

Portraying the Connection between Cultural Decline and the Protagonist's Downfall in Chinua Achebe's Novel "Things Fall Apart."

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Abstract:

This research centers on the novel "Things Fall Apart," authored by the renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, with the aim of dissecting the depiction of the interplay between cultural deterioration and the protagonist's downfall. The novel presents the Igbo society with precision and empathy, delving into the impact of European colonialism from an African standpoint. The objective of this study revolves around discerning the author's approach in connecting the central themes and characters within the text. It seeks to unveil the manner in which the hero's decline correlates with the decline of the cultural fabric within the narrative. Moreover, this study exposes a correlation that establishes a strong connection between the societal structure of a particular group and the concealed significance of a cultural unveiling.

Key words: *Culture, Themes and Characters Colonialism, Destruction*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works invariably align with the human experience, serving as touchstones for reference, while also encouraging individuals to surpass their anticipated human qualities. Among Nigerian and global authors alike, certain writers captivate readers by their adept handling of subject matter. In line with this notion, Chinua Achebe addresses the concept of people's reverence for their tribes and their willingness to make sacrifices for the clan's survival.

This narrative presents an image of an exemplary leader who goes beyond their limitations to safeguard the authenticity of the clan and its traditions. The entire novel meticulously delineates the Igbo society, revealing both its unique traits and compassionate nature. It further delves into the repercussions of European colonialism from the perspective of Africa. Achebe's intent is to share his personal story about Africa, showcasing the intricacies and sophistication of African society before the intrusion of European influences. His aim is to illuminate the profound scars of colonization and its impact on social, cultural, and political dimensions of the nation. To achieve this, he employs a narrative featuring a hero who ultimately meets a tragic fate.

This protagonist, named "Okonkwo," is renowned across nine villages and beyond (The novel "Things Fall Apart," Chapter One, Page 03). In the latter part of the tale, he takes his own life as he cannot bear the demise of his culture and traditions. The narrative vividly illustrates the intricate connection between the protagonist's demise and the fate of the culture he holds dear.

DISCUSSION

Relationship between Hero and the Culture

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Okonkwo stands as the central figure within the narrative, perpetually entwined with the culture, traditions, and society. The novel's inception portrays the protagonist's profound reverence for the culture, traditions, and societal norms. In Chapter Four, the narrative elaborates on the clan's peace week, highlighting Okonkwo's deep respect for this occasion. When he inadvertently disrupts the peace week, he accepts his responsibility and pays a substantial sum of money and goods to the priest of the earth goddess. His silent compliance underscores his understanding that adherence to cultural norms is imperative. While Okonkwo wields significant influence as a prominent figure, he is driven to safeguard the clan's culture and traditions, a sentiment shared by only a handful of individuals.

As depicted by the author, "You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one-she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. Okonkwo did as the priest said. He also took with him a pot of palm wine" (The novel "Things Fall Apart," Chapter Four, Page 28).

Beyond this instance, numerous other situations arise where Okonkwo dedicates himself entirely to upholding the culture, with little regard for his own happiness. A poignant example emerges with Ikemefuna, who resides in Okonkwo's hut for three years. Offered as a gift from a neighboring clan alongside a young virgin to avert conflict with Umuofia, Ikemefuna becomes a significant presence in Okonkwo's life. Though Okonkwo does not openly display affection or empathy for Ikemefuna, his fondness for the boy grows, particularly when Ikemefuna addresses him as "my father." Another reason for Okonkwo's attachment to Ikemefuna stems from

the influence the latter's presence has on his son Nwoye, who becomes more resolute under Ikemefuna's companionship. Tragically, Okonkwo ends up taking Ikemefuna's life, driven by his reluctance to appear weak in front of his clansmen.

The novel "Things Fall Apart," authored by the renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, meticulously examines the intricate relationship between cultural devastation and the downfall of the hero. This literary work delves into the specific and sympathetic portrayal of Igbo society while presenting the effects of European colonialism from an African perspective. The primary objective of this study is to dissect how the author establishes connections between the central themes and characters of the text. In doing so, the study endeavors to reveal the interplay between the hero's demise and the cultural decline within the narrative. This connection serves to underscore a profound bond between societal structure and the underlying cultural essence, offering a subtle commentary on the inherent values of a culture that is both exposed and concealed.

