

Comparison between ngugi wa thiongo's "a grain of wheat" and chinua achebe's "thi...

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



Power and respect take years to be earned however it only takes one mistake for it to all be taken away. Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *A Grain Of Wheat* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* both capture the lives and hardships of Kenyans and Nigerians during the postcolonial era from a first hand perspective. Both Thiongo and Achebe revile to the reader that power and respect take time to be earned however a rash mistake made at a time of anger can result in the loss of authority and can cause the tragic downfall of a hero. This is shown as both protagonists in the novel's come from unstable upbringing that lead them on a quest for success and power, once the protagonists are in a position of authority and respect they misuse their power when they are filled with rage and make a grave mistake, this mistake is what leads to their own downfall as a tragic hero and both Thiongo and Achebe use irony to convey this effect. Those who come from unstable upbringing often strive to work hard to change their life path and be noticed as an important member of society. This motivation even though it can help a person succeed and meet their goals it can also cause them to be fixated on gaining power and respect.

Throughout *A Grain Of Wheat* and *Things Fall Apart* both protagonists Mugo and Okonkwo are raised in unfavourable circumstances, and this causes them to be obsessed with the idea of being wealthy and being respected by others in society. In *A Grain Of Wheat* it is evident that the passing of Mugo's parents leads him to be determined to work hard and gain a better life for himself " Mugo's father and mother had died poor, leaving him, an only child in the hands of a distant aunt"(Thiongo, 9). This experience drives Mugo to wanting wealth and authority as he does not inherit much from his parents

passing, and is left to be taken care of by an aunt that he hates. Mugo's resentment for his aunt comes from her neglect as well as feelings of being powerless to both his aunt and society as he is barely noticed by them. When Mugo's aunt passes away, Mugo becomes fixated on working hard and gaining a better life for himself " He turned to the soil. He would labour, sweat, and through success and wealth, force society to recognize him"(Thiongo, 11). This quote shows how Mugo turns his feelings of powerlessness into motivation as he turns his passion for farming as a means to gain success, and be noticed and respected by the others in society.

Similarly in Things Fall Apart Okonkwo follows a similar path of being obsessed with gaining success and authority, as he resents his father for not having any title and for caring a huge amount of debt. After his father's passing Okonkwo realizes that he does not receive the same start in life as the others in his community as the others inherit barns, seeds and land, all which they then use to continue in their success and provide for their families. " Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men usually had. He did not inherit a barn from his father. There was no barn to inherit"(Achebe, 12). This quote illustrates how Okonkwo not being able to have the same advantages as the others causes him to become determined to work hard, and put himself in a place where he becomes noticed for his successes and enduvers. To Okonkwo his father is a failure as he is unable to make a proper living for himself. The fear of ending up like his father is what causes Okonkwo to become obsessed with becoming highly titled as he

refuses to accept the same fate as his father. Here on can see that both protagonist Mugo and Okonkwo coming from poverty are driven by the failures of their parents to become consumed with being rich and having a high standing in society. Mugo and Okonkwo also both use farming as their way to gain wealth and stand out in society. This determination to be successful and stand out defiantly has a huge hold on Mugo's and Okonkwo's life as it is evident that will stop at nothing to achieve their goal. Once in a position of power and authority it can become increasingly easy for a person to misuse their power and make a rash decision at a time of anger.

Throughout *A Grain Of Wheat* and *Things Fall Apart* both Mugo and Okonkwo rise to positions of authority, and are highly respected within their communities for their hard work and heroism. However once at this positions when Mugo and Okonkwo feel as if their authority is being questioned, or they do not agree with the decisions of other they become enraged causing them to make a crucial mistake. In *A Grain Of Wheat* when Mugo returns from the detention camp he is regarded in the community as a hero for taking several beatings. Due to this Mugo is invited to take part in a movement lead by Kihika and the community to retaliate, and take sacrifices for the death of community leaders for protesting against the Europeans taking land. Mugo does not support the movement however instead of voicing his concerns he chooses to instead betray Kihika and reveal his location to the Europeans, causing his death. " I know where Kihika can be found, tonight." And now the hatred he had felt towards Kihika roses fresh in him"(Thiongo, 226). This quote illustrates how Mugo lets his anger get the

better of him as he uses information he is trusted with to betray Kihika. When Mugo becomes known for his heroism and respect he lets that cloud his judgment while he is angry at Kihika. Even though Mugo thinks he is making the right decision to betray Kihika he does not know that the guilt from his betrayal will consume him, and that this will be the tragic mistake leading him on a path to his downfall. Similarly in Things Fall Apart Okonkwo also makes a rash mistake while he is angry.

