Although *Arrow of God* (1964), comes after *No Longer at Ease* (1960), it may be viewed both in its theme and in its presentation of the crisis in Ibo society as an extension of *Things Fall Apart*. It renders the cultural situation with greater psychological complexity and dramatic intensity. In fact, the action of *Arrow of God* takes place around the early 1920s when the colonial rule of the British over Nigeria had been well established and the Ibo society had passed from the stage of confrontation and survival into one of self-adaptation within the new order characterised by altered social values. While projecting a vividly peopled landscape, Achebe probes deeper into the inner contradictions of power, status and hierarchy which the colonial rule brings to the fore in the Ibo community. Unlike *Things Fall Apart* which depicts a world lost to
history, *Arrow of God* presents a society in the throes of historical experience. The Ibo society is presented in its emergence into a reality which demands a meaningful self-differentiation and a recovery of self-confidence on the part of its members. The action of *Arrow of God* is involved in the flux of time, and its protagonist is trapped in the irreversible duality of a cultural environment in transition.

Achebe explores the dilemma of the Ibo people mainly through the ordeal of the self undergone by Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu. The shifts in the social milieu are dramatised through the psychological conflict in the personality of Ezeulu. Consequently, *Arrow of God* offers an inside view of Ibo culture, from the point of view of the central consciousness of a representative individual whose actions and fortunes constitute the pattern of tribal destiny.

The narrative plunges in media res with Ezeulu contemplating the nature of his power, and moves back and forth in time, exploring the social and individual predicaments
through historical and racial memory as it shapes the immediacy of the present. The novel opens with Ezeulu watching for the new moon by whose sign, as the custodian of the tribal conscience and custom, he has to announce the Yam Festival, the successful performance of which would, according to tradition, ensure the survival and prosperity of the tribe in the future.

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and therefore over the people he wondered if if was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman... If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival - no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? ... His mind persisted in trying to look too closely at the nature of his power.

Ezeulu experiences a sense of crisis in the exercise of his function and authority on which the stability and fulfilment of Umuaro depend. Ezeulu is the mediator between the human world and the spirit world and his priestly obser-

vance and enactment of the ritual calendar are crucial to the life of the tribe. But the pressures of history, particularly the events in the immediate past render his authority uncertain. His trusteeship of the community becomes a highly ambivalent concept. Ezeulu as an individual is burdened with the agony of indecision, which is complicated by his own drive for power. (In the world of man he is master, whereas in the world of spirit he is but a servant. Caught in this dilemma of a double role, he overreaches himself. He seeks to test the limits of his power as Chief Priest, and in the process his limitations as a private and public individual are exposed.) In trying to resolve the conflict between his priestly pride and his existential despair, Ezeulu has the task of defining his authority and responsibility and reconciling the competing roles of priest and man. The novel embodies the search for the proper responses to these uneasy and anxious questionings. Ezeulu is constantly tempted to interpret the commands of the tribal God in terms of his own psychological compulsions, directed at the assertion of power and authority beyond his traditional status and function. In
the result, his religious duties and responsibilities get mixed up with the turbulent processes of political power in action. The delicate balance between opposing social forces and the worlds of Gods and men, so characteristic of the traditional Ibo society and the resilient world-view underlying it, is disturbed and Ezeulu is isolated from the self and society alike.

In presenting these elements of external and internal conflict, Arrow of God surveys the events of the past as the source of the crisis both in the society and the individual. Ezeulu is the custodian of a tribal organisation which had come into existence under the threat of a common danger and the necessity for survival. The six villages of which it is now comprised had once lived as separate tribal units, but faced with the menace of external invasion by a more powerful neighbouring tribe, they merged themselves into a single confederation. This social contract of the tribe also led to the installation of a new God 'Ulu', of whom Ezeulu is the priest in the place of the earlier tribal Gods who had failed to provide survival and succour for the people in this hour of need. However, the advent of colonial rule
diluted this historical motivation for tribal unity. The danger of a common dissolution removed, the confederating tribes tend to break apart. Internal dissensions and tensions between tribal individualism and separatism are revived, and the old jealousies and differences reappear. The double crisis of the community undermines the sovereignty of the common deity and the authority of the common priest.

This situation is further complicated by the rivalry between Ezeulu and Idemili, who nurtures the ambition of attaining the place of Ezeulu by subverting and usurping his position. The faction against Ezeulu gains momentum when, in a land dispute with a neighbouring village, Ezeulu takes up a position which goes against his own tribe. (Although Ezeulu emerges as a man of truth and integrity in the eyes of the colonial administration, he is projected by his tribal adversaries as an enemy of his own people.) (The charge that Ezeulu has turned against his own people and abetted forces working against their security and their traditional rights gains credence when he decides to send one of his sons to the Mission school, ostensibly to enable
him to master the White man's instruments and strategies of power. The mission-educated son, Oduche, brings about the desecration of the scared python, which is viewed as a sacrilege and a defiance of the tribal Gods. Achebe thus shows how the role of the chief priest in maintaining tribal unity is undermined by the contingencies of history from which no culture or individual is permanently exempt.

