CHAPTER II

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS:
THINGS FALL APART AND ARROW OF GOD
CHAPTER II

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS: THINGS FALL APART AND ARROW OF GOD

I

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;
The blood dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming."

It is startling to find the Yeatsian pattern traced most closely where Yeats himself was least likely to look for it: in an imaginary but typical village of the lower Niger. The two minds, their perspectives and their fields of vision stand poles apart; for Yeats, the pattern is an instrument of prophecy, and Achebe is not interested in prophecy, rather in analysing the present. Nor is he primarily interested in Europe or its civilization, for which Yeats meant these lines, but Achebe's instrument of interpretation is the same for "his Umuofia is a civilization in miniature, and the chaos finds its way in through slight flaws in its structure, murmurs that might have remained inaudible if they had not found an echo in the darkness."¹
Though much of Achebe criticism centres around the aspect of cross-cultural encounters and consequent conflicts in his novels, a perceptive reading of his works takes us well beyond peripheral issues on the cultural level. It further reveals to us an aspect of introspection not very common in African writing. Coming from an ethos which is essentially tribal and communal, the streaks of individual consciousness definitely provides an interesting dimension to Achebe's novels. The African novelist is essentially communally-oriented, opposed to any consideration of his literature as individualistic 'art for arts' sake'. And to that extent we may say that while asserting their past, these writers are aware of their art as socially functional rather than aesthetically pleasing. Belonging to a small intellectual class, and being an educated person, he is a spokesman for his society; his audience is both the local literate population and the rest of the world. And, in times of transition, writers often speak for their culture and for their people, "exploring the vitality of the African past in the interest of the present, correcting prejudices and misunderstandings of those who are strangers to it, and emphasizing the centrality of language for creative and critical purposes." Yet simultaneously Achebe exhibits a rare concern for individuals' introspection and identity-seeking as well.
Commenting on the misleading generalizations in western criticism regarding the "communalistic" African and the "individualistic" westerner, J. Z. Kronenfeld says that there are in Africa "collectivist, cooperative, small scale, homogenous societies governed by divine sanctions, in which there are close personal bonds between individuals" and he contrasts them with "individualistic, secular, heterogenous societies in which it is the 'cash-nexus' that controls relationships among individuals."³ For the African intellectual, the positive connotations associated with the cooperative side of the dichotomy are crucial: connotations of brotherhood, a non-materialistic outlook, of sharing, of a mystic closeness to nature, not an exploitation of it. In Things Fall Apart,⁴ which has been interpreted in terms of Achebe's presumed social aims as a defense of "traditional" Igbo life, we do find an attempt to balance cooperation and achievements, to balance the idea that one is free to shape one's life, and the idea that one has a preordained fate. In his book Tell Me Africa, Olney wishes to emphasize their communal character even when the Igbos are commonly described as individualistic, and admits that this individuality, when considered in a western perspective, is a partial and non-extreme thing, a brand of individualism rooted in group solidarity.⁵ Hence Okonkwo becomes a representative figure only to a certain extent, he represents one possible cultural type, rather than
the Igbo type. Everything in the novel reaffirms the idea that he overstressed manliness, when an ideal of balance was readily available.

In fact both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* represent a specific phase in the social transition of Nigeria, following its encounter with the west. They put together form a very composite and compact world, where characteristic Igbo rituals and practices are interspersed with the structural requisites of the major themes explored in them. Though chronologically one does not follow the other in order of publication (*Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958, *No Longer at Ease* in 1960 and *Arrow of God* in 1964), they both deal primarily with the pre-colonial and early colonial days in the eastern part of Nigeria occupied by the Igbos. The first Christian missions were established in Igbo region only by the middle of the century; and the British did not intervene there politically until the end of the century. Thus the people of Nigeria who enjoyed their freedom under their respective tribal administrative set ups were eventually brought to face the reality of an alien presence in their midst.

*Things Fall Apart* provides us with an impressive and vivid picture of Igbo society at the turn of the century. The novel is remarkable for its recapturing of the buoyancy and vigour of traditional life, where the rituals of the
community and the life of the individual are merged into order and significance. The plot as such revolves round the character of Okonkwo, the protagonist. But it is actually as much the story of the whole clan as of a single individual. By a very sensitive controlling of the narrative voice, Achebe has been able to capture the communal spirit behind the theme, which is unfolded steadily through the many events and episodes. And the effect can be traced to a narrative voice which does not have any suggestion of an omniscient observer engaged in constant scrutiny of the developments, but rather is a wise and sympathetic one, very much part of the tribe. This strong sense of belonging that guides the narrative voice makes for an intimacy between the reader and the fictive world, but it also renders the novel, and the life it portrays, a sense of order, perspective and harmony whose later destruction is poignant. What is significant, however, is that the formal realism employed by the novelist and the social focus of the narrative perspective does not preclude important glimpses of the private experience of characters. Such a transition from the communal to the individual necessarily implies a tension, but Achebe's achievement is not just the balancing of the two, more important is that the presentation of this social 'glide' is from a narrative point of view that is firmly from 'within' the tribe. Thus Achebe breaks with a narrative tradition
where African society is essentially described (whether the description is sympathetic or hostile) from without, and creates a mode where contradictions, conflicts and changes are presented from a point of view firmly located within the tribal society itself, something that could not adequately be dealt with in terms of the former.

Nevertheless, Derek Wright in "Things Standing Together: A Retrospect on Things Fall Apart" says that there are two distinct narrative voices in the novel, which can be divided into the two broad categories of 'traditional-communal' and 'modern-individual'. The first of these, which is predominant in the first two-thirds of the novel, is the 'communal' voice of one or a number of sympathetic elders who provide eyewitness accounts of Igboland in the 1890s. It is done through a mixture of anecdotes and gossip, folk-tales and proverbs, in which the emphasis is on experience that is shared rather than as it appears to any individual consciousness. The second voice, which obviously intrudes increasingly in the last third of the novel, is the urbane 'editorial' voice of a modern Nigerian who sees beyond the viewpoint of the villagers. This second voice presents the decay of traditionalism, the colonial mentality and the coming of Christianity from a larger, more balanced and detached perspective and in a more distanced and
elaborate style. To cite an example of the more urbanized and distanced tone:

There were many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation. The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia (TFA 126).

The same sophisticated undertone is heard again at Nwoye's conversion: "It was not the mad logic of Trinity that captivated him.... It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow" (TFA 104).

The two voices are equally powerful with a complex neutrality so much so Gareth Griffiths comments that "the modern African intellectual is the descendant of the tribal underdog.... Achebe is the inheritor of Nwoye's revolt as well as Okonkwo's sacrifice." It develops around the central paradox that in the changing world of Umuofia, Nwoye's 'failure' guarantees his survival while Okonkwo's 'success' ensures his downfall. Hence as the plot unfolds, we see that the narrative modulates through its interchange of narrative voices, from the communal of the village to the individual consciousness and back again, so that the two interpenetrate. Private concerns are expressed and
formalized in communal decisions, and the laws governing the punishment of individuals are geared to the building up and maintenance of the whole society. There are still 'strong characters' in Achebe's world--Okonkwo, who thinks he can make his 'chi' obey him, Uzowulu who will listen to no lesser voice of judgement than the 'egwugwu'--but their individuality, while not repressed, is held in check by communal solidarities.

In fact fictional form itself, as a literary genre, has undergone considerable change during the last two hundred years replacing the objective, social orientation of the classical world by a subjective and individualist one. The rise of individualism as a global phenomenon, and the weakening of communal and traditional relationships have in the course of history fostered the kind of private egocentric life we find in the heroes of eighteenth century English novels. In Western Europe, the diffuse nature of social cohesions was undermined by the individualistic pattern of thinking and life, and new modes of personal relationships eventually developed. Fictional narrative gradually evolved as the principal technique for capturing the intricacies of the individual consciousness. Thus, Ian Watt argues, while the novel as a literary form took root, simultaneously private experience emerged as socially significant. 8
Gradually, the novel form itself reflected this development moving from a 'neutral' omniscient narrative to the 'point of view' novel and later, the much more subjectively-centred 'stream of consciousness' novel.

