TRAGIC VISION IN ELECHI AMADI, CHINUA ACHEBE AND JOHN MUNONYE

By

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DEDICATION

To my parents who have given me all the opportunities in life to be somebody

and

To all my friends who have made my life what it is - happy!

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.

Bernice Niero Idigbe
December 1984.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis an attempt is made to appraise the tragic vision in Elechi Amadi's The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The slave; Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God and John Munonye's The Only Son and obi. The study pools in one single analysis the tragic world view of these writers, showing the nature of the influence of the gods on mankind's fate and the impact of traditional religious beliefs and Christianity on the lives of the Ibo speaking people of Nigeria.. Despite the differences in the methods of approach to these subjects, Amadi and AChebe are agreed on the issue that mankind is predominantly responsible for the tragedies in his life. Munonye shows that the African's psyche gets battered, the consequence of which is a warped image of himself, when he deliberately abandons his traditional religious beliefs for Christianity.

Chapter one reviews existing literature on Amadi, Achebe and Munonye. It also puts the study within a social context. An examination of aspects of igbo culture relevant to the study is undertaken showing the history and entrenchment of Christianity in Igbo land.

Chapter two is centred on Elechi Amadi. In the concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave, he

paints a picture of a society gripped by a paralysing fear of the gods. Despite the people's trepidation, they try to struggle against the gods and become broken in the attempt. They thus become authors of their ruin.

Chapter three examines Chinua Achebe's contribution to the riddle of mankind's tragedy. In Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, he portrays a universe where mankind is in firm control of his fate and the gods puny fixtures created by the people.

Chapter four shows how John Munonye in The Only Son and obi dramatizes the collective spiritual crisis created in the Africans converted to Christianity as their traditional ideals wrestle for dominance with their new faith. It also shows that, even though Christianity gains an upper hand, the converts still cling to their old traditional religious practices.

Chapter five summarizes the contribution of these writers to the search for meaning in life and to literature.

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ABBREVIATIONS

TC	The Concubine
TGP	The Great Ponds
TS	The Slave
TFA	Things Fall Apart
AOG	Arrow of God
TOS	The Only Son
Obi	Obi

CHAPTER I

The Orthodox notion of the tragic plight of mankind as postulated in the works of classic dramatists, such as Sophocles in Oedipux Rex and the Elizabethan and Victorian writers such as Shakespeare and Hardy, is one which sees mankind as being 'at the mercy of some unyielding outside fate' which preordains his fortunes and misfortunes.[1] Shakespeare summarizes this view in King Lear thus: 'As flies to wanton boys are we toth' Gods, They kill us for their sport.'[2] This notion furnishes the ideas expressed in many works of literature from Greet times through the Elizabethan to the present day. A common preoccupation with mankind's fate and the gods apprise the tragic vision in E'echi Amadi's The Concubine, The Great Ponds, and The Slave; Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God and John Munonye's The Only Son and Obi. An attempt is being made here to appraise the tragic views expressed by these writers.

Several critics have undertaken, with varying degrees of success, to examine the tragic vision expressed by these authors. Eustace Palmer attempts a comparison of The Concubine by Amadi and Efuru by Flora Nwapa. He examines both novels from the view point of their common theme, which he sees as 'man's complex relationship with the gods and the

to manipulate man, and man's proud attempt to counteract their influence is mere folly and the effort made will inevitably lead to ruin. She goes on to explain that the three men in Ihuoma's life find it impossible to bind the Sea-king and they lose their lives in the process. Even though they lose, laurence contends, Ekwueme's effort is praiseworthy. Although he is doomed by his love for Ihuoma, he is not totally defeated by the Sea-king because he does not die like a coward. He does not choose to do battle with the Sea-king, but when forced into a confrontation, he goes into the battle boldly, very much aware of his vulnerability. Laurence sees man's fate as preordained, with the gods firmly in control.