The hardening of attitudes between Ezeulu and the priest of Idemili brings up basic issues like the nature of power and the limits of that power in the exercise of the chief priest's primary functions which are religious rather than political. Religion which had once united the people has been transformed by politics which now divides the people. In this perspective, Achebe examines the nature of the contractual bond which brings people together and explores the consequences of the impending dissolution of that bond. The tribal society had built into itself various elements of flexibility, often going to the extent of evolving an entirely new structure including the replacement of the Gods themselves, when they no longer
can serve the interests of the tribe. It was one such contingency in the past that had placed *Ulu* and his Chief Priest in a position of power. In the dialectic of power, and in the context of the British presence as the over-riding and sovereign power, religious duties and political privileges get entangled with one another leading to the various tensions described in the narrative. (Achebe's *Arrow of God* thus becomes a historical and political novel) doubled into one, often imaginatively exploiting the dialectical tension between the temporal and existential factors for purposes of delineating the complex nature of individual human motivation and behaviour. Ezeulu, who derives his role and authority from the historical past, is exposed to the hazards of a politicised present. (He is presented as an individual who gradually goes out of touch with reality, and whose perceptions are clouded by his egotism.)

The crisis in the Ibo power structures is paralleled by the ambiguities inherent in the colonial system of administration itself. As the British administration establishes itself firmly on the Nigerian soil, the logistics of colonial power prompts new modes and strategies of governing
the tribal peoples. The classical colonial administration rested on a direct control of the subject people through administrative agencies adopting the attitudes of paternalism and benign indifference to local custom. Its responses to the tribal organisation were drawn from a single central authority. The colonial order seeks to rely on indirect control and devolution of routine authority on the local native elements. The colonial rulers now seek to entrust minor positions in the administration to the local chiefs and control the natural resources and 'Man Power' from a distance. The doctrine of decentralised exercise of power and authority has now become an instrument of the new policy applied to the African colonies as a whole. (However, the modified system of indirect administration ignores the basic democratic principle upon which the Ibo tribal organisation is founded.) The Ibo tribal organisation has been traditionally an open system which facilitated the decision-making process through tribal consultation, common counsel and collective consensus. This democratic ethos comprehended all tribal affairs, religious and secular, and governed the dispensation of justice as well as the regulation of tribal life through the observance
of the appropriate customs and rituals. Indirect rule opened a veritable Pandora's Box by releasing forces inimical to the facts of the inherited tribal way of life. Divided loyalties, personal rivalries, animosities and miscellaneous futilities have now crept into a society which had in the past been at ease with itself. Thus when Ezeulu is given the commission for being a warrant chief by the British administration, the central democratic premise of the Ibo society is ignored and things fall apart. This results in the erosion of tribal values on one hand and of the sacred authority of the Chief Priest on the other.

Achebe counterpoints the dialectic of power in the tribe and the clash of personalities and roles within the Ibo community by setting them off against the problems of the dual mandate and indirect rule on the part of the colonial administration. Unfolding the colonial crisis through the character of Captain Winterbottom, Achebe makes him a dramatic foil to Ezeulu. The European administrator in Africa is alienated from his own world on one hand and from the African environment on the other. Captain Winterbottom has a strong belief in the British Mission in Africa as an instrument of
running an errand of civilization into the dark African wilderness. Conscious of the White man's burden, like all old-world colonials, this strong-minded and authoritarian administrator believes in shaping Africa in the European image by exercising coercive power in the grand colonial style. He argues in favour of this policy from his past experiences, based on the primacy of the old hierarchical structure of direct rule, and resists any innovations in which he is unwillingly involved. The concept of the indirect rule undermines the myth of African primitivism as conceived by the District Commissioner in Things Fall Apart, a view which is shared by Captain Winterbottom. He resents the new concept of devolution and insists on maintaining the rigid hierarchy of power. Winterbottom, who inhabits a European world, which is as much governed by its own romantic rituals and hierarchical discriminations, faces a situation in which the old assumptions and equations of power and status are no longer valid. The efforts of the new colonial bosses to promote new concepts of power and their structural correlates are strongly opposed by Winterbottom who sees the events happening in
the fugitive European communities as a threat to the White man's moral imperative and holy mission based on the natural inferiority of the African natives. Winterbottom's dilemma and predicament are made the dramatic analogues of Ezeulu's own situation in his tribe. In dramatising Winterbottom's personality crisis, Achebe imparts a new dimension to the conflict of cultures in the throes of historical crisis.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the Ibo community is dramatised through its own internal ambiguities and conflicts, and its relation to the colonial system is left more or less tangential. (On the other hand, in *Arrow of God*, the Ibo society is compared and contrasted with the colonial society in its social content as well as its world-view and personality-conflict. In highlighting the centrifugalism of change in both societies, *Arrow of God* resembles Forster's *A Passage to India* by presenting the two cultures that confront one another as worlds divided within themselves and both exposed and subjected to historical change.) In the result, the idea of a manifest destiny working through individuals and cultures finds its appropriate
objective correlatives in the protagonists. If Ezeulu represents the Ibo society in crisis, Winterbottom represents the colonial British society in crisis. It is the meeting and matching of these sharply defined forces and personalities that intensifies the action of the novel while dramatising the conflicting assumptions and manifestations of power.