In Africa too, the purely social, corporal existence of its people was deeply affected with the coming of the westerners and by the impact on tribal society of a growing bourgeois, Protestant culture. The society's response to the complex challenge of contact with a colonizing cultural force inevitably resulted in transition and change. The possibilities inherent in such change are numerous, including a new awareness acquired by individuals in the course of the new developments. Perhaps Achebe is the best example of the artistic recording of this new awareness of the self which was hitherto non-existent, or dimly perceived.

Of course Achebe does not portray any mature form of individualism in his novels, but he highlights significant moments of this move towards emergence of the individual consciousness. In fact the term 'individualism' in the context of literature implies an added accent on the 'individual' in contradistinction to the society. All ages and all societies have had their 'individualists', which often meant that they were egocentric, unique or conspicuously independent of current views and customs.
But any attempt at conceptualizing the idea of individualism demands a wider approach:

It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition'—a force that is always social, not individual.9

Such an individualistic society is characterized by a complex of interdependent factors that predicate individualism. It presupposes a particular value system regarding its economy and political administration, and advocates an appropriate ideology too. It is also one "which allows its members a wide range of choices in their actions, and on an ideology primarily based, not on the tradition of the past, but on the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity."10

It is almost inconceivable in a tribal set up, where nothing is a matter of choice or chance, and where 'tradition' is equated to an inviolable force, that the autonomy of the individual be regarded by society as a whole as important. To speak therefore of a social structure based on an ideology of individualism, or even of a change in that direction, is to record a major shift.
The theme of *Things Fall Apart*, as we analyse it, unfolds consequential to the interaction of human reasonings and the divine directives manifested in three powerful forces--the Chi, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, and mother Earth the Goddess. These forces constitute a centre of action from a thematic point of view, but they also provide a life-principle for the people, guiding the fate of every individual Umuofian. Each of the major characters at some stage in the context of the novel faces a direct encounter with the supernatural powers dwelling in their midst, and feels intensely what it means to submit to them. Taken at its face value this would imply that the Igbos conformed to the prescriptive mores of the society with resignation. But the narrative consistently raises to the fore the denial of personal conviction and the negating effect that accompanies this conformity.

This implies that even when they accepted the power and authority of the Chi and the Oracle in principle, in actual life it often involved painful clashes with one's personal preferences. For instance, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves is deeply involved in the tragic fate of Ikemefuna. To the great consternation of the reader who has accepted Ikemefuna as a member of the Umuofia community, it is said: "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and Caves has pronounced it" (*TFA* 51). Also, it is the Chi,
which is a personal spirit, that guides the fate of Okonkwo through prosperity, and then in peril. "But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his Chi says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his Chi agreed" (TFA 25), and that brought him material wealth. But when he is cast out of his clan for a crime inadvertently committed, it is again Chi that is held responsible for the decision taken by the clan: "clearly his personal God or Chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his Chi" (TFA 119). Added to this comes the disturbing news that Okonkwo's son Nwoye has joined the missionaries. Okonkwo in his rage was tempted to take up his matchet, go to the church and wipe out the entire miscreant gang. But he decided against it as "he saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or Chi. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son's behaviour?" (TFA 139).

The power exerted through these forces control and guide the lives of the people of Umuofia, and they realise that there is no escape from it even when it causes them endless anguish. The voice of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves is imaged as decisive in any course of action followed by the tribe, especially in times of crisis. The first major event in the novel, and one that is central to the unfolding of the structure of it, is the incident of
Ikemefuna, which is also significant in effecting a shift in values in the whole community. Thus although this incident could be regarded as calculated murder, that too, of a son by a father, the involvement of the Oracle in the event seals it with supernatural sanction and authenticity, relieves it of the guilt associated with bloodshed, and is made acceptable to the highest social prescriptives. The act wins the approbation of the 'communal consciousness', but Achebe does not leave it there. He places the event in an individual perspective too, raising the horror of the incident to the fore and suggesting a very subtle alternative which, incidentally, echoes the beginnings of a new, individualistic humanism. The response of the 'individual consciousness' to this event is revealed mainly through Obierika, and in a more potent and forceful manner through Nwoye. A more detailed study of the episode is called for.

Ikemefuna, the 15 year old lad from Mbaino was taken hostage to avoid war when a daughter of Umuofia had been killed at Mbaino market. Umuofia with its powerful repertoire of magic and medicine-men and priests were feared by the neighbouring villages, and was offered as compensation a virgin and the young man Ikemefuna as ransom. Okonkwo as a man of honour and status is chosen guardian of the boy. The first chapter ends its list of Okonkwo's achievements thus: "And that was how he came to look after
the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours to avoid war and bloodshed. The ill-fated lad was called Ikemefuna" (TFA 8). The very expression "ill-fated" used qualitatively creates a feeling of foreboding in us, and is, faintly at least, suggestive of the resigned perspective of the narrative voice. We may recall here yet another context, where mention is made of Ikemefuna: "The lad's name was Ikemefuna, whose sad story is still told in Umuofia unto this day" (TFA 12 emphasis added), where again the same sense is conveyed.

Ikemefuna lives in Okonkwo's household for three years, and gradually becomes very much a member of the family, and an elder brother to Okonkwo's eldest son Nwoye. In exile he found solace in the friendship of Nwoye, and their deep attachment made him forget his initial depression and unhappiness. "...Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy— inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly unless it be the emotion of anger" (TFA 26). Thus the apparent harshness of a tribal decree that snatches a child away from its family is mitigated by the ease and genuine warmth with which he is accepted into and becomes part of a new one.

Yet the 'savagery' usually associated with 'primitivism' makes itself manifest in a most ruthless manner in the case of Ikemefuna. An aged warrior of the
clan, Ezeudu, informs Okonkwo that Umuofia has decided to kill the boy as commanded by the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, but asks him not to be involved in this human sacrifice:

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death.... Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father (TFA 51).

Here Ezeudu proposes the most human solution for the predicament—neither defy the gods by resisting, nor offend one's conscience by assisting in the death. But Okonkwo does not take this way out and finally succumbs to the temptation of demonstrating his lack of emotional involvement and masculine courage, and insists on participating in the ritual killing of Ikemefuna. As we watch Ikemefuna being taken unsuspectingly on his fatal journey, even the narrative voice modulates into the consciousness of the boy, imbued with a touch of irony. "...Although he had felt uneasy at first, he was not afraid now. Okonkwo walked behind him. He could hardly imagine that Okonkwo was not his real father..." (TFA 53). Unwilling to face the grim reality of the boy being brutally killed, at first "...Okonkwo
looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (TFA 55). It is a terrible, sickening moment, its effects emphasized throughout by repeated references to the human passion in conflict with divine postulates. That Okonkwo should be the man to perform this sacrificial 'sacrilege' places the whole tribe and its values in balance, is being judged and found wanting. For the first time in the novel we occupy the point of view of an outsider, of a victim, pass severe judgement on the community, and express our reprobation.

