OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

# *Arrow of God* and the Re-Reading of Event, Image and Text

**Dan Izevbaye**
Bowen University, Iwo

Freedom from European domination was the most important theme during the decade of the beginning of independence for African states. This theme had direct relevance to the concern of the African writer, for whom the negative image of Africa in European literature was a major challenge. This literary representation of Africa does not, of course, remain fixed or static. Contact and exchange between peoples and cultures over a long period of time should lead to greater knowledge and intercultural understanding. But the great darkness of prejudice and racism would not easily give way to enlightenment even given these conditions. Every reader is aware that some racism survives the evolution of the European image of Africa: from the racist condescension in the popular fictions of Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose stories of the European folk hero, Tarzan, have been translated into more than fifty languages, to the relatively less explicit but still patronizing racism in the Africa-novels of Conrad and Cary, considered by contemporary European readers as enlightened and skilfully written. For Achebe, 'the absolute power over narrative' that such writings represent is comparable to the power exercised by 'corrupt totalitarian regimes' (2003: 24).

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

You would have noticed how the tense of the passage that I have just read constantly shifts between past and present. This is because literary texts assert their original presence most stubbornly. Edit a text, and the new text turns out to be only a second edition, an altered copy of the original text, different, not the original. Any of the editions – the tenth, the second or the first -- is available to any reader who has access to it, and it continues to exert its influence until it is physically destroyed. Even then, it lives on in the memory of those who have read it, or in the consciousness of those who have imbibed its image through its secondary influence on the language, on other texts or through the stereotypes that it has generated. Because the presence of texts in this sense cannot be negotiated, re-reading or close scrutiny is an essential protection against the influence of negative literary representations, as Achebe argues in his own account of the necessity for a continuing re-reading of texts and events for a revision or deepening of insights, and for an understanding of the reality behind the image or stereotype of races or communities. An extract from that account summarizes the lesson that he learnt from his eye-opening undergraduate encounter with Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*:

> …slowly over time through experience …reading came to mean reading with greater scrutiny and sometimes re-reading with adult eyes what I had first read in the innocence of my literary infancy and adolescence(2003: 34).

Rereading is the first stage in this awakening of consciousness. Why should it matter that a particular representation of African reality has been projected through literature to the consciousness of literate Africans as well as the European reading public? The reason is that reality is so complex that a writer can only make meaning out of it by selecting from available options for shaping into texts. So we value literary texts for their interpretation of reality, and many readers are easily persuaded to adopt the writer's

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

account of reality. Writers themselves are affected by the texts they read, including those that they themselves have written. But the activity of rereading can so influence a writer that even a work as life changing as *Things Fall Apart* can be its author's stepping stone to a more sophisticated interpretation of related material, especially the history of change and its effect in a particular culture. The fact that a writer's vision also continues to evolve or deepen with time or in response to new readings is reflected in the generally held critical opinion that *Arrow of God* is a richer novel than the more widely acclaimed *Things Fall Apart* (Mahood: 38). Robert Wren (1980: 105) also argues that the 'extraordinary texture' and greater complexity of *Arrow of God* reflects Achebe's greater awareness of the dynamic character of the traditional community of Umuaro than he had when he created the more static Umuofia culture.

The period that Achebe referred to in the passage quoted above was a key period in the making of a new African consciousness. This was during the post-war, nationalist years with colonialism in decline in the decade that would end with independence. The imperial creation of a multicultural nation administered by indirect rule was experimental, but its purpose was clearly colonial. The African image was the product of a powerful colonialist discourse that had become seasoned from its long practice in Orientalist literature and scholarship. The emergence of a new generation of African intellectuals – politicians as well as scholars – was of great consequence for the making of a new reality. The task before the new generation of Nigerian intellectuals in post-World War Nigeria was a clear one. The common purpose was to produce a narrative that was more Nigerian than the colonial one. Achebe began to realize his calling as a novelist at a time when the African reality was in need of reconstruction. The result could be seen not only in *Arrow of God*, but also in earlier as well as more contemporary writings of historians from Kenneth Dike to Adiele Afigbo and, since

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

Geoffrey Parrinder's studies of comparative religion the growth of scholarship on African traditional religion beginning with Bolaji Idowu through successive scholars whose work on sacrifice highlighted one of the key religious concerns of this reality. Achebe's account of an episode in 'a colonial classroom,' as he termed it, shows the stimulus for the reconstruction of African reality at the time: Here was a whole class of young Nigerian students, among the brightest of their generation, united in their view of a book of English fiction in complete opposition to their English teacher, who was moreover backed by the authority of metropolitan critical judgment…. In the end I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like (2003: 23, 24).