Emmanuel Obiechina discusses man's subservience to the gods and his acceptance of the immutability of his fate. His stress is, however, on the helplessness of man when confronted with the gods. About The Concubine he writers: 'Even when the gods intervene to strike a man down, there is no struggle; the blow is hardly audible; it is sudden, sharp and decisive and life continues to flow on as if nothing happened.'[5] Obiechina shows man here as being incapable of challenging the gods. Man is more of a meek sacrifical lamb than an equal of the gods.

In his appreciation of The Concubine, Niyi Osundare, in assent with Laurence, draws attention to the point that man is a plaything of the gods. This is a view which he says echoes the tragic vision in ancient Greek plays such as Oedipus Rex by Sophocles. It is a vision that stresses the tragic irrevocability of man's fate. Osundare sees characters in The Concubine as 'puppets moved by creatures of overwhelming superior forces'.[6] He elaborates on this point by showing how the Sea-king uses Ihuoma, his beautiful wife before her reincarnation, as a bait to ensnare the eligible young men of Omokachi village. The first of them to die is Emenike, Ihuoma's husband, a hardworking and considerate man. Next is Madume, who, though important in the village, is condemned for greed. Ekwueme, a promising young singer, is the last to die in the prime of his manhood. Osundare points out that, 'Human responsibility is considerably minimized in The Concubine because of the predominance of divine authority ... The master choice belongs to the Sea-king and is made long before the story starts ... The Sea-king manipulates his human puppets and does not for one moment let go of the strings.'[7] While Laurence insists that the gods do not harbour any malice towards man but treat him the way they do simply because they are

powerful, Osundare accuses the gods of abuse of power and malice towards man. He stresses that the Sea-king uses his power to manipulate man's fate. He therefore blinds Anyika, the dibia, to Ihuoma's true nature, thus preventing an early discovery of her state and his victims from being cautious of the bait that she is. He only reveals Ihuoma's true nature to Anyika when he realizes that the victim's doom is inevitable. Osundare shows that the Sea-king uses some of the characters to further his own ends of destroying man. These agents of destruction are Agwoturumbe, the boastful dibia who reinforces Ekwueme's desire for Ihuoma, despite Anyika's warning, and Ihuoma's son, Nwonna, who shoots the death arrow at Ekwueme. In all these ways, Osundare depicts the gods as wilfully destructive.

Oladele Taiwo also comments on the fate of man at the hands of the gods in The Concubine, but his argument is inconsistent. He reiterates the idea that man is a victim of fate when he says: 'The reader is persuaded in the end that tragedy is inevitable because of the formidable forces against which Ekwueme and Ihuoma had to contend.' However, in the same analysis he concludes: 'Amadi's greatest achievement in The Concubine lies in the fact that he uses the novel to criticize life at a symbolic level ... The novel is concerned with circumstances

of a marriage which ends in disaster for reasons that are deeply human and universally valid.'[8] This conclusion indicts man, rather than the gods, as the architect of his own tragedy. This is a view he maintains when he discusses Amadi's other novel, The Great Ponds. Taiwo sees human tragedy in the novel as a result of the 'irrational, greedy and uncircumscribed aspects of his (man's) nature,' rather than an outcome of the machinations of the gods. He argues that, though the people in The Great Ponds claim that the various wars over the great ponds are fought to protect their heritage, the real reasons for the fight are the economic and social advantages which ownership of the ponds will bring, as they are rich in fish. An important feature in the novel, according to Taiwo, is the way Amadi 'dramatizes the diminutiveness of man when compared to external nature.' This relationship is emphasized when Amadi focuses on the activities of men around the ponds. While human beings are struggling hard for the possession of the ponds, the ponds in their 'primeval antiquity' remain as they are 'unmoved and immoveable.' This treatment, he continues, highlights the difference between the energy expended in claims and counter claims over the ponds on the one hand by men and the permanence

and 'lofty grandeur' of the ponds on the other hand. This is a situation that puts nature above the 'mistakes and irrationality of man'.[9]

