

Things fall apart by chinua achebe: a review of courage

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Albert Camus once said, " But in the end one needs more courage to live than to kill himself". This is the courage that the main character Okonkwo from Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart did not have. In this novel, Okonkwo is an African man, who is part of the Ibo culture and the Umuofia tribe, goes through a desperate journey to prove his masculinity and save his village from the European Christians. Okonkwo was a man of temper and made deliberate actions which was opposite of what his spontaneous father Unoka would have done. Achebe chooses to make Okonkwo kill himself at the end of the book instead of having the Europeans kill him. Through this, Achebe is able to show the irony between Okonkwo's apparent masculinity and his feminine ending.

Okonkwo's hate for femininity stemmed from his father. Okonkwo's dad Unoka was a very happy and caring man; however, " Unoka, the grown-up, was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat"(5). In the Ibo culture, the men are suppose to be the head of their family and provide food and discipline. Since Unoka did not follow the norm, he was seen as an unsuccessful man. Okonkwo wanted to be successful, so naturally, Okonkwo thought that success was the opposite of his father. Okonkwo wanted to die with the highest titles because " when Unoka died he had taken no titles at all and he was heavily in debt"(8). Dying with no titles is also seen as being very feminine. Ibo people live in a patriarchal society meaning it is impossible for a women to get a title. Unoka dies with no title making him a feminine man. Because Unoka was so feminine, Okonkwo hated him. However, Achebe chose to kill Unoka and Okonkwo the same

way: a disgrace. After Okonkwo worked so hard his whole life to be different than his father, Okonkwo died the same way.

Another factor of Okonkwo's hate for femininity is Nwoye. Okonkwo's son Nwoye was "too much of his grandfather"(65) implying that Nwoye was lazy and carefree. All the things bad are seen as feminine in this novel so being lazy and carefree is seen as womanly things. Nwoye was also very aware "that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell" (53). This made Okonkwo more mad because Nwoye knew that he was acting feminine, but he continued to act that way. Nwoye went to a school to teach while Okonkwo ended up killing himself. Nwoye's teaching at the missionary school freed him from the stress of the tribe and his father's heavy hand. On the other hand, Okonkwo's masculinity drove him to prefer death over shame ultimately being his tragic flaw.

Okonkwo hated feminine things because he was fully committed to defending his tribe, and he believed that women could not defend a tribe. Okonkwo believed what the poem "The Black Man's Burden" by Edward Morel says about the black man's burden of defending his culture and land. Okonkwo had the burden of defending the Ibo culture "with bullets, blood or death/Better by far defend it/ With honor's holy breath"(11-14). Black men have the burden of defending their culture with their lives if necessary. Morel makes it clear by the title that this burden lies on the men. Okonkwo took up this burden, but even after all the years of trying to be masculine, he was too feminine to help defend his beliefs. This drove him to suicide.

In the end, Okonkwo did not have the courage to live like Camus talked about. He made it seem as if he was the strongest and most masculine in the tribe , but he was one of the weakest most feminine men. The titles that he took before he died was worth nothing because they were accomplished by Okonkwo's pretending act. He hated his father , and he hated his brother, and he hated himself because he knew that his masculinity was an act. He took the easy way out instead of confronting his problems something that only females was expected to do at this time. Achebe was able to use Okonkwo's death to show what he truly was like: a weak, hypocrite, feminine man.