In other words, the writer, the historian and the theologian were united in the common task of reconstructing the reality. It explains the interlacing of the work of writers and scholars at the time. The line of this dual political and religious influence on Nigerian reality has remained unbroken from colonial times to the present, and *Arrow of God* is an important representation of that relationship. For the writer the challenge was not just a matter of re-creating contemporary material reality consisting of the landscape and the traditions of the past and documenting contemporary social issues like the effect of urbanization and modernization on social and political institutions. While these were important, the major challenge was the reconstruction of the African image beginning with literature, a powerful source of the consciousness of reality. The image of the past was an important part of that consciousness. A writer has two options in his picture of the past. Historical narratives are, by convention, views of the past from the standpoint of the present. But a writer like Achebe seeks to be faithful to the life and times being depicted by drawing on his personal experience of traditional

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

culture as well as documented sources. The aspects of Igbo traditional culture surviving into modern fiction have been identified by scholars like Obiechina, Egudu, Emenyonu, Nnolim and Wren. In reconstructing this past, Achebe tries to make the narrator's point of view contemporary with the historical setting. But the medium in which he does this raises the question of the imaginative modes that are appropriate for this reconstruction of the past. What emerges from Achebe's image of the past in *Things Fall Apart* is the recognition that change is a historical process that individuals and communities have to deal with. What this required was an adequate vision and an appropriate medium, an imagination driven by the fictional community's will to survive, and the power to fuse the different historical events and their consequences into an artistic statement.

The novel form adopted by Achebe evolved in close relationship with literacy and the printed word and has its base in the reading public. Its characters are like the ordinary characters and the antiheroes of the Aristotelian non-heroic genres in *The Poetics*, which 'represent men [not] as better than they are in real life, [but] as worse, or as they are.' The usual material of the novel is not the extraordinary, which stands out as magical realism when it is introduced into modern fiction, but the quotidian. The novel's realist conventions are distinct from the oral and performance modes of traditional cultures with their frequent resort to magical modes of narrative and performance. However, although Achebe adopted this modern, scripted form as the medium for the task that he set himself in *Arrow of God,* he modified the form by seeking a correlative of the genres and cultural practices of Umuaro tradition. As a result, he has produced a hybridized genre by crossing the novel form with materials normally associated with ritual drama.

Themes of religion and ritual dominate the action and the characterization through the constant presence of the numinous. Here are a few examples: Ezeulu is graphically depicted as half man

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

and half god; and Obika is spirit-possessed as soon as he puts on the necklace that transforms him into the Ogbazulobodo, then there follows the recitative of 'potent words' that are proverbial and cautionary in their discrete, everyday form, but in the eerie context of words chanted by the voice of an unseen runner speeding through the night, they turn into a magical text for the spiritual reinforcement of the community's values and folkways; and there are those festivals when 'a man might look to his right and find his neighbor and look to his left and see a god'. This anthropotheism is present not only in the seasons of festivals and good harvest but also in the season of anarchy and ruin when gods are in flight from their imminent mortality.

The ritualized action, more often associated with drama than with the novel, is Achebe's way of representing the life of Umuaro in the appropriate idiom comparable to his stylistic modification of English in order to transmit Igbo patterns of thought and modes of speech. In *Arrow of God* Achebe has produced an unconventional novel by crossing the content of ritual drama with the form of realistic fiction. Ordinary as well as momentous events are subjected to ritual interpretation in the novel: the autochthonous god, Idemili, is a religious response to the natural environment by a people who treat nature as a sacred, material reality; the spring and the python are the emanation and the incarnation of this reality, and for this reason, Ezidemili may be justified in seeking restitution for Oduche's violation of nature. Such is the influence of the ritual element in the novel that, at key points in the novel, the author shifts from the point of view of his modern rationalist persona to the viewpoint of his traditional, ritualized mask. This is what happens at the end of the novel when the political schemes of the colonial officers break down, and only the religious opportunism of the imported religion brings the indigenous dispensation to its knees.