Achebe offers yet another dramatic centre to his narrative in the neutral middle ground that exists between the two extreme positions represented by the Chief Priest and the Chief Administrator. This is projected through a society emerging out of the ruins of the tribal and colonial cultures represented by a character like Nwodika. In a transitional society compromise and adaptability became virtues in coping with social crisis and turning it to self-advantage. What Ezeulu and Winterbottom by their rigid stances make impossible, the people in this emerging society are able to achieve by blending the usable past of the tribe with the realities of colonial dispensation. Tradition and modernity cannot only be reconciled but
also brought together in a new thrust for social action resting on pragmatism and convenience. This new pragmatism is associated with the world of the missionaries among whom the indigenous ways of life are grafted on Western and Christian practices. A native priest like Moses reveals this sense of accommodation and compromise by translating the Christian content into Ibo custom, thereby seeking a new road on which all are the part of the same thing, and all are pilgrims sojourning towards a similar existential goal. Nwodika and Moses are adaptable individuals who show how by means of a flexible and open world-view a society can participate in the benefits of a changing world without succumbing to destruction by resistance. In them the average as heroic is affirmed and the tension between alternative modes of action is resolved in the direction of social order and continuity of life. In a sense such an attitude tends to restore to the Ibo society its traditional flair for accommodation through the flexibility of adaptation to new circumstances and unexpected contingencies. The old virtue of the community staying together on a shared ground of practical convenience and
egalitarian compromise, its capacity to respond to challenge in terms of accepting the golden mean, is reaffirmed. From this point of view, Achebe seems to hold an imaginative brief for the Ibo traditional morality of expediency which keeps the society an open form. David Carroll observes how the interaction of the three worlds of the novel constitutes an important shaping device in the structure of the Arrow of God.

The introduction of this third missionary world opens up new perspectives in the novel. Instead of seeing Umuaro as a political unit as the colonial administrators do, we are now encouraged to understand its problems as those of a religious sect. It is, of course, both, and in this way Achebe can stress first one and then the other of its major concerns. 2

II

Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, while sharing the social and historical experience of the Ibo tradition in a process of change and crisis, differ significantly

in their dramatisation of events and in the delineation of human character. Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, is presented as a victim-hero, whereas Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* is rendered as a tragic character whose isolation and alienation from his people are more organically related to his failure as a private person as well as a public figure. Ezeulu is under the pressure of a complex fate which proceeds from the ambivalence of his situation in which the forces of change are in abrasive competition with those of tradition in defining for him the nature of the contemporary reality. The structure of the folk-narrative, adopted in *Things Fall Apart*, is modified so as to provide for the dramatic element, and the narrative begins in media res, starting with the immediate pressure of reality affecting the protagonist's ordeal of conscience, and moves back and forth in time, the historical past surrounding the narrative present in loops and knots, and the drama of human personality unfolding itself in all its complexity of motive and impulse. As Obiechina observes:

From these brief but significant flashes back into the past, we build up a picture
of the precolonial society with which the colonial present is contrasted. 3

The presence of the past, rather than its archaic content, is what lends the vital enacting power to the narrative, and it is within this framework that the tragic responsibility of the protagonist is fixed. The conflict in the human personality is thus convincingly related to the crisis in the structural elements of a community in transition.

