

## Responding to [Shane Horsburgh's TED Talk: Redefining Masculinity](#)

Discuss each topic below in an intelligent paragraph. For each topic, the prompt is highlighted in yellow:

### 1) A CENTRAL DUALITY: Ego vs. Soul

Shane Horsburgh used to be a tough, aggressive, and intimidating guy. However, when he began having serious talks with a wise man he met in Iraq, Horsburgh found himself beginning to think differently. He tells us, "The wisdom in [this man's] words dissolved any religious differences or cultural differences that we may have had. Before we parted, he said to me, 'You're either *guided by your soul* or *driven by your ego*. It is only a matter of choice.' And for me these words were absolutely life-changing because they initiated a change or a move away from what I perceived to be manly or not. It altered the map that I'd been referring to most of my life.... It was then that I decided to leave the body armor, the bravado, the bullets, and the bullshit behind." **Here are definitions for two key terms:**

- The term "ego" stands for the ideas, beliefs, and judgments that each of us has about who we are and who we think we are "supposed to be." "Ego" might also be defined as the image each of us feels we need to live up to in order for us to be respected and valued. (Note: The term "ego" tends to be morally ambiguous for the same reasons the term "pride" is morally ambiguous; both terms encompass our feelings of self-esteem, which may be *appropriate* or may be *excessive*.)
- In contrast, one might define "soul" as the "heart" of each of us (consider the expression "heart and soul") or the source of our *emotional honesty* and *courage*, our *compassion*, and our *wisdom* about what matters in life. The term "soul" implies the ability to see beyond the limitations of one's own ego or point of view.

**What are some important ways in which Horsburgh stopped being guided by his ego and started being guided by his soul? Give a few examples, and explain each.**

### 2) CONNECTIONS to *Things Fall Apart* and Okonkwo

Here is how Shane Horsburgh describes himself before a wise man challenged him to change:

"I was an out-of-control, insecure, heavily-armed-at-times ego machine, ready to do anything I needed to maintain the image I perceived manhood to be, a false map which was reinforced when I was involved in counter-terrorism and special operations.... The body armor I was wearing had become more than just protective equipment. It had become part of a false identity that I had created based on what I thought a man should be. And I was scared that somebody was gonna find out and I'd be discovered as a fraud."

**In what ways do Horsburgh's story and ideas apply to Okonkwo's story and to his actions and relationships in *Things Fall Apart*? Discuss both the parallels and the differences. Moreover, if Horsburgh were somehow able to speak with Okonkwo and help Okonkwo see himself and his conceptions of masculinity differently, how might Okonkwo's story have turned out differently? Why?**

### 3) CONNECTIONS to "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Birthmark"

Consider what Shane Horsburgh learns both about *himself* and about *what it means to be an authentic human being*. Then consider what both Young Goodman Brown and Aylmer fail to learn—and the way each man's unique obsession does harm to himself or to important people and relationships in his life.

**In what ways can Shane Horsburgh's struggle with masculinity illuminate (A) Young Goodman Brown's obsession with moral purity and (B) Aylmer's obsession with perfection? Discuss both ideas below:**

**A. How can we apply Shane Horsburgh's struggle with masculinity to Young Goodman Brown's obsession with moral purity and intolerance of moral ambiguity? If Shane Horsburgh could actually speak to Young Goodman Brown, what could Horsburgh and his story teach Young Goodman Brown about "good," "evil," and being human?**

**B. Moreover, How can we apply Horsburgh's struggle with masculinity to Aylmer's obsession with perfection and intolerance of physical "flaws"? If Horsburgh could actually speak to Aylmer, what could Horsburgh and his story teach Aylmer about real human beauty, about what we perceive as "flaws," and about the ideas/ideals of perfection that we humans often carry in our minds?**