in relation to colonialism. Addressing the independence of Nigeria from Britain during the mid-20th Century, Achebe broadens the variety of literature to allow audiences to make informed judgements on colonial novels as well as universal predicaments. The novel delves into the cultural traditions of the people of Umuofia, a fictional village that borrows its meritocratic practices from Igbo culture within Nigeria. Audiences journey alongside Okonkwo whose rise from poverty not only embraces the communal aesthetics of his culture but also exposes the society’s revolution around power, “Umuofia was (…) powerful in war and in magic”. Critically examining Umuofia traditions before colonization subverts the colonial texts that praise British society and adds depth to the purpose of the text as a heightened understanding of the impacts of colonialism, whether positive or negative, affirms that institutions are universal and have traits that restrict individuals. The tension between Eurocentric and Umuofian values lead to the conversion of a multitude of peoples, whose status within Umuofia was not favoured, to Christianity whilst the remaining struggled to sustain the religion and practices of Umuofia. The plot reflects Nigerian history and identifies the root of the deterioration of Igbo culture, arrogance. The patriarchal principles upheld by each culture inflated their superiority towards the other which permitted hostile attitudes and its reliance on war. Okonkwo’s suicide, in the end, signifies Igbo’s surrender to colonial society because of either party’s
reluctance to enlighten themselves. Ultimately, Achebe subverts social values through the post-colonial genre as a vehicle to encourage individuals to practice autonomy.

Comparison of Things Fall Apart and A Latin Primer

Walcott’s 1987 post-colonial poem A Latin Primer liberates Caribbean consciousness through addressing the cultural identity predicament Caribbean’s fall into. Parallel to Achebe’s novel, Walcott acknowledges the insurmountable colonial texts that bury the truths of Caribbean cultures. These authors advocate for literature that embraces and explores the cultural dualities that currently divide Europeans from the African majority through critically examining both cultures. However, unlike Achebe’s text of recrimination and despair, Walcott addresses modern Caribbean audiences and offers liberation from their contemporary struggle of finding a firm identity amongst the diverse races introduced by colonialism, “I spun the globe’s meridian/showed its sealed hemispheres/but where were those brows heading/when neither world was theirs?”. Walcott offers liberation from this predicament through the incorporation of a frigate bird, which the narrator considers a “phoenix,” an allusion to the tale of a bird that renews itself out of ashes, to establish the pertinence of transcending the remnants of colonial despair. The frigate extends its course to the “roofless pillars once sacred to Hercules,” this location is significant as it is flanked between Gibraltar, in Europe, and Mt. Acha, in Africa. Thus, Walcott gloriously reconnects and sacralises the different European and African cultural traditions that comprise the Caribbean, effectively normalising the unifying of different cultures to establish an individual’s own. Ultimately, Walcott delves into the cultural predicament of the Caribbean to encourage individuals to embrace the fluidity of their identity, thus subverting social norms which limit individuals to the identities prescribed by society.

Comparison of A Latin Primer and The Yield

The Yield is a contemporary post-colonial novel that appropriately reflects the racial tensions of its context in Australia. A prominent theme of the post-colonial genre that Winch adopts from artists such as Achebe and Walcott is the loss of culture to European civilisation. Winch examines this effect as she interlaces three stories across several periods that all take place on one land, “Prosperous”. The earliest narrative is provided through letters written by Reverend Ferdinand Greenleaf in 1915. Greenleaf, like Achebe’s own “Mr Smith,” is a representation of what could have been a peaceful settlement if their compromising practices, which did not assume the native people as barbaric, were embraced. The second focalising character is Poppy Albert Gondiwindi, whose stories are immersed in magical realism as the character relies on the spirits of his ancestors to inform him of his identity and the content of his dictionary of Wiradjuri words that sustain the culture’s language and traditions, “Wanga-dyung (…) “It means lost, but not lost always”. The contemporary point-of-view is the protagonist, August Gondiwindi, Poppy’s granddaughter. August’s experiences analyse the generational effect that government policies such as assimilation has on Indigenous scion as August struggles to immerse herself into the culture as physical sources of it have been taken for aesthetic purposes by non-Indigenous peoples, “This is where all your culture is! Under glass!”. This is parallel to the identity crisis explored by Walcott; Winch further amalgamates the text by acknowledging the pivotal role of nature in enhancing the cultural identity of individuals through the consistent setting of Prosperous which is rich in cultural history. Ultimately, Winch probes through the effects of colonialism to heighten individual’s cognizance of universal predicaments that arise from the misconducts of political institutions.

Conclusion

Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott and Tara June Winch simultaneously reveal the malleability of cultural identities through the post-colonial genre which offers a literary voice for colonised nations
to narrate their perspective of colonialism. Through their texts, Things Fall Apart, A Latin Primer and The Yield, these authors identify the predicaments that have been caused by colonisation, mainly the cultural identity crisis which individuals struggle to adhere to due to drastic contextual changes. A thorough study of the contexts of these authors reveal the tropes of suffrage that colonised countries experience, so through holding institutions accountable, these individuals can be released from the restrained values thrust upon them and can foster higher human ideals that embrace all individuals. The content of these literary texts also provokes deep insight into the social values and restrictions embedded within individuals that transcend time through the ignorance of contextual history. Ultimately, as manifestations of the post-colonial genre, Achebe, Walcott, and Winch delve into the incestuous history of their contexts to educate audiences of the threats posed by society to the identity of individuals as a vehicle to transforming cultural values that dictate identity.

(1985 words)