In exploring the darker areas of consciousness in the protagonist, Achebe traces Ezeulu's heroic failure. In contrast to Okonkwo, Ezeulu is more intellectual and introspective; Okonkwo is a Herculean hero whereas Ezeulu is a Promethean hero. Achebe emphasises the point when he observes:

Ezeulu the chief character in Arrow of God is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is an intellectual. He thinks about why

things happen - he is a priest and his office requires this - so he goes to the roots of things and he is ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is completely different from Okonkwo's. He is ready to come to terms with it - up to a point - except where his dignity is involved. This he could not accept; he's very proud. 4

At the outset, Achebe presents the protagonist in all his supreme dignity and power. Half-black, half-white, Ezeulu is the intermediary between the human world and the spirit world. His role is to interpret to Umuaro the will of the God and to perform the two most important rituals in the life of the villages - the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and that of the New Yam, one ceremony to cleanse the six villages of their sins before the planting season, and the other to thank Ulu for mellow fruitfulness. Ezeulu thanks Ulu on behalf of all the people of the six villages and supplicates for good fortune of the entire tribal confederation:

Ulu, I thank you for making me see another new moon. May I see it again and again. May this household be healthy and prosperous. As this is the moon of planting may the six villages plant with profit. May we escape danger in the farm - the bite of a snake or the sting of the scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland ... may our wives bear male children.

May children put their fathers into the earth and not fathers their children. May good meet the face of every man and every woman. Let it come to the land of the riverain folk and to the land of the forest peoples. 5

it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was. Now the Chief Priest of Ulu is more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival - no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare.

Ezeulu was stung to anger by this as though his enemy has spoken it. 'Take away that word dare', he replied to this enemy. 'Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not yet been born'.

This obstinacy, which proceeds from Ezeulu's conception of his infallible authority as the Master of Time, forces him to assume a stance of internal rivalry with Nwaka, a wealthy chief and principal supporter of Ezidemili, the Chief Priest of the God Idemili, one of the deities displaced

by Ulu. It also impels him to take a stand against the alien power and culture which represent the new sovereign authority. Besides obstinacy, Ezeulu has an ardent desire for power ultimately causing the death of Ulu Himself. The failure of the priest brings about the death of the God, from which the tragedy of a whole society proceeds in all its grim inevitability. As Ravenscroft observes, Ezeulu's complex misunderstanding of the relationship between his personal desire for power and his sacred priestly responsibilities brings madness to him and ultimately destroys his people's traditional faith in their protecting God Ulu. 7

Of the two crises in the story, the rivalry between Ulu and Idemili and the episode of the warrant chieftaincy, the former one is the more crucial in the sense that it generates the momentum of tragedy from an inner focus, defining the centrifugal forces of disruption which break up the community. Unlike Idemili, Ulu, the protector, is created by the people of the six villages who comprise Umuaro, the confederation which had succeeded in resisting the invading Abam. At the time of the action of the novel, around 1921, Ulu is powerful. The rivalry of Ulu and Idemili is quite manifest in the direct attack of Ezeulu by Ezidemili, the priest of python God. Nwaka, supporter of Ezidemili, pays no heed to Ezeulu's advice in the land dispute with Okperi, a neighbouring village. Despite the Chief Priest's advice not to go to war, 'a war of shame', Umuaro does go to war. The fighting is stopped by the White man, Winterbottom, the District Officer, who goes to the very origin of the feud; and at the investigation Ezeulu gives evidence stating that they have no claim over the land in dispute and that Umuaro ought not to have fought at all. The District Officer admires the priest's
Winterbottom tells his Assistant, Clarke,

I think I told you the story of the fetish priest who impressed me most favourably by speaking the truth in the land case between these people here and Umuaro. 8

But the Priest has to incur the displeasure of his kinsmen and the people of the clan for this act of betrayal as it is interpreted by his adversaries. His own people in Umuaro are led to believe that he is trying to shake hands with the 'white body'. In fact, Ezeulu, unlike Okonkwo, understands the power of the alien government and decides to send one of his sons, Oduche, to the mission school. His action is justified in his view as he believes that if any power is to be retained in the traditional hands, the present generation should learn the White man's methods of manipulating the power structures through western education. He wants his son to learn the White man's wisdom which is well-recognised on all hands. Moreover, the Oracle prophe-

sies that the White man's intention is to take over the land and rule, and in such a case it would be wise to have a man of his family in the band. He makes it clear to his son Oduche who almost kills the sacred royal python by locking it inside the box given to him in school:

At first Oduche did not want to go to Church. But Ezeulu called him to his Obi and spoke to him as a man would speak to his best friend ... I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the Whiteman today will be saying had we known tomorrow. 9

Oduche's mother, Ugoye, is reluctant to send her son to the White man's school, but she is forced to concede, as Ezeulu is impatient with her. The tradition-bound Oduche becomes a changed lad. His reluctance gives way to resolution and reasoning. The boy makes very good progress and is popular with his teacher and members of the Church.

Mr. Goodcountry's inspirational preachings and teachings make Oduche decide to kill the Royal python but he dare not hit it on head and as a way out he locks it in a box, thus absolving himself of the sacrilege.

