

Characters in chinua achebe's books

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Chinua Achebe shows the custom, especially, African values and attitudes through his characters in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo is an ideal Ibo man who achieves wealth and fame out of nothing, but this causes him to be conceited and disdainful of less successful. Pride is a noble quality that man should have, but sometimes, when the source of that pride is fear and insecurity instead of true faith in oneself, pride could be destructive. In the book, Chinua Achebe uses the direct characterization, character dialogue and foil to reveal how Okonkwo's incorrigible pride led him to his own destruction.

First of all, Achebe uses direct comments from the narrator to describe Okonkwo's thoughts and action so that the author would effectively show his character's proud nature. When Okonkwo returns from the exile, the narrator tells the readers about his plan in detail that he says Even in his first year in exile he had begun to plan for his return.

The first thing he would do would be to rebuild his compound on a more magnificent scale. Then he would show his wealth by initiating his sons into the Ozo society. Only the really great men in the clan were able to do this. Okonkwo saw clearly the high esteem in which he would be held, and saw himself taking the highest title in the land (Achebe 172).

When Okonkwo was exiled, he had a hard time because he had to start a new life while he already became old and not as strong as before. The narrator shows that even though Okonkwo had hard time to adapt himself in Mbanta, he still wanted to show people that he is a successful man. This shows his proud nature that the narrator illustrates Okonkwo not only desires

to reveal his achievement to impress other people but also tries to regain his power in the society. By using the method of direct characterization, the readers can exactly see the traits of a character and what is going on in his mind without interpreting. In this case, the narrators direct comments of Okonkwos thoughts and action effectively show his inveterate pride that he always wants to show off his success.

Secondly, Achebe uses Unoka as the foil to strengthen Okonkwos character; his meekness is contradictory to Okonkwos brash and arrogant pride. Unlike Okonkwo, his father, Unoka, is a peaceful, friendly but lazy man who was considered to be a failure by the Ibo society. Okonkwo is very ashamed of and disgusted at him; I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him. too much of his grandfather, Obierika thought, but he did not say it. The same thought also came to Okonkwos mind. But he had long learned how to lay that ghost. Whenever the thought of his fathers weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success.

And so he did now. His mind went to his latest show of manliness. (Achebe 66). Okonkwos abhorrence of his father strengthens his intractable pride because this reflects that Okonkwo sees himself as a successful man but his father as a failure. Furthermore, his fear of resembling his father caused him to stand against his fathers trait including gentleness and humility. Thus, by comparing two opposite characters, Achebe not only exaggerates Okonkwos brash and arrogant pride but also explains the reason behind as well.

Lastly, through emphatic dialogue, Achebe further strengthens his description of Okonkwos hard, sometimes distorted, and often destructive,

pride. After the death of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo is still bothered by it that he says When did you become a shivering old woman, Okonkwo asked himself, you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed. (Achebe 65). Okonkwo is telling himself that he has turned into a “ woman”- meaning soft-hearted and emotional, and he feels ashamed.

Through this monologue, Achebe lets the reader understand more of Okonkwo’s way of thinking. He obviously thinks that a man should only be strong and unemotional, and he measures a man’s sense of pride by his ability in battle and toughness of his heart. Since his pride is not from the true confidence of himself, but from the fear of not being what he thinks about an ideal man, it is twisted- wrong, destructive. Achebe’s excellent use of dialogue shows Okonkwo’s distorted pride that the readers can connect that it would eventually lead to his downfall.

Ultimately, Okonkwo’s inveterate pride led him to death that at the end of the novel he commits suicide. He finds himself unable to see his falling and weakness and adapt to changing society that he could not play an important role anymore due to the arrival of the white men. Okonkwo is a memorable character as he shows true-to-life strengths and true-to-life flaws. Through Achebe’s excellent use of direct method of characterization, effective use of foil and his robust dialogues, the reader not only sees Okonkwo’s character, but understands it as well.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart : A Novel*. New York: Broadway Books, 1994.