Okonkwo's constant preoccupation with the idea of masculinity, the fear-complex that controls his total thought--pattern and the eagerness to fulfil the orders of the Oracle to the letter, in fact blinds his vision, and makes him incapable of a balanced judgement, unable therefore to accommodate competing claims with the wisdom and maturity that seems to be the touchstone of the tribe. Okonkwo acts in the anxiety to prove himself by the norms of the tribe, but ultimately meets with its disapproval. And to that extent the narrative presents this as Okonkwo's personal tragedy too; a result therefore, not so much of a savage tribal custom as of a tragic flaw in his character.
Later, even his death by violence, his suicide, as Obierika explains, is an offence against the earth, an abomination. It is pathetic that his commitment to achievement through violence ostracizes him from the very society he sought so desperately to champion and honour. As David Carroll observes, "Okonkwo's self-assertion has broken the organic links between the individual, the family and the village, and obscured the larger perspective in which duties must be defined."\textsuperscript{14}

But a mature wisdom in the context of the tribal ethics is represented by Obierika when he exclaims: "If the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it" (\textit{TFA} 61). Here, Obierika is suggesting a compromise between conflicting loyalties, being aware of the grim immensity of this socio-religious impasse, but Okonkwo, impervious to the proposal, insists on the moral validity of his stance. A more positive synthesis of the dialectical claims is almost inconceivable in the context. Even Obierika, who symbolises an outright rejection of the literal implementation of the command of the Oracle, resigns to the fact that the tribal ethics, for all its flexibility, does not provide an easy answer when it comes to choosing between personal claims and social commitments. The Ikemefuna incident is specifically relevant to the exploration of the present theme as it highlights both the overpowering 'traditionalism' and the
streaks of 'individualism' that would seem to be on the rise. What it results in is the unique form of individualism pioneered and championed by Nwoye.

As we read further, we perceive that the numerous unresolved contradictions in Umuofia will result in its downfall. It is here that Nwoye's reaction to the Ikemefuna incident calls for a closer scrutiny for his perspective focuses, though rather obscurely, on cruelty as a recurring feature of life in Umuofia:

As soon as his father walked in that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. He had had the same kind of feeling not long ago during the harvest season.... They were returning home with baskets of yams from a distant farm across the stream when they had heard the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest. A sudden hush had fallen on the women, who had been talking, and they had quickened their steps. Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes
an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna (TFA 55-56).

The sudden shift into an individual point of view adds power to the narrative, and relates it to the reader with an increased force and authenticity. Not very long after our glimpse into Ikemefuna's frightened inner world, this second relapse from the communal to the private indicates an uncommon feature which the tribal narrative voice is not always equipped to delineate.

The Oracle of the Hills and Caves is once again drawn into the limelight as Okonkwo recovers his equanimity, and the customs of the tribe regain their unquestioned sway. The narrative moves forward with a spontaneous flow, effortlessly integrating the routine of household lives and the rituals by which it is realised and communicated. The two perspectives are simultaneously followed without any glaring discrepancy, but on deeper discernment we perceive that the harmony is not totally wholesome. Achebe brings out increasingly the tension, crystallised in the death of Ikemefuna, between the 'micro' and 'macro' levels of tribal existence, between the family and the larger community. A typical instance of this persistent feature of life occurs when the priestess of Agbala comes to the village.
to take Ezinma, the daughter of Okonkwo and Ekwefi, to pay homage to her god. It is significant that Achebe chooses to view the event from within Okonkwo's household. The whole incident is imaged through Ekwefi's consciousness. The priestess arrives as an intruder into the domestic calm of Okonkwo, and the whole description is pervaded with fear. One is obscurely aware of an impending doom. Chielo's repeatedly chanted greetings to her god, the surrounding thick darkness, the child's agonizing loud cries against the eerie silence of the forest... all fill the air with a sense of foreboding, felt as much by the reader as Ekwefi. "A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voice like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite. Ezinma's voice soon faded away and only Chielo was heard moving farther and farther into the distance" (TFA 93). She would not be consoled by Okonkwo's reasonings. She stood transfixed for a while, and in the flash of a moment disappeared into the darkness to follow the priestess unnoticed by her. And the next day, after Ekwefi returns home safely with her child, we learn with surprise that even Okonkwo had been troubled by these conflicting loyalties.

This peculiar situation can be better grasped only by understanding how 'Chi' exerts its power over individuals. Also, the concept of 'Chi' in Igbo cosmology is central to the study of Igbo life as well as literature. The simplest
definition given for 'Chi' is 'personal god', yet Achebe adds that its elusive and enigmatic character makes it rather complex. He explains it thus: "In a general way we may visualize a person's Chi as his other identity in spiritland--his spirit being complementing his terrestrial being; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it."¹⁵ For our purposes it suffices to know that 'Chi' exerts its sway over the individual like his 'other self'. And Okonkwo's 'Chi' was not made for great things despite his vaulting ambition. Hence his killing of a clansman later, though inadvertently done, demanded that he flee from the land for seven years, for it was a crime against the earth goddess:

That night he collected his most valuable belongings into headloads. His wives wept bitterly and their children wept with them without knowing why. And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his motherland (TFA 113).

As soon as day broke, a large crowd of men, dressed in garbs of war, stormed Okonkwo's compound:

They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess and they were merely her messengers.
They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman (TFA 113).

The whole narrative reinforces the sense of foreboding felt earlier, and leaves us with an unresolved question, focussed this time on Okonkwo, that points to the complexity of the situation. For it is unquestionably 'tragic' that despite his strong affiliations to the tribe a man would be expelled by his tribe for a crime inadvertently committed. Once again it is the narrative voice that ensures our empathy with Okonkwo.

Closely following the narrative voice through the first part of the novel, we see that, though not in a clearly pronounced mode, the force that is 'individual' is invariably in conflict with the force that is 'society' or a 'tradition' preserved with religious sentiments. In his scholarly inquiry into the Igbo village life Emmanuel Obiechina maintains that "the identification of the individual with the group of which he forms a part, and with its social and cultural outlook, is the very essence of 'traditionalism'." 16 Besides acquiescing the beliefs and customs of the clan, "his individual self-interest is always subordinated to the overall interest of the group." 17 This is a value often
emphasized by novelists, who contrast it with the opposite value based on self-interest that marks a more 'developed' situation. But along with social conformity and the discouragement of deviation from the common norms, traditionalism involved a certain amount of the repressive curbing of individual freedom. Erich Fromm in The Sane Society uses the word 'submission' to denote the various ways in which an individual related himself to the rest of the society. He maintains that the individual in this way "transcends the separateness of his individual existence by becoming part of somebody or something bigger than himself, and experiences his identity in connection with the power to which he has submitted." It leads us to assume that any movement contrary to this coordinating gesture, any attempt at a severance of the total integrity of the clan, leads to separation from the mainstream of its corporal existence, which is taboo and anathema to a tribal society. Irrespective of the means employed, the individual is bound to the milieu inseparably; he can achieve this coordination by integrating himself wilfully and consciously to its entire body, by transcending the individualistic traits in him, or by pure 'submission'.

In Things Fall Apart beneath the conventional structural requisites of a plot and character and dialogue, there is the record of a steady transformation of the individual from his integrated existence to his independent existence.
It is a long process that took years even within the confined time span of the novel, but goes unhampered, and is nurtured by the unresolved contradictions involved in the social system of Umuofia.

We have dealt at length with the first part of the novel where Achebe depicts the different aspects of the too literal implementation of the tribal commands. In the end precisely these values are used in the downfall and ruin of Umuofia. To Nwoye's mind they represent the fear and cruelty recurrently revealed through these ritual gestures. In fact, the inscrutability, even arbitrariness, of the religious dictates puzzles Obierika and Nwoye equally. Throughout Achebe deploys the technique of juxtaposing the tribal and the personal very effectively bringing out the paradoxes and contradictions that sustain a social superstructure. Obierika thinks for us too when he interrogates the fate of Okonkwo in exile, "Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently?" (TFA 113). Again, "he remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed?" (TFA 113). The dilemma is very painful indeed, and the anguish of the individuals who make the mental accommodation is crucial to the development of a new way of thinking. Yet Achebe does not probe deeper into the nature of this inner adjustment
demanded of individuals while torn between loyalties from within the structure of the tribal society itself. Focussed exclusively from that point of view, the incompatibility of human and divine values, and their paradoxical and inextricable involvement creates a stasis, a stagnant equilibrium, which admits of no synthesis, and suggests no possible dialectic.