The python would die for lack of air, and he would be responsible for its death without being guilty of killing it. In the ambivalence of his present life his act seemed to him a very happy compromise. 10

Ezigdmili, the python-priest now has the much-needed opportunity to expose and decry his rival's selfish and irreligious action of sending the boy to the mission school and thereby instigating him indirectly to cause the death of the sacred python. Ezeulu receives a message from Ezigdmili who wants to know what the priest of Ulu is going to do about the abomination which has been committed in his house. Ezeulu feels that what has happened is not an offence and that it is not serious enough for the priest of Idemili to send him an insulting message. Achebe treats the python incident as symptomatic of the struggle for power and also

Achebe's ability to reveal ambiguous human motives is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of the boy Oduche, seeking to destroy the sacred python without killing it. 11

It is only later that Ezeulu confesses that he had to offer his son as a sacrifice for preserving the sanctity and supremacy of his God, Ulu.

Ezeulu knows his enemies and the origin of their grievances. The priests of Idemili and Ogwugwu and Eru and Udo have only a secondary role since Ulu is the Chief deity. Moreover, the Ibo have never experienced a tyrannical, non-accephalous system of authority. In fact, Idemili had been supreme before the coming of Ulu. As Robert M. Wren remarks:

The origin of Idemili is never discussed in the novel, but in Achebe's 1974 revised

edition the insertion by the author of a single word defines the history in a way that can be confirmed by evidence outside the novel, in the town of Achebe's birth, Ogidi. In the revision, Ulu is speaking directly to his priest, at a time when Ezeulu has been contemplating appearing the town people permitting the harvest. "Go home and sleep", the God says, as if speaking to an unruly child and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me so that his python may again come to power" (Arrow of God, 1974 Edition, p.192). The operative revision is the word 'again'; in earlier editions, Idemili had no claim to power, but the change implies that Idemili was supreme before coming of Ulu. 12

—Considering the relationship between the Chief Priest and the people of the tribes the British wanted a person, clearly in charge of each village. And so they resolve to appoint local chiefs even against the Ibo custom. Winterbottom, the strong-minded officer, finds himself compelled to implement the British Government's policy of 'Indirect Rule' much against his will. He doesn't relish the very policy and he reveals his unconcealed disgust when he tells Clarke:

We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones - more likely filthy animal skins - we not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before. 13

But he has to appoint a chief as he has received a reminder from the Governor to speed up the appointment of two warrant chiefs in his district. His choice is Ezeulu because of the latter's testimony in the land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi, which established his credentials as a man of integrity in his view.

David Carroll sees in this ironic election of the recalcitrant priest to act as warrant-chief an uneasy balancing of two mighty opposites both of which are torn by a sense of crisis:

Winterbottom clearly feels that it might not be too painful to hand over power to the 'impressive-looking fetish priest' who seems to understand the White man's justice. In this way, as the two main characters jealously safeguard the authority which has been entrusted to them, they

both find reassurance in the land inquiry which fits conveniently into their very different patterns of meaning. And for the moment it does seem as if the aims of the two men coincide. Winterbottom wishes to invest Ezeulu with the authority he so much desires. But the inquiry, the only occasion on which the two men meet in the novel, contains something more, a moment of rapport between two strong-minded men of power whose authority is being questioned. As the similarities become clear it is with an effort that we remind ourselves that one character inhabits a world of gods, priests and ikenga, the other a world of government memoranda, district commissioners and delayed promotion. 14

Ezeulu is summoned to appear before the District Officer. But he refuses to go as he has been criticised in the land disputes as having let down his kinsmen and supported the Okperi people before the White men. The court messenger's arrogant manners and indifferent gestures also provoke Ezeulu's temper and he bluntly defies the White man's power:

You must first return, however, and tell your White man that Ezeulu does not leave his hut. If he wants to see me he must come here. 15


In refusing to appear before the British Officer, Ezeulu, apart from revealing his personal pride, is also acting in conformity with the tribal protocol prescribed by his priestly status, although this aspect is not understood by the white rulers.

