

Chinua achebe's
things fall apart:
inevitable suffering in
tragedies essay
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What makes a tragedy so tragic is that the tragic hero, frequently because of his hamartia, falls a great distance from the high point where he is above many of us to the lowest point possible. In addition, they tend to be conductors of suffering as critic Northrop Frye says. These heroes catch the attention of the divine power and inevitably serve as instruments that bring suffering to both themselves and the people around them. The suffering that Okonkwo brings upon his clansmen in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole by emphasizing how much control man has over his own suffering, especially when he is an instrument that brings pain upon others as well.

Early on in the novel readers are introduced to Okonkwo's hamartia: the fear of appearing weak. This affects his temperament and the relationship he chooses to have with his family. Okonkwo cannot show the affection he has to his family, even though he definitely has a strong fatherly affection to both his daughter Enzima, and the outsider Ikemefuna. Okonkwo's wives and his eldest son Nwoye suffer most from this lack of affection. The three wives bear many beatings; his second wife Ekwefi is almost killed with a gun when she mumbles an insulting remark about her husband's shooting skills. They go into exile for seven years with Okonkwo, and although the novel doesn't show what happens to the widows when Okonkwo commits suicide, it probably isn't a happy life. This lack of affection though is how Okonkwo stays strong and also how he achieved his high status in the community. After hearing what happened to Okonkwo's "lazy" father one can understand this sternness that Okonkwo lives with.

Nwoye also suffers more than his father's physical beatings. Okonkwo frequently compares his eldest son to his father Unoka and sees Nwoye as lazy and not masculine enough while Nwoye sought to please his father feigning his care for women's stories, acting the way Okonkwo would want him to, until his friend Ikemefuna was murdered by a group of clansmen including Okonkwo. The death of Ikemefuna is of course tragic for the boy himself, for he came to admire Okonkwo as if he was his real father. It cause Nwoye a great deal of grief though not only because he knew that his friend was dead but also because he was forced to question the traditions and values of his tribe, as the discarding of twins into the evil forest. Nwoye probably knew that Okonkwo didn't kill Ikemefuna because he wanted to, but he also didn't feel comfortable in the culture he lived in where he couldn't choose to do the right thing and eventually converted to Christianity. This incident along with the murder of the district commissioner's messenger was due to his nature. His mother died when he was still a child and his dislike of weakness from watching his father contributed to this rash personality.

The suffering of Okonkwo's family is to some extent caused by his character and actions. However, it was also partially the Ibo culture and the environment Okonkwo was brought up in that caused him to behave the way he did. Readers cannot bluntly criticize Okonkwo for his actions; rationalizing that if they were in that exact situation they would behave differently. Tragic heroes are not simple people who can be stereotyped by their hamartia. The complexity of the characters often gives that inevitableness to the pain that give the catastrophic feeling in tragedies. Achebe's Things Fall Apart is a work that shows the struggle between both individuals and society and also

change and tradition, realistically depicting that no extreme can be the ultimate solution to life's problems.