But a brilliant exposition of the nature of the individual voice that emerges in the character of Obierika is made by Biodun Jeyifo. Achebe has stated that there is an element of himself in Obierika "in the sense that at the crucial moment when things are happening, he represents this other alternative." Etymologically the name 'Obierika' suggests several associative meanings: great-heartedness, generosity of spirit, capacity for fellow-feeling, the mind/soul/heart of an individual, a group, a people that is infinite in its potentialities. And as we go through the novel, we see that the name does imply all of these significations, an ethical, rationalist cast of mind or disposition, which means that Obierika 'lives his name'. And he is not only Okonkwo's 'greatest friend', his is that loyalty in friendship that is deeply informed by a balanced sense of the friend's strengths and weaknesses and even neurotic susceptibilities. Thus Obierika could be viewed as his friend's 'alter ego,' and a 'device'
in the text of *Things Fall Apart*, a contrast to Okonkwo's loyalty to the letter of the law. For as Biodun Jeyifo points out, they both represent two "fundamentally discrepant cultural avatars: Okonkwo as the culture hero who is doomed because of his rigid, superficial understanding—really misrecognition of his culture; Obierika as a sceptical, dissent and prescient observer of the culture's encounter with the self and the colonizing other." Thus it is Obierika who registers the falling apart of things; who records the collapse of the most vital identity-forming connections of the culture: kinship, community, ritual and ceremonial institutions, even when Okonkwo refuses to see them. (TFA 124-125).

Surprisingly though, one perceives in Obierika a divided, alienated subjectivity long before the arrival of the colonizing powers to pacify the native culture and initiate a new epoch. As mentioned earlier, Obierika had spoken out his condemnation of Okonkwo's participation in the killing of the youth saying that he would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it. This split is more poignantly and powerfully rendered when Obierika had to, forced by tribal ethical compulsion, join others in the demolition of his friend's homestead:

... His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which
Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. Obierika was a man who thought about these things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led to greater complexities (TFA 113).

It is important to recognize in this context that Obierika's scepticism towards his culture springs from his deep, positive currents of values, predispositions and identity which have roots in the very same culture. His mythological but moral and philosophical interpretation of the 'abomination' of Okonkwo's participation in the killing of Ikemefuna is that it is an action which could bring ruin on whole families, as retribution from the earth goddess (TFA 46). Another instance when his dissenting voice is heard is in his discussion with Okonkwo about the customary prohibitions and exclusions of the title 'ozo' holders from some mundane activities of the everyday world:

"Sometimes, I wish I had not taken the 'ozo' title," said Obierika. "It wounds my heart to see these young men killing palm trees in the name of tapping." "It is so indeed," Okonkwo agreed. "But
the law of the land must be obeyed." "I don't know how we got the law," said Obierika. "In many clans a man of title is not forbidden to climb the palm tree. Here we say he cannot climb the tall tree but he can tap the short ones standing on the ground. It is like Dimara-gana, who would not lend his knife for cutting dog meat because the dog was taboo to him, but offered to use his teeth" (TFA 74).

Even to voice a dissenting idea, Obierika draws from the culture's common stock of imagery, rhetoric and humour.

The 'cultural demystification' of which Biodun Jeyifo talks about in the context of Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God hints at these two contradictory, dialectic poles of cultural affirmation and cultural critique. And he adds that this particular dialectic is at work in the mesh of significations in the construction of Obierika as a complex device. However, what impresses us is the balanced textual articulation of this authorial disposition, which simultaneously upholds and assesses the tribal ethos.

The countless fragmentary stories we find in the novel centred around 'minor' characters like Unoka, Chielo, Ikemefuna and Nwoye, Ekwefi and Ezinma, Okonkwo's uncle Uchendu, Akunna, Obiako and many others provide Obierika's
thought pattern an added dimension by admitting the existence of illogic even in the most sacred values of the culture. These are instances when the collective code is placed in balance through selected individuals. Of these many 'minor' characters, Obiako's case is to be specially mentioned in the context of the present study. To quote from the text:

"Obiako has always been a strange one," said Nwakibie. 'I have heard that many Years ago, when his father had not been dead very long, he had gone to consult the Oracle. The Oracle said to him, "your dead father wants you to sacrifice a goat to him." Do you know what he told the Oracle? He said, 'Ask my dead father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive.' Everybody laughed heartily except Okonkwo, who laughed uneasily..." (TFA 41).

These 'mini' narratives concern the 'smaller' people of the community, but they do echo a different note which can be contrasted with the voice of the 'lords of the land', the title holders like Okonkwo. And the central irony of the novel is that when things fall apart for the leaders of the tribe, for the group of smaller men it does not really fall apart; they have found a better option. Biodun Jeyifo comments that "among many of the ironic twists and articulations of Things Fall Apart, is the fact that while
the main narrative line about Okonkwo leads to tragedy and a
general sense of social malaise, the fragmentary stories and
motifs... move the social category to restitution at the end
of the novel. Almost all the first converts to the new
religion, the first minor functionaries of the colonial
administration, the first teacher-pupils of the new school,
are drawn from this subaltern group. For this group, things
certainly do not fall apart." 24 In short, the human-centred
scepticism and resilience we find so brilliantly encoded in
Obierika is reflected, though not so powerfully, in the
short, fragmentary story of Obiako and the other minor
characters. And one would certainly agree with Abiola Irele
when he says that "the importance of Chinua Achebe's novels
derives not simply from his theme, but also from his complete
presentation of men in action, in living reaction to their
fate..." 25

Into this discomfiting deadlock is introduced "the
abominable religion that has settled among you" (TFA 152).
The treatment of the arrival of Christianity among the Igbos
is done with an unusual subtlety and detachment, so much
so it has never been very easy to decipher anything at all
about Achebe's attitude towards Christianity from the
novels. This sustained objectivity leaves broad margins for
the reader to arrive at his own conclusions. There is no
incident of any dramatic confrontations or sudden
conversions. The new religion makes its way into the
close-kint tribal edifice quietly and touches on its most
vulnerable points. Even when the missionaries made Umuofia
the centre of their activities, the tribe never felt
threatened, nor was there any sense of urgency, as the early
converts were all worthless members of the village.
"Chielo the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the
excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog
that had come to eat it up" (TFA 133). The only disturbing
piece of news was that Nwoye had joined the converts.

For Nwoye a new 'frame of orientation,' much more
flexible and appealing to the human emotions was made
tangible in Christianity. For the new religion, what
mattered was not a whole tribe with its antiquarian ways, but
every single individual. Its musical beginning effected a
sudden impact:

Then the missionaries burst into a song. It was
one of those gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism
which had the power of plucking at silent and dusty
chords in the heart of an Ibo man. The interpreter
explained each verse to the audience, some of whom
now stood enthralled. It was a story of brothers
who lived in darkness and fear, ignorant of love of
God. It told of one sheep out on the hills, away
from the gates of God and from the tender
shepherds' care (TFA 133).
Nwoye's instantaneous response to this new philosophy of life is not unexpected in the context and is very consistent with the logic Achebe has been developing through his consciousness. It appeals to a need very deeply felt though not very neatly formulated. The point is not whether the Christian God equals in power the great Chukwu, but that his loving, personal care appeals to the whole unresolved fear syndrome so rampant in Umuofia. The perennial deadlock resulting from the conflict between divine law and individual preferences, that caused so much anguish, would seem at last to have found a substitute in this new means of relating oneself to the Absolute. Nwoye, still in rebellion against his father's harsh and rigid religiosity and his cruel pride, gropes in darkness for a ray of light, and stumbles upon an appealing alternative:

It was not the mad logic of Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul, the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen
rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled (TFA 134 emphasis added).

Beginning with its initial victory over the 'Evil Forest', the dumping-ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died, the progress of Christianity meant the reassimilation of all that was considered undesirable by the tribe--the Osu, the slave, the twins, the 'effeminate'--into a confraternity of love. For them "the new religion's profession of basic human equality, the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man, constitutes an awakening of submerged hopes, the resurrection of a sense of human worth long buried under the grave-mound of custom."27 The appeal is largely on the emotional and psychological level. Nwoye sees it as a potent liberating force. And for him this new religious awareness implies acceptance for the outcastes of the tribe.