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

When the colonial administration closes the file on Ezeulu, it is because the colonial officer is no more than an instrument of the gods: 'it looked as though the gods and the powers of event finding Winterbottom handy had used him and left him again in order as they found him.' In other words, the cultural elements that Achebe chooses for the representation of Umuofia reality are not the conventional elements of the realistic, literacy-based novel genre, but the pre-modern elements of ritual and recitative, mask and scapegoat motifs, elements that are conventionally associated with drama or the theatre. The images and icons are those of the mask and masquerade (Egudu, Emenyonu, Peters) and the plot and structure those of ritual drama. In spite of the historical sources of the novel, the characterization is conceived in terms of ritual roles. The protagonist and his antagonist are ritual performers. First, it is Ezeulu versus Ezidemili; then it extends into the unanticipated psycho-political contest between Ezeulu and Winterbottom. It becomes more complicated when Ulu himself enters the contest on the side of his priest; it may be a disastrous move, but there is some logic to the alliance of the deity with his human half. The action has the outlines of ritual drama. It begins as a 'natural' rivalry between Ulu and Idemili, founded on the nature of their cultural functions since Ulu is the protector of natural and civil order and Idemili is the emblem of nature's stability. The seed of tragedy is sown when Ezeulu extends this agonistic field to include the community and becomes tragically complicated by Ulu's strange blindness to his own self-interest when he ironically takes sides with his vengeful priest against the community that he was invented to protect. This story of a god and his priest is almost a variation on the cautionary folktale motif of the hubristic Igbo wrestler who takes on his own chi. There is a strong ritual undercurrent of conflict in the subplots too -- like the question of generations and succession [Edogo and Nwafo] and the possessed medium, Obika, chanting a sacred text

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

as he runs round the community during the funeral rites for the dead, as he races to his own death.

Prose fiction rather than drama is Achebe's choice because of his own storytelling gifts, which he describes as part of his own inheritance. The literary genius of Igbo culture expresses itself most explicitly in its speech forms, just as one might similarly hazard a suggestion about a correlation of theatre and drama to aspects of traditional Yoruba culture. There are accounts of Achebe's use of this inheritance in Emenyonu (1978) and Egudu (1981). It is tempting here to revisit the case that Echeruo made in his argument about the limits that ritual imposes on the development of drama, with its underlying assumption that the Igbo genius for speech forms had only been partially exploited. Of course, it has to be understood that ritual and drama are similar but independent forms with different purposes and that their relationship is not necessarily evolutionary, in spite of the Greek evidence. By re-reading and re-creating the corpus of ritual in fictive form – as distinct from its customary mythic and performance modes – in *Arrow of God*, Achebe has already taken the route of converting ritual into narrative or, to borrow the words of Echeruo, he forced 'ritual to yield its story' (1973: 30) without upsetting the role of culture and tradition as basic sources of literary production.

Although the legitimacy of Ulu is based on a political and military foundation, the function of Ulu during the early years of the colonial administration is essentially religious, and the dominant political and economic themes of the colonial period in which the novel is set are subordinated to the ritual motif even when they produce direct economic and demographic results. Even the evident political function of uniting the divided communities is achieved though their participation in the rituals over which he presides. The priest of Ulu is too shrewd to fall victim to the danger that is looming on the cultural horizon, so he invests in the future of both dispensations by sending one son to the white man's school

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

and taking a more than neutral interest in the succession to the priesthood. Material productions and interpersonal relations are similarly subjected to the ritual process. Ulu and his priest preside over the agricultural calendar with its economic and demographic implications; Ezeulu rejects the white man's offer of a political appointment as chief as inconsistent with the priesthood; the white man's bout of malaria is understood in folkloric terms as the priest's revenge.

The core political and economic events in the novel are the building of the road and the implementation of the Warrant Chief policy of the colonial administration. But these are subordinated to the themes of religion and literacy. The building of the road does not develop into the exploration of its effect on economic activities. It is mainly an instrument for developing the closely related themes of image, intercultural understanding and race relations. Similarly, the Warrant Chief system is mainly a trigger for the multilayered conflict that is driven by the interpretations of the ritual process. The political theme of indirect rule recedes to the background once the religious discourse takes over. It is arguable of course that the nature of the policy itself makes it distant in the childhood experience that Achebe identifies as part of his inspirational memory for the novel. For while in early childhood he had a close and intimate association with Christianity and Igbo traditional religion through his parents, uncle, church services and school, the white colonial administrators understandably hardly appear in the horizon, except for a faint recollection of a popular song nicknamed Egwu Tochi (Song of the Torchlight) in the mid-nineteen thirties when 'Europe was unwrapping her wares of seduction at the threshold' (2003: 8).

