

Editorial

The Golden Jubilee Conference, 17-18 July 2014, called for a rereading of *Arrow of God* with a strong consciousness of its identity as a work of art. The papers turned up profoundly conflicting readings of the same identical passages, often depending on the interpretive paradigms at work. Some of the old ones like culture conflict and the portrayal of the dignity of Igbo culture are encountered, but overwhelmingly, there are new departures. For example, there are deep explorations of the psychological states of some of the characters, particularly Ezeulu, re-appraisals of the contradictions in the attitudes of the people in their beliefs and in their relationships with one another; and there are reflections prompted by form and genre, enabling the perception of this narrative as one coherent *act of art* in which the work is *the same* as its meaning, not just a series of message-bearing signs.

In opening up this one act, there is a release of possibilities of meaning, without, in the words of Ejesu, ‘necessarily implicating an “ultimate point” that closes the argument’ but allows that ‘every reading [is] merely a ‘direction’ and not the be-all and end-all of directions’. Hence we see that the relative standings of the gods in the community are read differently in some of the papers; similarly, the sources, dimensions, and implications of the tragic movement in the narrative, even the causal relationships among incidents and whether the story projects Chinua Achebe’s views or is driven by a necessity internal to the *poetry* are issues of conflicting readings.

The understanding seems to be unanimous in the papers contained in this volume that Ezeulu is important in this narrative in a way not even Okonkwo is in *Things Fall Apart*. *Arrow of God* is the kind of narrative, according to Aristotle, that ‘turns on character’. Many find him complex and enigmatic, a profoundly humane character, and yet *more* than man; a sensitive and fair-minded individual, at the same time unyielding and unwilling to conciliate, a clear-sighted thinker who, nevertheless, does not know the limits of his power; a leader, but at the same time ready to go it alone; a wise

and diligent counsellor, who seems to have difficulty sometimes separating personal from cultic and state affairs; a hard-pressed hero, who nevertheless will not walk away from a fight if only to live to fight another day; a cultic functionary who also bears on his own body the conflicts and tensions of the times; the protagonist of his deity's claim to dominion of history, who also negotiates to buy into a historical process which claims absolute and ultimate rationality.

If only for the dialogue from very strong positions gathered together in this one volume, it may well be said that the Anniversary had been worth celebrating. One hopes that the papers contained in this volume will stimulate more and more *daring* readings of this literary masterpiece.