Critics often interpret the Christian intrusion into Igbo land as Achebe features it, as a disruptive force that resulted in the tribe's falling apart. The alien religion has undoubtedly undermined the solidarity of the tribe. That is explicit in the novel. In fact there is a marked subsiding of communal scenes as we read more and more about Christian presence in their midst. With the arrival of Mr. Smith on the scene, there is no more negotiative
attempts between rival myths. And his insistence on slaying the gods of Baal is taken up as an aggressive challenge by the villagers. Striking a final blow to this tense atmosphere of conflict Enoch, the son of a snake-priest and an over-zealous recent convert, crudely unmasks in public an 'egwugwu', and defies one of the tribe's sacred practices. "Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion" (TFA 168). Thematical this is a highly significant event, the last of the communal scenes which have been such an impressive feature of the novel. The tribal narrative voice which spoke with authority in the early part has become less confident, more shaky, and though it seeks to recapture its old tone of voice it has evidently met its limit:

That night the Mother of the Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming--its own death.

On the next day all the masked egwugwu of Umuofia assembled in the market-place. They came from all the quarters of the clan and even from neighbouring villages. The dreaded Otakagu came
from Imo, and Ekwensu, dangling a white cock, arrived from Uli. It was a terrible gathering. The eerie voices of countless spirits, the bells that clattered behind some of them, and the clash of matchets as they ran forwards and backwards and saluted one another, sent tremors of fear into every heart. For the first time in living memory the sacred bull-roarer was heard in broad daylight (TFA 168-69).

In the most eerie act in the whole course of the book, the tribe is mourning its own demise. It is a unique act of rebellion, and expiation of a crime, where even the narrative voice falters and assumes a new perspective in the neutral tone of "clatter" and "clash", and most of all when it says, "and it was never to be heard again" (TFA 169). The very existence of the clan hangs in balance in an evocatively dramatic situation. Unable to withstand the new powers, positive or negative, epitomised in the new religion, Umuofia is forced to yield, and gradually disintegrates.

It is in the logic of things that in the ashes of a burnt out cause, a novel phenomenon should find its nourishment. Along with the tribe sank into oblivion its own value system, religious as well as socio-economic. Close on the heels of the new religion was a new administrative set up and a fresh economic approach. The economic
phenomenon that made a decisive entry into the tribe is worth considering here as a major instigation behind the rise of individualism. Though it does not comprise of many pages of the novel, the few references to a different method in the assessment of wealth has its dual aspects—the extinction of a compact system that believed in corporal ownership and the development of individual ownership. It meant an advanced thinking on the economic lines:

The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia (TFA 161).

The new trading policy did not have an immediate effect, but Mr. Brown triggered off a very powerful incentive in the form of the new school. One can never deny the basic change brought about in the thinking patterns of whole nations by a well-planned educational framework. The dignified Mr. Brown managed to win the affection and respect of the clan "because he trod softly on its faith" (TFA 163). He realized that "frontal attack on it would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia" (163-64). Even the narrative voice seems to appreciate the manner in which Mr. Brown approached the tribe, its leaders and religion, though it was in his own
interests. Though the white man's knowledge was considered equivalent to superior magical powers, Mr. Brown found it hard to influence them towards schooling. He begged, argued and prophesied. "He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them" (TFA 164). The threatening voice in this prophecy goes a long way in eliciting a very positive response from the tribe as to the 'need' for education; they associate it with the interests of the clan in the long run as they would take any risk to prevent submission to an alien force. Mr. Brown succeeds in making them 'aware' of the situation and thus draws more people into the new mode of education. "Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers... new churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand" (TFA 164). Young Nwoye, who was now called Isaac, was among those undergoing training to become teachers! The expression here seems to ring of a faint touch of irony, but not distinct enough to be qualified as disapproving. The subtlety of it rather confirms the consistently objective tone of the narrative voice.
The change thus brought about in Umuofia with the growth of formal educational facilities and a very personal approach to religion and a new economic thinking was so instantaneous and effective, so much so, Okonkwo on his return from exile found himself amidst a different social order, one based on individual contractual relationships as opposed to the traditional and collective kinships hitherto existed. He was pained to see that people no more talked about the cherished values of old. Not only the outcastes, even worthy men like Ugonna, "who had taken two titles--like a madman had cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away to join the Christians" (TFA 157).

Apart from the church, the white men had taken over the administration of the tribe too. It was too late to prevent this course of events when Okonkwo returned from exile; with mute resentment and wounded pride he watched the white man sitting in judgement over his clan. With his own people turned against the tribe, there was no hope of fighting it out. Obierika's passive observation sums it up thus: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly with his religion. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (TFA 160). The hold of traditional religions and all associated values over the tribe is considerably lessened if not totally lost. Thus an eventual release from conventional social ties gives the individual an impetus and motivation to reshape his
whole pattern of life rather than maintain the status quo. Nwoye, severed from his family, but accepted and established in the new dispensation, holds forth the image of this new individual.

II

*Arrow of God* is considered a fitting sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, taking us one step further from the socio-political situation portrayed in the latter, where the narrative ends as the tribe realizes that it must come to terms with the alien force which is powerful and irreversible. *Arrow of God* is richer, more dynamic and complex too, yet is imbued with an elegance that comes of its multi-dimensional capturing of the Igbo society of 1921. It explores simultaneously into the depths of three elements involved in the artistic apprehension of a particular historical moment: the tribal world of Umuaro centred around its chief priest Ezeulu, the colonial administrator's world and its political concerns symbolised by Winterbottom, and the missionary world represented by catechists John Goodcountry and Moses Unachukwu. Here too, the former is determined to rout pagan superstitions by his uncompromising, literal Christianity, whereas Moses Unachukwu disagrees with this violent campaign for conversion and believes in persuasion through negotiation with existing values. These
three worlds have independent existences, yet put together they form a totality, vast and mature, with revealing portraits of personal and social modes. Inchoate experience is made subject to rigorous aesthetic pruning, and Achebe is definitely at his best in Arrow of God which is a rich and renewed representation of the traditional Igbo ethos, within which Ezeulu tries to assert his individuality.

Before plunging into an analysis of the novel and examining the nature of the individualism claimed by Ezeulu, it is significant to perceive the role of the white men here as agents of change. Whereas in Things Fall Apart we encounter the alien power in the course of the narrative forcing itself as intruders into the tribal world with all its associated ill-feeling and vengeance, the forces working against tradition seems already entrenched in the Umuaro of Arrow of God. "The local school and mission station, irreverent strangers like the catechist Goodcountry, and the inarticulate though palpable reality of the white man's administrative presence, all these have undermined traditional confidence and shaken the sense of common purpose and solidarity which in the past constituted the spirit of traditionalism." And the people of Umuaro have come to view these changes without bitterness, and in a matter of fact manner, having recognized that these things are there to stay. The white man, his religion, the soldiers, the new road—all form part of the same thing. The theme of contact
and change as such is significant here as in *Things Fall Apart*, but is highly relevant for the human involvement in it, and especially of Ezeulu, who attempts to adapt himself to the present constantly. Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, and a man marked out by his role as preserver of the collective solidarity, is keenly aware of the breakdown of the old structure, and attributes the change to "the new age."

"Ezeulu often said that the dead fathers of Umuaro looking at the world from Ani-Mmo must be utterly bewildered by the ways of the new age." The diverse and conflicting themes of *Arrow of God* develop around the character of the aged Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, who is the ritual and religious leader of Umuaro. He is an intermediary between Ulu and his people, interpreting his will to them, but he also performs the two most important rituals in the life of the villagers—the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and that of the New Yam. As the priest of the village, Ezeulu's image and character is one that contains contradictions relating to the privileged role he plays, one which calls for an equilibrium between the double realities of his position. The very image of the priest in any society has been of a person 'specially called' or 'set apart' from the category called 'most men'.