The question arises, what dramatic form or plot is reflected in *Arrow of God*. A hero-centred narrative is usually either a tragedy or an epic. *Arrow of God* is often described as a tragedy. The nature of a tragedy depends of the measure of audience sympathy for the

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

agonists. In other words, tragic empathy – as distinct from compassion -- depends on the extent to which the author encourages the implied reader to identify with each of the main characters. This is evident, in particular, in the movement of tragic sympathy between Ezeulu and the latter day antagonist, the community. The author provides cues for the reader in two recurrent comments in the narrative. The constant reference to Ezeulu's constitutional loneliness is meant to be taken along with the recurrent wisdom that no man, however great, can win judgment against his people. The plot evolves from a choice between what is right and what is wrong – Ezeulu's testimony against Umuaro -- into a choice between, on the one hand, tradition (or is it retribution?) and, on the other, change and survival. The effect on the community is mediated through the scapegoat theme, and the reader's empathy is minimized by the dementia of the hero. He is partly prepared for his role by his constitutional isolation not only in his mental state and physical state, but even as a surrogate in a symbolic race round a cycle of expectant community awaiting absolution, for he has been bred to loneliness. He begins to alienate the reader's empathy from the point when he takes on the community that he and his deity are meant to serve, thus extending the field of spiritual contest beyond his rival, Ezidemili, as well as his real antagonists, the strangers at the gate – church, school and colonial administration. His release from detention unmasks the wrestler behind the priest painted in sacred chalk: 'I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklet.'

The novel is not plotted as a full tragic form. Thus, Achebe depicts, but does not endorse, the values of epic or tragic form with their glorified heroes. He projects instead a third option, the will to survive drastic change without surrendering an identity that has been shaped by tradition. This elegiac ritual drama is actually

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

redemptive, ensuring communal continuity within the inevitable cycle of change and renewal. That is the whole point of the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves. It is the reason that the community plotted this scapegoat performance as their rite of passage to ensure their survival as a group, with the safety valves of precedence and sacrifice. Nwaka, the priest of the autochthonous god, Idemili, does not forget to remind his rival that Ulu had a beginning, with the unspoken implication that what has a beginning would have an end. Nwaka's taunting reminders are reinforced by the icons of mortality in the underground shrine where 'the skulls of all past Chief Priests looked down [on the earth mound which represented Ulu and] on their descendant and successor'. Since death cannot be eliminated in any life history, a surrogate plays the role on behalf of the human community, and the scapegoat theatre may actually spill over into reality. That is the meaning of the memorable words that Ezeulu speaks to his friend Akuebue when he says, it may 'happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things, and their back is broken and hung over a fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood'. In his usual self as a priest possessed by the spirit of truth, he understands the words to be ritual prescriptions and thus anticipates, but does not fully comprehend the prophetic reality of his own words and would be too broken to recall them in his demented last days.

The difference between tragedy and elegy lies in the ideology of progress as a subtext: tragedy focuses on the end of the hero; elegy is the point of view of the survivor and, ironically, a new beginning. The liturgy of this creed is not the dirge but the prayer of survival, and *Arrow of God* ends on an upbeat note: Umuaro fathers send their sons to make their harvest offerings in order 'to bring back the promised immunity'. It is an ironical move that belatedly endorses Ezeulu's prescience. But in the end, the focus is not on the hero's doom but on the community's fate. The novelist presents two sharply opposed interpretations that bring this

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

historical era to a close in Umuaro. The interpretation of the Chief Priest – 'the collapse and ruin of all things' – is clearly a personal one, for the leaders of Umuaro take the different view 'that no man however great was greater than his people; that no man ever won judgment against his clan.' The coda that brings the action to a close is not a dirge but a harvest song, not a tragic lament but a feast of succession, renewal and survival. There is a recent acting out of this collective cultural attitude in the responses to the end of the tragic Nigerian Civil War documented in various literary accounts. The contemporary slogan, 'Happy survival', is common to all the sources, including Ekwensi's novel, *Survive the Peace*, and Achebe's short story, 'Civil Peace'.