Taiwo, in his critique of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God, does not elucidate a clear-cut view point. He apportions blame for Ezeulu's tragedy to Ezeulu himself, the people of Umuaro and the gods Ulu and Idemili. He expatiates on the point by delineating the various levels of controversy in Umuaro. The first is between Ezeulu and Ulu, the second between Ezeulu and the people of Umuaro and the third between the gods Ulu and Idemili. He conceives of Ezeulu's relationship with Ulu as the centre of the conflict when he says: 'The complex situation in the novel (Arrow of God) arises mainly from the fact that Ezeulu's immense authority is ill-defined and his relationship with his god, Ulu an ambiguous one.'[10] This is a situation which makes Ezeulu very insecure; for Ezeulu is very conscious of his position in Umuaro and he conceives of himself as a watchman of Ulu, a role he is very dissatisfied with. He wishes his god would delegate absolute power to him. While Ezeulu feels thus frustrated, the people of Umuaro consider him very powerful and they hold him responsible for all he does in the name of Ulu. They also expect him to be loyal to them in all his actions because the people created both

Ulu and the position of Ezeulu. The circumstances of the creation of Ulu leaves the clan supreme. Authority therefore rests with the people and it is only with their continuing support that any Chief priest can hope to carry successfully 'in his body ... such potent danger', Taiwo explains.[11] Ezeulu on his own part, however, despite his discontent with his role, believes his loyalty should be towards Ulu. The ensuing confusion and misunderstanding, coupled with the 'internecine struggles' in Ummaro ruin Ulu, the traditional authority and the religious unity of the clan. Taiwo concludes:

> A close examination of events in the novel shows that Ulu is unlikely to be responsible for the tragic fate of his chief priest. We are involved in this novel not only with the breakdown of communication between individual characters or groups but also with a situation in which these characters are mere arrows with which anthropomorphic gods, Ulu and Idemili, shoot one another ... the confrontation in the novel is a fight of the gods in which the god who loses is destroyed with his chief priest. Ezeulu suffers because his god is defeated in this vicious contest.'[12]

Abiola Irele's comment on Arrow of God, which is more straight forward, is based on the same premise as Taiwo's conclusion. Irele contends that the gods are in control and man is only used as a arrow in the war of the gods. He points out: 'Achebe presents the picture of a total universe over which

the gods Ulu and Idemili are pitched in a deadly conflict against each other through their protagonists.'[13] While the local gods are pitched in battle, Irele continues, the Christian God is around, bidding for the loyalties of the people of Ummaro. Irele sees all the characters in the novel as tools in the hands of the gods. He explains that, that is the reason why clarke, whose 'personal disposition is against the falsity of things', is assigned the duty of dealing with Ezeulu in Captain Winterbottom's absence. Ezeulu is therefore right in considering himself the arrow of his god when he decides to take personal vengeance against the people because 'Ezeulu has been all along an instrument of fate - the blind accessory of a monumental process that culminates not only in his undoing but in the fall of the gods of the land'.[14] Irele quotes from the text to support his point that man's fate is determined by the gods and there is nothing man can do to avert disaster: 'It looks as though the gods and the power of event finding Winterbottom handy used him and left him again in order as they found him.' Irele thus points out that the gods have ruined both themselves and man. They orchestrate the events in man's life while using man as a foil in their own battle.