"He has been perceived as somehow more in touch with transcendental realities than other men, as a spiritual leader, a divine spokesman, an intermediary between men and the deity, and even the bearer of the people's 'spiritual
burdens. He ministers at all stages of man's rites of passage, and his personality may at times be defined in terms of the attributes of the God whom he serves. "32 But he is only a 'servant' of the God, where rather than his individual will, resignation to the will of the deity guides him along. The tragedy of Ezeulu is that he tried to be 'himself', 'individualistic', identifying himself with the god whom he was expected to serve defying the precept that"...no matter how strong or great a man was he should never challenge his Chi" (AG 27).

Caught between the polarities of the dilemma of his position, Ezeulu has confrontations with the priests of the remaining five villages of Umuaro, with his friends, his family, with the white man, and even with his god Ulu. It is within this broad framework that Achebe establishes once again that an individual, priest or no priest, has real, valid existence only in terms of the community. The norms of the society exact conformity from the individual, discouraging deviations and subversion of the common will, and emphasize the primacy of the group over the individuals who compose it. This is reinforced in the fate of characters like Okonkwo and Ezeulu who are important and powerful in their own rights, yet as we see, in their conflicts with the communities the supremacy of the latter is soon established.
The role assigned to Ezeulu by the tribe is beautifully manifested through the two festivals that occur during the year (AG 66-73). The Feast of the Pumpkin leaves cleanses the six villages of their sins before the planting season, and breaks in as a great event in the domestic reality of Umuaro. People stream towards the meeting place of 'Ilo', and in the warm atmosphere of the Feast, friendships and relations are renewed, hostilities forgotten. The great, decorated Ikolo drum, fashioned in the olden days from a giant Iroko tree "as old as Ulu himself at whose order the tree was cut down and its trunk hollowed out into a drum" (AG 69), greets the six villages in their ancient order, salutes Ulu, and finally summons Ezeulu from the shrine of the God. Achebe here skilfully captures the rhythm and tension of communal Igbo rituals, with their strange mingling of fear and ecstasy. The women wave the pumpkin leaves from side to side across their faces and mutter prayers to Ulu, the god that kills and saves. Filled with a deep sense of his own divinity, this half black, half white intermediary between the spirit world and the human world goes on to re-enact the first coming of Ulu in the distant past, and the establishment of his power. As the priest breaks into the concluding ritual race to the safety of his shrine, the tension of the crowd is released and they understand that "their Chief Priest was safe in his shrine,
triumphant over the sins of Umuaro which he was now burying deep into the earth with the six bunches of leaves" (AG 73).

This dramatic realization of the major priestly function of Ezeulu is a private as well as a public drama. Commenting on this, David Carroll says that "the power of the scene comes from the effortless interaction of individual and community, which, at the climax, merge in the ritual gestures." On the one hand the narrative voice constantly seeks to give unity and authenticity to the festival through the drums, the dancing in unison, the cloud of dust, and the imagery--the ilo sounds like a vast swarm of bees, the pumpkin leaves resemble a swarm of giant flying insects. But this unified reality is repeatedly intruded upon and fragmented by the intervention of individual perspectives artistically blended into it, like the fears and rivalries of Ezeulu's wives, the meetings of friends, which are then gathered up into the totality of the larger ritual. Perhaps in the whole of the Arrow of God this is the most representative gesture of the fundamental vital rhythm of Igbo life.

The second major communal celebration is the Feast of the New Yam, which marks "the end of the old year and the beginning of the new" (AG 201-202). On this occasion, every grown man of Umuaro takes a seed Yam to the shrine of Ulu, and from these the elders can reckon the number of men in
each village. It is from among these that Ezeulu selects twelve to calculate the new year. Only when these have been ritually eaten can the festival take place and the harvesting begin. At the sight of each new moon, with the customary fear mingled with the joy of his high office he beats the iron gong. And while the villagers welcome the moon, he selects one of the sacred yams from his barn, roasts and eats it. Finally, he thanks Ulu for allowing him to see another new moon and begs good fortune for the six villages:

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 reverain folk and to the land of the forest peoples (AG 6).

These two festivals symbolize the power Ezeulu extends over the whole village, by controlling both planting and harvesting, and the village year which is dependent upon them. And yet Ezeulu is always uncertain about himself; he is often perplexed, unable to comprehend the real implications of his high office, the nature of his authority. As we go along, we perceive that Ezeulu nurtures a curious concept of individualism which gathers wider and deeper dimensions later. In fact the whole novel can be read as a search for individuality in the context of strong tribal
affirmations, a quest for identity characterized by personal idiosyncracies. Ezeulu's misgivings as he tries to assess his powers take us right into the heart of the problem:

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 it. He was merely a watchman (AG 3 emphasis added).

But his pride will not allow him to be in darkness and illusion as to the nature of his powers. "No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was 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" (AG 3). But the uncertainty still persists--"Could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So, it could not be done. He would not dare" (AG 3). The angry retort from within himself contradicts all the assessments that went earlier: "No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not" (AG 3). Achebe goes on to follow Ezeulu's consciousness in argument with itself: "His mind, never content with shallow satisfactions, crept again to the brinks of knowing. What kind of power was it if it would never be used?" (AG 14). He takes us again to the crucial issue that tortures the priest of Ulu--what kind of power is it that could never be used?
One central assumption which unfolds the theme of the novel is however clear here--Ezeulu the man cannot be easily separated from Ezeulu the Chief Priest. In fact one could regard the novel as depicting the desperate attempts of an 'individualistic' highpriest to redefine his relation to the society. The paradox of his office is indicated in his ceremonial appearance--he is half man and half spirit; in the world of man he is very powerful, in the world of spirits he is a servant. The duality of his person and position is almost incomprehensible to the 'man' Ezeulu, which leads him to shifting loyalties from 'the divine' to 'the human'.

The discrepancy between divine and human values becomes more acute and apparent in Arrow of God than in Things Fall Apart. Every minor event in the novel testifies to the theme that is explored, and our attention is immediately focussed on Ezeulu whose character embodies this dilemma in its most acute form. In complexity too, Ezeulu far outdoes the hero of Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo's pride and assertiveness springs from his literal loyalty to the tribe and the values upheld by it whereas Ezeulu is proud and arrogant in his own right. His personal drives and ambition in constant conflict with the expectations of the tribe is highlighted throughout. But as Okonkwo found out, "a society based on a flexible balancing of competing claims is not the most comfortable place for a domineering personality. No one, not even a god is safe from criticism; there are always other people,
other gods, ready to supplant their predecessors in these shifting, sceptical Igbo communities."\(^{34}\)

The main threat to Ezeulu's attempts to identify himself with Ulu and impose his will as the god's comes from Nwaka, the most titled man in the whole of the six villages. Nwaka's insight into the personality of Ezeulu maintains: "He is a man of ambition; he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all. His father, they said, was like that. But Umuaro showed him that Igbo people knew no kings" (AG 27-28). Commenting on this Achebe says that Nwaka uses the term 'king' to talk about an individual who sets himself apart and against society by wanting to set himself above it. And he adds that "such behaviour would run against the social cohesion and group integration so dear to traditional Igbo communities."\(^{35}\)

But as Ezeulu sees it, since the highest spiritual values are attached to his priestly tasks any autonomous individual would tend to regard his achievements as a quasi-divine mastering of the whole situation and environment. Yet it is obvious that Ezeulu is quite conscious of his vulnerable position and this explains his closely scrutinizing the nature of his power in the beginning of the novel. He recalls how his authority was challenged five years ago over the war with Okperi. He advised Umuaro not to fight for a piece of land which was not theirs and warned
them that Ulu would not support an unjust claim. "Umuaro is today challenging its Chi.... Some people are still talking of carrying war to Okperi. Do they think that Ulu will fight in blame?" (AG 27). Nwaka, however, refuses to accept the priest's authority and exclaims that his powers should be exclusively limited to the rituals as "the man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god's ritual and carry sacrifices to him" (AG 27). The significance of 'Chi' is once again brought to the limelight. Whereas Ezeulu thinks that it is an offence to challenge one's 'Chi', Nwaka asserts that "if a man says yes his Chi also says yes." (AG 28). Though Nwaka won the argument, Umuaro lost the battle, the disputed land being given to Okperi by the white man. But the question of Ezeulu's identity in terms of his deity is still in a crisis and shrouded in mystery. And his position as the unifying symbol of the tribe appears shaky.