The social context of *Arrow of God* is historical. Critics have consistently set out its historical setting and even identified a specific period with precise dates and landmark events [Obiechina, Wren]. Achebe's plot hints at an interpretation of history that is deterministic in ways that are reminiscent of Thomas Hardy and W. B. Yeats. Ezeulu and Winterbottom are not free agents. They act within the will of the gods, transcending ethnicity and race, for the white man's church is run by Africans who are strangers to Umuaro and who cast the sacred python in the negative image of the serpent in the garden. The 'powers of event,' as Achebe terms it, remain constant, although the specific interpretation of the event may depend on the worldviews of different cultures or dispensations. These powers are exercised through ritual in Umuaro, where Ezeulu is a semi-divine priest, and through the secular and political acts of the colonial office who want to turn Ezeulu into a secular Warrant Chief, and who create one of the central events in the novel, the construction of a road that is meaningless to Umuaro and its hostile neighbours. The psychological conflict between Winterbottom and his 'friend' Ezeulu arise because of their different misconceptions of the role of a leader in his community – whether a ritual priest can be

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

translated into a Warrant Chief. For Achebe, apparently, the concepts of event and structure are constant in history; it is perception or image that differs with cultures.

Achebe's ritual representation of the key events of Umuaro history in *Arrow of God* may be said to anticipate – or is at least consonant with – the recent event-history analysis of American Sociology. In the narratives of the Umuaro community, the lifespan of the gods is constantly aligned with historical events, for the gods have been invented to serve a time-related purpose in the first place. Ulu's major of role is periodic, recurrent. It was initially defined and fixed as that of a scapegoat to take over communal misfortunes and dangers, so that when any major threat appears, Ezeulu is there to confront it in whatever capacity, just as he was there for the community during the Abame raids and, by implication, should have been the first to confront the unforeseen threat from the cultural invasion of the white man, as friend or as foe.

*Arrow of God* was first published in 1964. Although the novel had received high praise from critics, with very few complaints about the text of the first edition, Achebe prepared a second edition ten years later in 1974. In the Preface to that edition Achebe explains that the revisions are due to 'certain structural weaknesses'. Robert Wren (1980), the earliest reviewer of these revisions, identified one structural weakness in an extended folktale that has now been abridged, but dismissed the other revisions as lacking in substance. The Eneke Ntulukpa folktale that Ugoye tells appears in its full form in the first edition because Achebe was writing back to the colonisers of the African image in his earlier manner of recreating life in traditional society. Mahood (1977: 181) had written that *Arrow of God* 'presents itself as the documentation of a way of life which is confirmed in all its details by historians and anthropologists'. Surely, Achebe must have felt that having disposed of 'the fundamental theme… that African people did not

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

hear of culture for the first time from Europeans' in *Things Fall Apart,* it was time to get on to this new project that required a much more intense attention to moral and existential questions. The new task did not require him to continue with his earlier attempt at a comprehensive representation of life in a traditional Igbo community. The effect of the expurgation of the folktale is dramatic. Instead of essentially mirroring the past, the extended five-page account has now become two short paragraphs reflecting Umuaro culture in transition. The new version juxtaposes the activity of storytelling in its oral culture with the early beginnings of the new culture of literacy (Izevbaye, 1996: passim).

One impression given by Achebe's editorial work and revisions in the text is that the conventional research resources like sources, backgrounds and interviews revealing the author's intentions are no longer sufficient for the committed reader. Such revisions interrogate the relationship of the words to the initial creative vision, as if words were treacherous to an author's intentions, as T. S. Eliot once complained. There seem to have been two primary motivations for the revisions. First is the desire for a general improvement in the text and second, a more precise account that is also justification of the author's philosophical outlook or worldview.

There are three types of revision involved in the drive for an improved text. The first is editorial, and properly belongs to the publishing house. Some of the printing errors are carried out only corrected up to the sixteenth chapter in the second edition but this consistently carried out in the recent Everyman Library, which is thus technically a third edition rather than a reprint. The underlying reason for the second type of revision is that Achebe is a perfectionist who constantly strives for aesthetic effect. This explains his concern for stylistic matters which, going beyond the ordinary editorial concern over typos make changes that, as Wren complains, would seem to be pointless. However, since texts are

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

representations of reality, the resulting stylistic precision is justification for the changes.