Ezeulu cannot but discuss the matter with his clansmen in accordance with the democratic custom of the community. In the meeting, Nwaka, his chief rival, loses no chance to make sarcastic remarks against him. He reminds everyone of Ezeulu's role in the land dispute. Convinced by his argument, the opponents of Ezeulu interpret his refusal as cowardice. Ezeulu changes his mind and on the next morning he walks to Okperi only to find himself locked up in the guard room for his insulting reply to the British Officer. This is a critical step leading to a total impasse and confusion in both camps. Winterbottom now cannot settle the issue of warrant-chiefship despite the reminder from the Governor, unless he decides to select another from among the native leaders or titleholders. By keeping Ezeulu under arrest, he prevents the Chief Priest from attending to his ritual responsibilities in declaring the Harvest season, which brings the community to the brink of famine and starva-
tion. As Achebe observes:

Perhaps it was Captain Winterbottom's rage and frenzy that brought it on, 16

and not any deliberate motive to hold the tribe to such extensive ransom. Suddenly Winterbottom collapses and goes into a delirium. Ezeulu is at last summoned and the young British official, Clarke, offers the post of warrant-chief to the priest, but soon, reacting angrily, puts him back in jail for his reply:

Tell the White man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu. 17

Ezeulu is set free, as suddenly as he has been locked up.

Altogether Ezeulu stays for thirty-two days in Ikperi during which period he cannot perform the ritual of eating the sacred Yams. Until all the old Yam are eaten, he cannot announce the Yam Festival. Returning home, he stands firm

---

17. Ibid., p. 215.
in being dutiful. He decides not to announce the harvest under the circumstances, because the appropriate ritual sanctions have not been completed. This he does with much agony and tension, for he cracks down under the emotional tension. Yet he receives a revelation from his God:

'Ta, Nwanu, barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child! 'Who told you this was your own fight?'

Ezeulu trembled and said nothing.

'I say who told you that this was your own fight which you could arrange to suit you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he-he! laughed the deity the way spirits do.—a dry, skeletal laugh. 'Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you not know what happens when two elephants fight? Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, who wants to destroy me so that his python may come to power. Now you tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for me and Idemili we shall fight to the finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet!'

After that there was no more to be said. Who was Ezeulu to tell his deity how to fight the jealous cult of the sacred python? It
was a fight of the gods. He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god. 18

Ezeulu doesn't heed even the suggestions made by the elders to resolve the deadlock and he firmly replies:

'I am the chief priest of Ulu and what I have told you is his will not mine'. 19

Supported by the divine sanction, he refuses to announce the feast. Ezeulu's supporters believe that he is helpless while his foes find his action revengeful. The new moon appears and the situation is at its apex. Ezeulu eats the twelfth Yam and announces the New Yam feast in a month's time. At this juncture the missionaries perform an alternative ritual, under sacerdotal authority and sanction of the alien religion. Whoever made his thank-offering to God could harvest his crops without fear of Ulu. The action spreads and the problem is solved. The Yam is

harvested in the name of the Son. Ezeulu's mind is now full of heavy load. One of his best-loved sons, Obika, dies of a severe fever as he participates in a funeral ceremony, though suffering from fever, performing the role of the night spirit, running round the village. The death of his son is a severe blow and Ezeulu cannot reason.

'What happened to him? Who did this?
I said who? Ozumba began to explain but Ezeulu did not hear. The matchet fell from his hand and he slumped down on both knees beside the body. 'My son', he cried. 'Ulu, were you there when this happened to me?'

Foiled in his public role as the priest of the tribe, with his authority undermined and his God rendered ineffectual, Ezeulu sees in the personal tragedy, an almost apocalyptic disaster symptomatic of his total failure, and he goes insane. Bereft of his magical prowess, his manna, Ezeulu becomes, in the words of Margaret Laurence,

"a senile old man, witless with grief." 21

III

While the *Arrow of God* continues the theme of the protagonist's isolation from his society, first illustrated in *Things Fall Apart*, the nature of the conflict and the crisis both within the tribe, the individual are explored in their many-sided implications. Ezeulu, the priest of the tribe, faces the more complex challenge, not of resisting change, but of manipulating the traditional tribal structures of power and sacred authority to achieve an authentic accommodation to the new order. If *Things Fall Apart* dramatises the death of a hero, the *Arrow of God* traces the catastrophic results following the death of a god who is rendered obsolescent and powerless to fulfil the needs of a tribe which can no longer depend on the resources of its internal order for survival. The old crisis-deity 'Ulu' can no longer keep the tribe together because in the fight of gods He loses his supernatural efficacy. Correspondingly, Ezeulu who considers himself as only an arrow in the bow of his god, loses his mastery over the tribe because the gods have replaced him as their instrument. The White man and his functionaries in the
colonial system of power and his new agents drawn from the Christian converts, who are progressively on political and social ascendency, become the agents of this process. Ezeulu is driven to the point where he is forced to assert his independence of the clan, to protect which is his role and duty, and becomes a sort of Coriolanus to his own people. Ezeulu's isolation from the community is also aggravated by his greed for power and his obduracy in resisting its traditional, seasonal rituals. In the struggle for power, Ezeulu is burdened by the ambivalence of his role as master in the world of man and servant in the world of spirits. His traditional religious duties do not entail the exercise of political power with which he is tempted by the British administration and by which he is also punished for not accepting the offer of the position of a warrant-chief. The duality of his role is further accentuated by the crisis in the British administration as high-lighted by the opposition between the dual mandate and the indirect rule dramatised in the personality of Winterbottom the old colonialist who resents the very idea of devolution of power in favour of the natives. The contrast and correspondence between the two worlds of the Chief Priest and the District Commi-
sessioner constitute a basic dichotomy in the novel which is traced with great subtlety by Achebe. Ezeulu's scanning the sky for the new moon to proclaim the onset of the harvest is in symbolic correspondence to Captain Winterbottom's watching the first rains of the year. Ezeulu's seasonal wait for the new moon introduces an element of irony by way of isolating him from the familiar world of the tribe, whereas Captain Winterbottom's vigil describes the externality of landscape in an alien environment. The inner and outer realities in these two worlds are traced closely as their custodians seek to reconcile them in terms of their own differing perceptions of their status and mission.