As the story unfolds, the protagonist Okonkwo emerges as a central figure deeply intertwined with his culture, traditions, and the fabric of society. A pivotal scene in Chapter Seven sees the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves decreeing Ikemefuna's death, a grim pronouncement by the authoritative Oracle that Umuofia has decided to carry out. While some individuals like Obierika opt out of the journey to the jungle for Ikemefuna's execution, Okonkwo willingly participates, suppressing his emotions and personal feelings in favor of the clan's collective values.

The narrative takes a somber turn as Okonkwo actively partakes in Ikemefuna's death, demonstrating his unwavering commitment to cultural norms and traditions, even at the cost of his own emotional turmoil. The poignant scene in which Ikemefuna, upon seeing Okonkwo's involvement, runs towards him, crying out "my father, they have killed me!" culminates in Okonkwo drawing his machete and ending Ikemefuna's life, driven by a desire to uphold the sanctity of the culture and appease the demands of the Oracle.

The aftermath of these events reveals Okonkwo's deep emotional struggle. He abstains from food for two days and immerses himself in palm wine, a testament to the weight of his internal turmoil over the loss of Ikemefuna. Yet, Okonkwo's commitment to preserving cultural norms remains unwavering, even in the face of personal suffering.

Another instance demonstrating Okonkwo's unyielding attachment to his clan and culture unfolds during the cremation of Ogbuefi Ezeudu. A tragic accident transpires as Okonkwo's gun accidentally discharges, leading to the death of Ezeudu's son. This unfortunate incident places Okonkwo in a precarious situation, as tribal customs demand his exile from the clan for seven years as a result of unintentionally killing a fellow clansman. Although Okonkwo's intentions to abide by cultural norms reflect his devotion to the clan's traditions, his decision contrasts sharply with that of Obierika, who questions the fairness of punishing someone for an inadvertent offense.

Despite his substantial material wealth and esteemed status in the clan, Okonkwo makes the profound sacrifice of leaving everything behind to avoid violating cultural norms. He flees to his mother's village, Mbanta, where

he adopts a new life as a cultivator, demonstrating his willingness to forsake personal possessions for the sake of upholding cultural values. This commitment continues to be evident as he plans to return to Umuofia after the prescribed seven years of exile, emphasizing his profound bond with his clan and its cultural heritage.

Throughout the narrative, Okonkwo's dedication to his clan and culture remains steadfast. His interactions with missionaries and the changes they introduce gradually reveal the extent of his distress and resistance. When the white men arrive and begin converting members of the community to Christianity, Okonkwo's son Nwoye is among those who embrace the new faith, prompting Okonkwo's disappointment and unease. Despite this, Okonkwo remains a firm advocate for traditional values and is reluctant to discuss his son's conversion with his friend Obierika, showcasing his unwavering commitment to the preservation of cultural identity.

As the novel nears its climax, Okonkwo's frustration with the encroaching changes reaches a tipping point. He impulsively kills a court messenger during a confrontation, expressing his desperation to resist the erosion of cultural norms. However, his action does not lead to a larger revolt, revealing the community's reluctance to engage in direct conflict with the colonial forces.

Tragically, Okonkwo's inability to sway the collective sentiment of his clan and protect their cultural heritage becomes evident. The novel concludes with Okonkwo taking his own life, symbolic of his resignation to the inevitability of cultural decline and the apparent futility of his efforts. This tragic ending reinforces the thematic connection between the hero's fall and the cultural disintegration.

In summary, Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" presents Okonkwo as a resolute figure who embodies his clan's cultural values and traditions. His unwavering commitment to preserving these ideals underscores the intimate bond between culture and society. Despite his sacrifices and efforts, Okonkwo's tragic end serves as a sobering reflection of the ultimate demise of his culture and the inevitable changes brought about by external forces. The novel offers a poignant commentary on the fragile relationship between cultural preservation and societal transformation.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, the author skillfully constructs vivid depictions of the hero's character and his unwavering sacrifices aimed at safeguarding the traditions and culture of his own community. The author's presented evidence robustly reinforces the argument highlighted earlier. In the realm of English literature, this work stands as a substantial piece that preserves the national identity. This study delves into the intricacies of how the aforementioned concept has been illustrated. It's important to note that these ideas have been articulated from the researcher's perspective, and on the whole, this study serves as a valuable resource for individuals engaged in further exploration of this subject matter.

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