When Okonkwo returns from his seven years of exile he expects to be treated again with respect and authority. However Okonkwo has a differing opinion compared to others on their course of action in response to the christian missionaries and their dwellings on the land. The community decides to work out a solution in a peaceful manner. Okonkwo however does not agree with this decision and is filled with rage when he feels that his power is being questioned by others. Okonkwo while extremely angry decides to take actions into his own hands and kills the messenger sent by the district commissioner. " In a flash Okonkwo drew his machet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machet decended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniform body"(Achebe, 144).

One can see through this quote that Okonkwo while filled with rage makes a tragic mistake as this action causes him to be rebuked by others. Okonkwo does not know it at the time however this is the tragic mistake that will eventually lead to his downfall. One can see that when Mugo and Okonkwo's gain power and respect they make rash decisions in order to keep their title

and authority. They can not stand to compromise their ideas with others. As well as when they are forced to follow a courses of action they do not agree or support they both become filled with anger, and this causes them to make rash decisions that will have a negative impact on them leading them on path to their downfall. All it takes is one mistake for power and respect to be taken away from a person. Throughout A Grain of Wheat and Things Fall Apart Mugo and Okonkwo both make a tragic mistake that will eventually resulting in their downfall.

In A Grain Of Wheat Mugo can not live with his mistake of betraying Kihika and causing his death. It is evident that Mugo's feelings of guilt greatly affect him as he is no longer able to feel pride from being called a hero. Mugo as an attempt to get rid of his guilt chooses to confess to his entire community " You asked for Judas he started you asked for the man that led Kihika to this tree. That man stands before you (Thiongo, 252). Here Mugo gives up on living with his guilt, and informs his community about the mistake he makes many year ago. Even though Mugo confesses as a way to redeem himself the member of his community grow furious, and can not forgive the one mistake he made and instead vow to punish him. " Your deeds will condemn you," General R. Continued without anger or apparent bitterness.' You-No one will ever escape from his own actions"(Thiongo, 270).

This quote illustrates how easy it is for one mistake to take away a persons standing and respect as before Mugo's confession he is viewed by many as a hero. Mugo hopes that his confession will result in the community forgiving him. However instead it causes the community and all those who look up at

Mugo to turn against him resulting in his downfall. This shows that one mistake is all it take for Mugo to become a tragic hero. Thiongo use irony to deliver this effect as before Mugo's confesses the community believes that he is not involved with Kihika's death, and sees him as an inspiration for taking a huge role in the movement to retaliate. After Mugo's confession they are able to understand that they give credit and respect to Mugo for betraying Kihika. It is ironic as the entire community is shocked that they once called Mugo a hero for doing the exact opposite of what he is praised for. Similarly in Things Fall Apart Okonkwo's mistake of going against the community's wishes and killing the messenger soon catches up with him. Okonkwo makes a rash mistake as a means to regain his power however he soon realizes that the others are not impressed with his actions and rebuke him. In this moment Okonkwo can not live knowing that he lost all his power and authority after his return from exile.

When Okonkwo comes to terms with his reality and the consequences his actions have he knows that he will be punished for his rash desision.

Okonkwo realizes that he makes a mistake when he kills the messenger and not wanting to face the retaliation Okonkwo chooses to take his own life instead " Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead"(Achebe, 147). This quote shows how Okonkwo becomes a tragic hero as he makes one mistake that results in his ultimate downfall. Before this incident Okonkwo is viewed as a highly titled and important member of society, however after Okonkwo feels as if he is worth nothing to his community and takes his own life in an attempt to

escape his own feelings. Achebe uses irony to convey this effect as throughout the novel Okonkwo is driven to gain success because he did not want to become a failure like his father. It is ironic as at the end of the day Okonkwo becomes just like his father even though he tried everything to avoid that path. One can see how Mugo and Okonkwo's mistakes have a devastating effect on them, as before this they are both living their ideal lives. However as one can see it only takes one rash decision to derail all their accomplishments and have them be rejected again by society. As well as both Thiongo and Achebe use irony extremely well to capture the effect of Mugo and Okonkwo's tragic downfall.

At the end both Mugo and Okonkwo lose all the power and authority they worked hard to gain all caused by one devastating mistake made at a time of anger. In conclusion both Thiongo and Achebe revile to the reader that all it takes is one mistake to lose everything one worked hard to gain, and this causes the downfall of a hero. They illustrate this as both protagonist are raised in property causing them to become obsessed with gaining success and authority, once the protagonists receive the power and wealth they have been yearning for they act rashly when angered resulting in them making a devastating mistake, this one mistake is all that it takes for both protagonist to lose all they toiled hard for resulting in their tragic downfall and both authors use irony to emphasise this effect. Both Thiongo and Achebe excellently capture similar traditions and conflicts between the novels and emphasizes how crucial one mistake can be even on the life of a highly respected hero.