In a sense, this 'inadequacy' in the tribal set up, the fact that it has no room at all for individuality, is in some ways parallel to the problems of Ikemefuna and the twins in Things Fall Apart. What it points to is the limits of an old humanism prevalent in the tribe, and how a socio-political order uses it. In the long run it leads to strangers making steady inroads into the traditional communities, and creating wide chasms out of mild cracks.
What interests us is the thought process of certain individuals in such a transitional phase, revealing the conflicts involved in the mental adjustments demanded of them.

It is indeed a fascinating note in the West African fictional locus that against the innumerable literary creations celebrating the purely communal ethic, in *Arrow of God* Achebe has upheld the validity of an individualist mode of thinking. Hence there is no lamenting over things falling apart, but a very objective, realistic picture of Igbos at a phase where encounter with the European values meant accommodation and assimilation rather than 'protest and conflict'. Ezeulu is far more aware of the changing times and responds to it in an exceptionally more mature manner than the rest of his clansmen. "The world is changing", he had told him [Oduche]. "I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba." When his friends asked him why he was always on the wings he replied: "Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching" (*AG* 45). He is equally positive about sending his son to the Church too. "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 white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow." (AG 45-46, 189-90). This canny wisdom, part of Ezeulu's general tendency toward introspective reflection, renders him capable of a deeper perception into the nature of things and a greater adaptability to changing conditions. Indeed by treating Ezeulu's experience as a substantial part of the novel's subject matter, Achebe is able to bring into focus a question that has little validity within the tribal world—that of the inward moral being of the individual. Thus, though Achebe does not release his hero from the determining ties of his society, the delineation of Ezeulu's character is marked by a radically individualist approach. And in Arrow of God self-examination, introspection and personal reflection lie interspersed with social documentation.

As Achebe himself says, "Ezeulu, the chief character of Arrow of God, is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is an intellectual... so he goes into the roots of things and he is ready to accept change intellectually. He sees the value of change. He is ready to come to terms with it..." Change, in the form of the white man, poses serious external threat to Umuaro, and Ezeulu is deeply aware of it. He wants Oduche to be his eye and he says to his son: "If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time" (AG 189). Ezeulu's attitude to change, then, is a
complex one; as Russell McDougall puts it, one of "neutralizing it by embracing it, or of arresting it by making sacrifice to the god that is bringing it about. Dance bridges the poles of opposition embodied in this complexity of response to change."37

McDougall goes on to examine Ezeulu's attitude to change and concludes that in sending Oduche to learn the white man's ways, Ezeulu bases his response to change upon the principle of flexibility, or in other words 'innovation'; but the principle behind sacrificing the boy to the white man's god is one of stability, or 'tradition'.38 Hence there are these two motifs operating in the character of Ezeulu—the one permitting individual innovation and the other sacrificing the individual to the tradition of the community. "To say that innovation and tradition mesh in the overall motivation for sending Oduche to the white man is another way of saying that he is expected 'to learn a new dance', while maintaining in his mind the rhythm of the old."39 It throws much light on the ingenuity of Ezeulu when he expects Oduche to learn the ways of the white man without losing his commitment to the ways of his people. But unfortunately, Oduche takes it on its own terms, and follows it. The next time we come across Oduche, after his father's command to tell the white man the old custom even as he learns the new, we see him instead 'speak up for the Lord' (AG 49) against the Sacred Python. The irony of his subsequent naming as
Peter, the rock upon which the Church will be built, is that it is an image of solid inflexibility, contrasted with the African notion of support and flexibility. The Christian baptism of Oduche as Peter could be conceived in terms of a rejection of the traditional modes of stability, and it also prefigures the final collapse of Ezeulu when his son lets him down. Thus, 'tradition' and 'innovation', integrated in the dual symbolism of Oduche's role, become mutually exclusive when the father 'cannot count on' the son (AG 221). Innovation triumphs, tradition collapses; and the Church offers sanctuary to those who wish 'to escape the vengeance of Ulu' (AG 220).

Each of the major actions of Ezeulu is followed by passages of reflection, or of self-justification where he has deviated from the accepted mores. Right from the first page of the novel, Achebe has consistently harped on this point, with an occasional flash of the Joycean stream of consciousness as the environment impinges directly on the consciousness of the hero. His reflections over his image as the priest of Ulu, his decision to send Oduche to the white man's school, his leading role in the colourful celebration of the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves, his witnessing against Umuaro in the land dispute with Okperi, his rejection of the 'warrant chieftancy', and finally his refusal to proclaim the day for New Yam festival--everything is elaborated and
gathered up into a crescendo of controlled perfection from which Ezeulu has no escape. What happens in the course is a steady progressive 'alienation' from his surroundings, a denial of normal human relations. By the end of the novel the 'alienation' is complete and turns out to be fatal as in the case of Okonkwo. As his friend Akuebue tells him, "no man however great can win judgement against a clan" (AG 131).

As a technical device, the constant scrutiny of the consciousness of the hero provides us with a glimpse into its depths with all its subtlety and complexity. He is not merely an appendage of the clan, but a world by himself, confined as it is, and conceived in 'superhuman' proportions. The reader fully shares the doubts and fears and ambitions of the highpriest, wholly partaking of their eventual development into an obsession, until they reach a natural climax. Thus the thematic progression is made logical and lucid rather than superimposed. However there is about Ezeulu an element of mystery, befitting a priest who dwells in a sanctorum: the sublimity that is part of the transcendental scheme of things. As Ezeulu himself says, "I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am known and at the same time I am unknowable.... You cannot know the Thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances" (AG 132).
But this new ethos, so internalised and democratised, individualistic and evolved out of Ezeulu's own theistic apprehensions, does not add to his priestly stature in the existing milieu. His final confrontation with the demands of the collective body of the tribe is just prior to the New Yam Festival, which he manipulates to assert his own rights. Ezeulu's refusal to accept 'warrant chieftaincy' infuriates Winterbottom, the District Commissioner, and results in his imprisonment for 32 days. This unexpected turn of events adds a new dimension to the infighting and jealousy among the tribes of Umuaro. On his return from the prison Ezeulu recounts and broods over his grievances against Umuaro. The constant cold war and occasional open fights between Ezeulu and Ezidemili, mainly represented by Nwaka, was always seen as a threat to the power and authority of the Chief Priest of Ulu. Moreover during his imprisonment, they had not cared for him with due respect. Thoughts of vengeance fumed in his mind, now is the time to repay, yet he was overwhelmed by the warmth of the welcome he received from the whole of Umuaro on his return from captivity. Oscillating between the two options of revenge and reconciliation with his community, he began "to probe with the sensitiveness of a snail's horns the possibility of reconciliation, or if that was too much, of narrowing down the area of conflict" (AG 191). By his imaginative recreation of tribal harmony, and attempts at striking a balance between his human and divine roles, Ezeulu
in fact does not feel any more the need to affirm that his power over the tribe is absolute.