Irele's views about Things Fall Apart are different from his views on Arrow of God. He sees man's tragedy in Things Fall Apart as partly of his own making and partly that of forces outside himself which he has to contend with. These forces he sees as accentuating man's flaws to precipitate his tragedy. Thus Okonkwo's tragedy in Things Fall Apart, is a result of both the refusal of Okonkwo's chi to work in tune with him and the warped meaning he attaches to his society's value of manliness. Irele sums up his argument thus: 'Okonkwo's tragedy is worked out of his personal conflicts - his neurosis, almost as well as the art of the contrariness of his destiny.'[15]

Bernth Lindfors corroborates Irele's contention that the fall of the protagonist in Things Fall Apart is a result of the contrariness of purpose between him and his chi when he says:

> When Okonkwo returns from exile he makes the mistake of believing that if he says yes strongly enough, his chi and his clan will agree. No doubt he should have known better. He should have accepted his years in exile as warning from his chi ... But although he said yes very strongly, his clan and his chi says nay. Okonkwo the wrestler is at last defeated.[16]

Lindfors, however, shifts the blame for Okonkwo's tragedy from his chi to himself. He continues in his argument that since Okonkwo is the first to challenge his Chi, by trying to change his fortune

in life, his chi works in opposition to him. Lindfors concludes that man shapes his own destiny, and that Okonkwo's 'adversary is not the whiteman, but rather his chi, his personal god or guardian spirit. Okonkwo is crushed because he tries to wrestle with his chi'.[17]

Garret Griffiths agrees with Lindfors that Okonkwo's doom is of his own making, but his argument is based on a different premise. He sees Okonkwo as a man who allows himself to be used as a sacrifice by his people: 'He (Okonkwo) performs more than is expected of him and sacrifices his personal life to an exaggerated, even pathological sense of communual duty.'[18] Griffiths goes on to explain that in ignoring the advice of Ezeulu, the oldest man in the village, not to join in the killing of Ikemefuna when the oracle demands it, Okonkwo acts in defiance of the values of the society, which believes that the old hold the key to wisdom. In so doing, Okonkwo ironically destroys the culture he is trying to uphold and the consequence is his own ruin.

John Povey sees Okonkwo's tragedy in Things Fall Apart from the view point of the opposition between change and conservatism. He contends that Okonkwo is destroyed because of his refusal to adapt to changing times. He says: 'Okonkwo's integrity

has a certain nobility in its fixity of spirit, but it includes an element of folly, for no man can be so assured of his own rightness. Such an attitude brings destruction to Okonkwo as surely as it does to the Old priest Ezeulu in Arrow of God.'[19]

James Olney stresses the same views as Povey in these terms: 'The inflexibility of his character leads inevitably to Okonkwo's tragedy, since the world, with the arrival of the whiteman insists on change and has the power to enforce its will.'[20] His argument points out that Okonkwo's intransigence and the forceful arrival of the whiteman lead to his end.

The same viewpoint is expressed about Ezeulu's tragedy in Arrow of God by Wilfred Cartey. He notes: 'Ezeulu's downfall is owing as much to his stubborn intransigence, uncommunicating aloofness, and destructive pride as to the progress of colonial administration.'[21] Man is thus shown to be party to his own ruin.

John Munonye has not generated the same interest among critics as Achebe and Amadi have. He is classified by Roscoe, in his examination of creative writing in Nigeria, as one of the writers 'waiting for recognition'.[22]

Munonye's The Only Son interests Don Carter only from the point of view of language. He draws a contrast between Achebe's use of English and John Munonye's and concludes: 'After reading a more recent novel, The Only Son, one wonders whether Achebe's place has not in this regard been challenged.'[23] This assertion is hardly tenable because Munonye has not, in either of his novels, The Only Son and Obi, matched the grace, fluidity and verve in Achebe's style nor the African colour in his character's dialogues.

Dathorne is more comprehensive than both Roscoe and Carter, but he dismisses Munonye's The Only Son in four sentences: 'Munonye's Only Son (1966) portrays the separation of a mother from her son Naana, because of their religious differences. Posing the familiar problem of the contact of cultures, Munonye sees it strictly from the view point of education. There is little humour to save the book from its dry barrenness. In short, The Only Son is laye's African Child told with limited ability and a lack of poetic insight.' About Obi he writes: 'The principal theme is change and transition in African Society, not only in ideas and values but also in devices and methods ... Munonye excellently elucidates the conflict between Christian and

traditional religious worship."[24] These attempts at examining John Munonye's contribution to Nigerian literature are too scanty and superficial.