Achebe fills the tribal landscape with details of social activity in both the worlds and sets up Ezeulu and Winterbottom as mutual foils to each other. The tribal society is regulated by rituals and hierarchies while the European community too observes the exaggerated formalism of its own social rituals and hierarchical protocols as a defensive strategy against the unknown. The events of the narrative are fitted into the colonial reality with the tribal logic, and the tribal reality is tested by the colonial logic; and
the clash of these two responses produces the dramatic tension in the novel. As David Carroll points out:

One character inhabits the world of Gods, Priests and 'Ikenga! the other a world of government memoranda, District Commissioners and delayed promotion'.

Both Winterbottom and Ezeulu are increasingly isolated by their high-strung attitudes and their self-righteous behaviour and their sense of messianic burden. As Ezeulu seeks to extend his influence into the adjacent worlds of the White man and the Missionaries, he becomes progressively isolated from, and disregardful of, the tribe which looks upon his motives with growing scepticism and incredulity.

Into this complex clash of public and private motives and ego conflicts, Achebe introduces a historical pathos of non-communication. The healthy normality of tribal life is interrupted by the eccentric intrusion of colonial expediency and morality which results in mutual misinterpreta-

tion and general lack of comprehension in all spheres of human activity and interaction. For instance, the land dispute and the feud that follows it are the result of experiences and perceptions not adequately shared and are the backlash of the reality principle not properly comprehended. Ezeulu in refusing to declare the feast fails in his traditional duties and brings the community, which he is supposed to protect, to the brink of starvation. While this failure is traced to his priestly hubris, he unconsciously enters a trap out of which there is hardly any escape. The tragedy of Ezeulu is that he lends momentum to the breakdown of his own society by taking out his psychological hurt on the community placed under his trust, striking the very branch on which he sits as it were. He upsets and violates the old wisdom that no man however great is greater than his people and fails to build bridges over the chasms that arise within his tribe. Ezeulu's designs go awry in the contexts in which he seeks power and domination because of a radical failure in his vision. In seeking to test and try the limits of his power he exceeds them and overreaches himself. Eventually his drive for power, complicated by the divided loyalties, fissiparous rivalries
and disruptive jealousies within the tribe, releases all the centrifugal forces at work in the human situation and renders him powerless both as a healer and as a ruler. With an implacable momentum, a chain reaction of events and effects is triggered off, such that Ezeulu pushes his people to a point where they are confronted with extinction unless they discard their tradition and embrace an alien god. Disowning their tribal god they are forced to turn to the western administration which is enthroned as the new tribal god who has the power of declaring the harvest season. Okperi's tribal god, the British Empire, comes to the rescue of the tribe and ensures its survival and continuity when the Christian Church rather than the shrine of Ulu announces the beginning of the harvest operations.

Ezeulu's failure is dramatised in a more intimate way through the irony of his son affiliating himself with the opposing order of the west and the Christian Church and the whole value system which set it apart from the traditional tribal society. The violation of the sanctity of the totemic deity of the python by Oduche becomes symbolic
of the disintegration of the tribe and also of Ezeulu's fall from grace and his plunge into the molten centre of disaster. The Christian God becomes the provider of food and secures the survival of the Ibo tribe which Ezeulu and his federal God fail to ensure. Ezeulu's tragedy proceeds from his inability to understand his fate which cannot be fully comprehended or explained by his priestly knowledge and experience. His agonising incomprehension of what happens to him, and his instinctual awareness that in some strange, inexplicable manner, the old dispensation which conferred power on him has been violated, drive him insane. Achebe depicts his predicament in giving a proverbial conclusion to the priest's story which traces Ezeulu's tragedy to the violation of ancestral truths which had once held the tribe together and legitimised the role and authority of the priest as its trustee and custodian.