But this newfound sense of community is disrupted by the one direct intervention of Ulu in the whole novel, where his voice falls on Ezeulu like a thunderbolt:

'Ta! Nwanu!' barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. 'Who told you that this was your own fight?' Ezeulu trembled and said nothing, his gaze lowered to the floor.
'I say who told you that this was your own fight to arrange the way it suits you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm 'wine he--he--he--he!' Only the insane could sometimes approach the menace and mockery in the laughter of deities--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 know what happens when two elephants fight? Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his python may again 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! (AG 191-92).
Ulu has reasserted his control over the divine half of Ezeulu's ambiguous nature in an unmistakable way, and all doubts and perplexities are resolved. The assertive priest's ambition and eagerness to identify with his God, and act on his behalf only provokes his wrath. The priest is nothing more than the remote agent of Ulu:

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. This thought intoxicated Ezeulu like palm wine" (AG 192).

Ezeulu's madness took the form of an extreme religious individualism which meant an assertion of complete independence from the reality of his relative existence. Commenting on this mental state, Joseph Swann in his study of Arrow of God remarks that Ezeulu "is broken by the sheer scale of his encounter with the unknown." However, this sudden turn of events calls for prompt action, and the rest of the novel impressively depicts the struggle embodied in the person of Ezeulu. Presumptuous as he might be called, he lets himself be ruled by the 'secular' half in him rather than the 'sacred', and decides to hit Umuaro at its most vulnerable point--the Feast of the New Yam. He is a
'conformist with a vengeance', and considers himself 'sinned against rather than sinning'. New thoughts tumbled over themselves and past events took on a new, exciting significance. Even a radically new perspective is offered for the narrative by Ulu's intervention, whereby everything is made subordinate to the conflict with the rival god. Ezeulu should exact punishment from Umuaro for dividing its loyalty to him with the sacred python of Idemili. Achebe follows at length the 'subjective' in Ezeulu, where he tries to rationalize his 'ungodly' approach and seek peace with himself. Thus he keeps up the enduring image of Ezeulu in his single-minded pursuit of a solid individuality.

The image of the implacable Ezeulu is highlighted with an added force after he refuses to proclaim the Feast of the New Yam. He is determined to manifest that he is not just an 'arrow of god', rather somebody more potent and powerful. "I only call a new festival when there is only one yam left. Today I have three yams, and so I know that the time has not come" (AG 207). On behalf of Ulu he means to make them wait the two extra moons he needs to eat the remaining sacred yams. To justify himself he observes that "Ulu did say that two new moons came and went and there was no one to break kolanut to him and Umuaro kept silent" (AG 208). As the Yam harvest rots in the fields and Ezeulu remains unappeased, the question of his power over the clan occupies our concern once again. Is it absolute or conditional? The questions
on the opening pages of the novel take on a new relevance and depth here. "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" (AG 3). He has refused, and now tries to establish that it was done on the authority conferred on him by his god—extending a purely human act of personal revenge to transcendental dimension.

With the same skill displayed in Things Fall Apart, Achebe insinuates the growing challenge faced by Umuaro by the growth of Christianity, and seizes this moment of discord very effectively. We begin to hear the sound of the mission bell in the very heart of Umuaro, near the sacred shrine of Ulu. The narrative gains a powerful effect by the juxtaposition of two polarities embodied in two different religions: "As Ezeulu cast his string of cowries the bell of Oduche’s people began to ring. For one brief moment Ezeulu was distracted by its sad, measured monotone and he thought how strange it was that it should sound so near—much nearer than it did in his compound" (AG 210). In a point of deadlock and despair, the missionaries intervene and announce their own harvest festival. "Whoever made his thanks-offering to God could harvest his crops without fear of Ulu" (AG 215). Desperate and confused, the people turn to the Christian religion for help; they send their sons with yam
offerings to the Church and harvest their crops in the name of the new god.

A tailpiece to the human drama involved in the recent developments in Umuaro is provided by the sudden death of Obika, Ezeulu's favourite son. It disturbs the whole balance of his mind, and picks up the hint of madness in Ezeulu's family, and finally resolves the tension built up between Ulu, his priest and his clan. The broken Ezeulu does not understand why Ulu had chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and cover him with mud. It shook Umuaro to the roots; they felt that "a man like him did not come into the world too often" (AG 229). But Ulu, Ezeulu's implacable assailant, having stood over him for a little while had stepped on him as on an insect and crushed him under the heel in the dust. But the final act of driving him insane proved to be a blessing in disguise. "It allowed Ezeulu, in his last days, to live in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest and spared him knowledge of the final outcome" (AG 229).

Close scrutiny of the text reveals that there is a certain strain placed on the plot in the novelist's attempt to inter-relate three worlds into a coherent whole, and almost all the characters are conspicuous for their inability to handle their situations and for an immature grasp of events. And it seems the author is often unwilling to commit
himself with any precision as to the nature of the interior-exterior realities of the tribal religious world. We accept the element of the inexplicable and mysterious as part of the world he has tried to depict, trying to convince ourselves that the ways of Ulu are intractable and beyond the reach of man. However, for Umuaro, the issue was simple: "Their God had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan" (AG 230). For us too the issue is simple enough—the defeat of individualism in a world of rituals and religious constraints.

But the last word belongs to the novelist who sees the whole narrative in its total historical and cultural context. He argues that if Ulu had meant to teach his priest loyalty and tribal wisdom, he had chosen a dangerous time for this, for "a deity who chose a time such as this to destroy his priest or abandon him to his enemies was inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so" (AG 230). The mass defection of the tribe to Christianity which follows must be seen as the result of the failure of the old dispensation to provide security to the people. As in the case of Things Fall Apart, the inadequacies of a disintegrating system provides space and accommodation for
more flexible values, which acquires a stronger foothold in a time of crisis.

Louis James in his review article on *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature* says that an analysis of *Arrow of God* compels one to pay attention to two significant aspects of the novel—the "alienation which has so frequently resulted from the imposition of western codes on those formerly organic cultures" and "the unique quality of specific African views or situations". Dr. Killam writes with a sympathetic understanding of both Achebe and West Africa, and in one of the closest studies of the novel, he provides genuine insights into the book when he concludes: "At the end, Igbo society is smashed and an important part, perhaps the finest part, is lost". When Obika dies, "The god has claimed his harvest and it is the Christian god that reaps it" (*AG* 231). Yet this interpretation is explicitly challenged by Kofi Awoonor in his essay, "Tradition and Continuity in African Literature." Awoonor says that "in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the priest, half-priest, half-man, half-deity, refuses to eat the yam and therefore imposes hardship on the community. Thus, he was the one who had stepped aside and, as Achebe puts it, when they brought in the harvest, they brought home the harvest in the name of the son, which critics have decided means that the Christian religion had won in the end. But it was not a victory for Christianity. It was a victory for
Umuro (the village community)." 43 Although the novel does show the break up of one phase of Igbo religious culture, Awoonor's interpretation is an important one, and one which potentially liberates us from a constricting mental framework. Ezeulu may be a tragic casualty on the busy high-road of African development. But the perspective that sees this as a conclusive tragedy is out of touch with the ongoing life, crisis-ridden though it may be, of West Africa.
NOTES


4 Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1975). All citations are from this edition.


9 Ian Watt 60.

10 Ian Watt 60.

11 'Chi' is qualified as a personal spirit. For an elaborate study of its relevance to Igbo life and literature, see Chinua Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology", Morning Yet on Creation Day (London: HEB, 1975) 93-103.


15 Chinua Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," Morning Yet on Creation Day 93.

17 Obiechina 18.


21 Jeyifo, *Kunapipi* 58.

22 Jeyifo, *Kunapipi* 58.


24 Jeyifo, *Kunapipi* 64.


26 The term is used by Fromm which, he says, provides an individual with a basis for relating himself to his surroundings.

27 E. Obiechina 222.
28 'Egwugwu' is defined as "a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village" (Notes to Things Fall Apart, 189). David Carroll reads it as a symbol of "the duality of roles by which the inscrutable world of the gods and the human world are uneasily accommodated." (Chinua Achebe, 56).


33 Carroll 90.

34 Carroll 92.


McDougall 12-15.

McDougall 13.


Louis James 226.