Despite all the many and varied attempts at a critical analysis of the works of Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi and John Munonye, there is still a need for further appraisal of these works, to pool in one single analysis the tragic world view of these writers, showing the nature of the influence of Ibo traditional religious beliefs and Christianity on the lives of the Ibo speaking people of Nigeria.

Elechi Amadi and Chinua Achebe express a tragic vision which is largely Aristotelian. Theirs is, however, a vision which imputes that mankind's tragedy is more the consequence of his inability to contain his passions and ambitions, because of innate weaknesses in his make up, than the contrivance of the gods. Amadi presents a picture of a society pervaded by and enmeshed in the fear of powerful but benevolent gods. These gods are, however, forced to viciousness by the people when they attempt to wrest power from them. In The Concubine, tradgedy is the consequence of Ihuoma's stubborn insistence on becoming a human being inspite of the contrary wish of her Sea-king husband. The people of Aliakoro and Chiolu in The Great Ponds suffer because of

their greed, selfishness and ambition. Olumati's misery in The Slave is largely due to his inability to cope in the highly competitive world of Aliji after his stay at the serene shrine of Amadioha, and the contrivance of his enemies.

In Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, the people are in control of their destiny. The gods are the creation of the people to help them maintain law and order in their world. When the interest of the gods clash with that of the people, the gods are made redundant. In Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo couches his ambition and fear of being seen as a coward in his claim of maintaining the tradition of his people, when he tries single - handed to resist the encroachment of Christianity into Umuofia, his village. His passion to prove he is manly and brave at all times leads to his ruin. In Arrow of God, Ezeulu's ruin results from his ambition, vanity and obstinacy. His aspiration for more power than he already has as Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu who is the Chief god of Ummaro, becomes his undoing. Ezeulu uses Ulu in this venture, and he brings both Ulu and himself to ruin.

John Munonye in his two novels The Only Son and Obi concentrates on the tragic consequences of an alien religion, Christianity, on the African

consciousness. The Only Son traces the systematic manner in which Christianity encroaches on the traditional beliefs of a people through the young ones, and the reactions of the older generation to this encroachment. Nnanna, the youth who embraces Christianity, and his mother Chiaku, are representatives of the two generations. Obi dramatizes the trauma created in the individual when he is severed from his traditional roots by an alien religion. The confusion and agony Joe and Anna, his wife, go through show effectively the effects of alienation on a battered pysche by a religion that is inimical to a people and their way of life.

In these novels, the authors deal with mankind's concept of his place and fate in the universe, his beliefs and his efforts to maintain harmonious relationship between himself and his gods.

The tragic vision espoused by these writers in their works is influenced by their traditional Ibo beliefs, the classical, the Shakespearan and the Victorian concepts of tragedy, and by Christianity.

According to Ilogu, the Ibo people live within 'latitude 50° - 70° north of the equator and longitude

6^{o} - 8^{o} east of the Greenwich line,' in what is now Anambra and Imo States; the Ikwere areas of Rivers State; and 'to the west of the River Niger, in towns such as Asaba, Agbor, Kwale, Ilah and Aboh. A rough estimate of the present Ibo population will be about 9million.' Their origin is not certain but it is speculated that they could be part of migrant groups 'set in motion in Egypt in 1870 B.C by events such as the Nubian wars of Amenenhat I or the conquest of Egypt some what later by Hyksos. These movements are believed to have led some Egyptians to settle in the Yoruba country of Oyo and certain Ibo sub-tribal areas.'[25] It is also believed that other migrant movements from Benin and Idah may have formed the Ibo stock in Onitsha and Nri respectively.

Evidence amassed by both Ilogu and Arinze portrays the Ibos as a mainly agricultural people who lived in villages made up sometimes of homesteads or compounds whose owners were members of lineages who claimed a common descent or clusters of hamlets made up of homesteads whose occupants shared common facilities such as market places, sometimes the same ruler and common Ozo titles.

