

The dangers of change: things fall apart by chinua achebe

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Turning and turning in the widening gyre. The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world This is an excerpt from the Poem " The Second Coming", which is the basis for the novel " Things Fall Apart". This title is significant to the many themes that are explored throughout the story. I feel that the story is broken into three different themes in order to arrive at the main theme. The themes of tradition, social appearance and belonging, and fear and anger, are blended in such a way as to bring to light the main theme of the story. This idea is that though throughout life one can train themselves to think that they have absolute control over all things in their lives if they will it to be so, they really don't. The author shows the reality that through these ideas, we brainwash ourselves to believe that if we master these things and gain control over them, life as we know it will always be the same. The danger of thinking in this fashion is that in doing so you never prepare yourself for change, and if you are not prepared for change everything in your life can fall apart. The conflict among these issues shows that though we may have momentary control of ourselves and or family and even our culture, we do not have complete control over change, it is inevitable. The story is set within the Ibo tribe of Umuofia, which is one of the nine villages that combine to make one large clan in Nigeria. These tribes are ones that hold courage, strength, tradition and customs extremely high. The theme of tradition is examined by The Dangers 3 showing that they are a prideful people, who rely solely on the will of " their gods" to direct their paths in life, which in turn brings them great strength and prosperity. This is evident through a dialogue that takes place in the text detailing what happens when

a member of the tribe disobeys a law made by the gods, " You are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth, without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil. The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish. (Achebe, 1959, p. 30) This theme of tradition is further explored by showing how continuously consulting the gods leads them on a devastating journey where they wage an internal and external war between what they know as the norm and a new strange presence that comes among them. A time comes when their land, their lives and ultimately, their traditions are invaded by colonialism and Christianity. With this invasion comes great conflict and confusion amongst their people. The village is faced with the hard decision to either accept the change, which they believe would show weakness and disobedience of the gods, or to continue to resist, and stay true to their beliefs and traditions. The story is brought to life through the trials and tribulations of the main character, Okonkwo. This character is also the medium for understanding how social appearance and belonging can consume a person to a point where fear and anger become a strong part of their character. Okonkwo's social appearance and level of belonging is The Dangers 4 measured by how he feels he is being viewed in the eyes of his people. He is described as a true warrior who holds high levels of respect within his village. He has won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine

villages, is a wealthy farmer, and rules his household with an iron-hand. Though he holds these honors of respect from his people it does not come without a price. The fee for his prestige is taken from his inability or non-desire to have compassion, and show love or sympathy to anyone. These emotions are useless to him, and would only hinder him with weakness. This is where the author establishes the conflicting relationship between strength and prestige vs. fear and anger. The overall factor that nourishes this philosophy of Okonkwo's is his overwhelming anger felt toward his father and how he was looked upon in the village, and his fear that he will be as is father was. Early in the story it is made very clear that Okonkwo's father was a man who, " was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow" (Achebe, 1959, p. 4). It also states, " But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness...it was not external but lay deep within him. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father" (Achebe, 1959, p. 13). With that being said it is evident that anything that is showed as " weakness" would surely be the demise of Okonkwo, in his eyes and the eyes of his people. Most of the story revolves around the elements of social appearance, belonging and fear and anger together. The author did an excellent job of intertwining these ideas together in order to show how in the life of the main character one element can not exist without the other. In order for him to have a high level of social appearance he needs to have a strong, angry, no-nonsense way about himself. In contrast his need to belong consumes him with fear, because he is unable or unwilling show love or compassion to anyone, for he will be looked upon as weak. It is this constant battle with himself and his

inability to see that all can not be controlled, which leads him to suicide. In this aspect the main character is looked upon as not only the protagonist but also the antagonist. The author brings about events that happen to the main character that are severe and extraordinary on certain levels. He is plagued with a pitiful inheritance, he is the keeper of a boy who is sentenced to die, and is banished from his fatherland, and he ultimately takes his own life. The list goes on and on, but the author will have you see that most of the events that happen to the main character are all done by his own hand or actions. He is in a constant battle with himself in order to hold on to all that he believes is controllable, which is everything. In comparison, this same aspect of the protagonist also being the antagonist is also seen in the short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper". In the story there were different things and people that played apart in the conflict with the main character, but ultimately, I believe that the woman was in a conflict with herself and her inner feelings. Also in that story the women had no control over anything concerning her well being. The author soon brings all the pieces of the story together by introducing the one thing that can not be controlled and that is change. Whether it be a good or bad, change can become an overwhelming event that can either flourish life or destroy it, but this is only true if the change is meant with utter resistance instead of some levels of compromise and understanding. The author achieved this climatic point in the story by The Dangers 6 introducing the elements of colonialism and Christianity. In choosing these elements as the vehicle for change, the author drives home that change is inevitable, and only our preparedness for it or lack there of will be the deciding factor for our livelihood. The author carefully chose

colonialism and Christianity as the force for change because in the time setting of the story these two elements were ones that swept African countries by storm without invitation. These elements were ones that could not be controlled, and was coming if it was welcomed or not. All in all one could derive from this story that it was meant to be about the rise and fall of a great warrior and his tribe by Europeans, and this is true. This story is looked upon as a classic African story. The coming of the Europeans and the West marked the beginning of the end for traditional African society. This is depicted in the text as, " The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (Achebe, 1959, p. 176). I believe that there is another point that the author wanted to make known to the reader, and that is to force the reader to look deep within concerning ones beliefs, fears and need for accomplishment, and how they place on the spectrum of change. All of these factors have a way of falling into the great grasp of change, creating great weakness and defeat, if we allow it. Sometimes we hold on to so many things in life, and though some of them may be great for us, others have a tendency of being detrimental, The Dangers 7 but we chose to hold on to them because they are familiar and safe. In doing so our lives begins to fall apart, and the things that we so desperately try to control and hold on to begin to consume us, because we have not prepared ourselves for change. Instead we fight and fight an unsuccessful battle, until we are overwhelmed and succumb.