The purpose of the third type of revision is not structural but affective. For Achebe critical interpretation is by itself less important than the psychological effect of the text on the reader. Many of his revisions are reader-oriented in the sense that they focus on the affective nature of the revised parts. The purpose of the creative writing is the transformation of the reader's attitude, especially his view of the African image. This third type is clearly linked to the central theme of change in the novel, and it encourages the reader to accept that change as involved in the nature of things. This partly explains the close attention that Achebe gave to the text not just from the point of view of precision of meaning, but with regards to the effect on the reader. I am aware of the risk of intentional and affective fallacies when I propose this interpretation of the revisions.

The second motivation shows why Achebe made the revisions even when they may seem, on the surface, to be pointless. Such revisions are part of a wider philosophy of being to which Achebe connects the specific editorial work on the text: 'Perhaps changes are rarely called for or justified, and yet we keep making them.' The underlying philosophy is the idea that history is itself driven by change, an idea that Achebe had earlier in *Things Fall Apart* aligned with Yeats' similar philosophy of history as an endless spiral of change. Tradition is the attempt to stabilize the accumulated experience of a people and assimilate new events into existing customs. It is event that drives history and changes tradition or overrides it. Because change is in the nature of things, the extreme traditionalist who stands in the way of the process is destroyed, like Okonkwo and like Ezeulu. Admirable, heroic individuals, their tragedy is not personal, for once they have committed selves irredeemably to the resisting change, their people part ways with them and their gods abandon them or are themselves destroyed.

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

Because of this process of change, successive generations may perceive the events of the past from points of view that are different from their predecessors' and may feel the need for a re-reading of the past.

*Arrow of God* is a bold experiment in prose fiction adapted to Igbo ideology or worldview. It has crossed the content of ritual drama with the medium of prose fiction, and reshaped the form of the tragic novel with its heroic individual into an elegiac scapegoat narrative with the survival of the community as its orientation. By ritualizing history and making recurrent change part of its essential structure, Achebe has split open the provincial implications of that interpretation of tradition that is based on inflexible precedence, offering the alternative of tradition as an opening out instead to new ideas and institutions, all the while retaining the validity of the old mores and principles that elevate the community above the individual. For all its simplicity, there is an unforgettable final message in the combination of words from Achebe's Preface: 'Perhaps changes are rarely called for or justified, yet we keep making them,' and the elders' interpretation of Ezeulu's fate: 'that no man however great, was greater than his people.' It is true that history has brought radical change to Umuaro, but they have devised a tradition of coping with change. And Achebe pays tribute to those who stand fast by tradition, as well as the defectors who will be forgiven for their close scrutiny of event.

**Works cited**

Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God.* London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1964.

Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God*. (2nd ed). London, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974.

Achebe, Chinua. *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart. No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God*. Introduction by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

OKIKE
AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING
NUMBER 52, 01 NOVEMBER 2014
ISSN 0331-0566

Everyman's Library. New York, London, Toronto: Alfred Knopf. xx + 513pp. 2010.
Achebe, Chinua. *Home and Exile*. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.
Ash, William. 'The Dramatic Presentation of Achebe's Novels.' In Ihekweazu.
Echeruo, M. J. C. 'The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual,' *Research in African Literatures*, 4.1 (Spring 1973)
Emenyonu, Ernest. *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1978.
Egudu, R. N. 'Achebe and the Igbo Narrative Tradition,' *Research in African Literatures*, 12.1 (Spring 1981).
Egejuru, Phanuel. 'Orethory Okwu Oka: A Neglected technique in Achebe's Literary Artistry.' In Ihekweazu, 394 – 410.
Ihekweazu, Edith, (ed.). *Eagle on Iroko: Selected papers from the Chinua Achebe International Symposium*, 1990. Heinemann Educational Books, 1996.
Izevbaye, Dan. 'Achebe's First Two Novels: The Writing of a New Consciousness.' In Ihekweazu, 346 –366.
Mahood, M. M. 'Idols of the Den.' In *The Colonial Encounter*. London: Rex Collings, 1977.
Nnolim, Charles. 'The Sons of Achebe.'
Obiechina, Emmanuel. 'The Human Dimension of History in *Arrow of God*'. In *Culture, Tradition and the African Novel*. Cambridge University Press.
Peters, Jonathan A. '*Arrow of God*: Masks in Masquerade.' In *A Dance of the Masks: Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka*. Washington D. C. Three Continents Press, 1978, 115 – 128.
Wren, Robert M. *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels.* Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1980.