Why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and then unleash
rain on him? Who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree? But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take to his heels and in one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry:

If the rat cannot flee fast enough
Let him make way for the tortoise! 23

The tragedy of Winterbottom traces the countervailing force at work in the colonial establishment. Ezeulu's refusal to accept the warrantship marks the erosion of the old colonial power which eventually replaces Winterbottom with Clarke, the new colonialist who harbinger the era of direct rule. The patriarchal role of Winterbottom is rendered dysfunctional and the imperial strategy of 'divide and rule' ushers in a new order which renders him archaic and superfluous. The dialectic of power leads to the isolation and estrangement of Winterbottom, and the heroic age of personal authority and its magisterial paternalism are at an end. Both Ezeulu and Winterbottom as the Chief

Priests of their respective orders are rendered unnecessary by the inexorable historical contingency of change.

**Arrow of God** derives its distinctive force from the presentation of a society which is far more an actor in its destiny than an object that is merely acted upon. History is presented as a dynamic element acting through multiple causation, through a multitude of events and shifting perspectives, and more than a hundred arrows in the bow of god pointing in different directions. As Achebe points out:

> The world is like a mask dance; to see it well you do not stand in one place. 24

As a chronicler of such a world, Achebe takes his place at different levels of reality and demonstrates the many-sided and kaleidoscopic changes that take place in the Ibo society. He goes beyond the individual predicament and offers a study full of sociological insights into the whole pattern of

human relationships in a world comprised of several cultural systems. He shows that the historical outcomes constitute an asymmetrical rather than a symmetrical pattern in human destiny, owing to which individuals are rewarded or punished by an impersonal, indifferent and remote dispensation at work in human affairs. Achebe's conception of history as a Yeatsian gyre enables him to structure his novel as the product of a dynamic shift from unity to diversity. In consequence, 

An important aspect of African fiction is the tension between the traditional and the western conceptions of time. The African view of time rests on its cyclical nature in terms of which the imagined past becomes the reality of the present controlling individuals and institutions. The western view of time on the other hand is linear and is responsible to the contingency and reality of the present. In the changing African society 'Black time' coexists uneasily with western time; and the individual is compelled to take
a position in a no-man's-land between the two extremes, playing the role of the keeper of time, seeking to extend his limited watchman's role. Ezeulu, the keeper of the tribal calendar is especially under this predicament as he attempts to make reality conform to his vision of power and autonomy, to stop time, to imprison it in his own vision. This can be accomplished only by a disruption of cyclic time. In the episodes of the land dispute, the sacred python and his own imprisonment, this struggle is illustrated. Ezeulu's own sense of importance is undermined by his impotence, and his failure both as priest and kinsman to the tribe. There is at work in his life a pattern of recurring fatality flowing from cyclic time, whereby time will no longer run according to the natural seasons but according to the demands of a wilful god.

Of Abraham, God demanded only Issac; from Ezeulu he seems to demand an entire community. 25

In trying to repair the foundations of the past, Ezeulu brings destruction on himself as well as the tribe because he has tried to make the best of both worlds which are incompatible and irreconcilable. Ezeulu's tragedy is that, in remaking the reciprocity of cyclic time into a linear absolute, he unwittingly collaborates with the forces of disintegration in a transitional culture where metaphor has usurped reality, myth has subverted vision and the new order has replaced the old.

While Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart becomes estranged from reality because he, as a product of cyclic time cannot accept temporal linearity, Ezeulu goes to the rack because he makes the unsuccessful attempt to play one against the other to pursue the motives of power and the propitiation of his god. In a sense, Ezeulu's tribal god, himself a product of tribal historicity, now turns into a vindictive deity claiming his priest as an arrow in his bow and demanding of him the wages of sacrifice. In this binary portrayal of Ezeulu as a character exceeding the type, Achebe achieves an ironic balance between personal responsibility and social necessity in projecting the tragic predicament.
of the protagonist. Ezeulu's final role is not that of saviour or priest, but of victim and scapegoat, which gives a ritual content and tone to the historical change from one god to the next.

The theme of power combining with the theme of change brings these two modalities into a state of mutual tension and interaction, thereby extending the conclusions of *Things Fall Apart* into the larger dimension of human universals. If *Things Fall Apart* by and large remains local and regional, *Arrow of God* tends to be a novel of our times, although its action relates to the historical experience of a community and gains a wider context and dimension of reality. In this sense, *Arrow of God* is more synchronic and modern in its rendering of tribal experience than *Things Fall Apart*, and the tragic vision it embodies embraces a wider and a more intense vision and delination of the human situation and predicament.