The basic social unit in Ibo society is the patrilinear Umunna or members of the extended family. Within each Umunna are major and minor sub-lineages.

The Head of the Umunna is the most senior member of the family called the Okpala. The Heads of the Umunna form the most important political unit, the council of elders, which includes Ozo title holders. These with the help of religious institutions such as the cult of Ala, the earth goddess and Ndichie the spirit of the ancestors, help to maintain law and order in the land. Besides the Okpala and titled men, some places in Iboland have an Eze or king. Some of the Ezes are powerful enough to rule over extensive areas but none over vast empires or kingdom. Marriage bonds and common interests, as in matters of defence against intruding warriors, united communities into voluntary confederations. This is demonstrated in Arrow of God when the seven clans of Umaro unite against the common enemy, the Abame warriors. Even in areas where there were Ezes, the people were ruled through the Okparas and lineages instead of through staff hired by the Eze. Meek explains the communual nature of Ibo authority more clearly when he says: 'The elders were a body of mediators and referees rather than of prosecutors and judges, and the community was a republic in the true sense of the term, i.e. a corporation in which government was the concern of all.'[26]

The family is another important social unit in Iboland. Marriage which is greatly respected is not an affair between individuals; it is a protracted family affair which consist of religious ceremonies and sacrifices, payment of brideprice and the actual marriage ceremony itself. A family is believed not to be complete without children. They are seen as the link between the ancestors and the living because they are seen as reincarnations of ancestors. In Obi, Munonye uses this aspect of Ibo culture to expose the cultural conflicts that arise in the lives of converts to Christianity in Iboland. The agony Joe and Anna are subjected to by the Umuada, as a result of their childlessness, coupled with the conflicts between the traditional and Christian ideals of marriage, are responsible for the plight of the protagonist in Obi.

Though the family is a strong social unit, the people exist in groups and perform their various tasks communually. For example, if one were to build a house, members of his age-group would help him accomplish the task. Everything that affects an individual in the village would affect the clan. In such interaction, the kolanut plays an important role in the lives of the people. It is a traditional sign of welcome to be shared with visitors. To

refuse to give or accept kolanut is a sign of hostility. Thus in Arrow of God, Akukalia refuses the kolanut he is offered when he bears the message of war to Okperi.

In Iboland, there are some very important social institutions, one of which is the Ozo title. The Ozo title or rank is an important status symbol as well as a religious institution. Wealth is the passport to the title although good conduct is also demanded. Once initiated, the Ozo man becomes, an Nze and he has many privileges in the society no matter his age. The privileges include the holding of political office, representing the family and lineage in village group councils, presiding over the settlement of cases, making covenants and establishing new cults. Social privileges include being given precedence in social functions and offering libations to the ancestors. To retain the Ozo title through life, the Nze must live an exemplary life, publicly and privately upholding the morality of the land, observing all taboos, religious ceremonies and rituals of all the gods and goddesses of the land. Once an Ozo man is convicted of a crime he automatically loses his title. In this way the sacredness of the society is maintained. The Nze had great powers in Iboland and often decided

major religious, social and political issues affecting the community. Thus in Things Fall Apart, we see Okonkwo placing such a high premium on being a success, without which he will not be reckoned with in Umuofia.

Even though one has to join a society like the Ozo society to gain esteem, there is still a great deal of respect for old age. The language of the old is usually generously spiced with proverbs. The significance of proverbs in Ibo speech is expressed in Achebe's statement that: 'proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.'[27] The apt and generous use of proverbs make the speeches of Achebe's characters colourful and captivating. Proverbs encapsulate the accumulated wisdom of the people. They reveal the profound thought and soul of the people. As a result the words of elders are held in high esteem.

The Ibos are a deeply religious people and they have a wide pantheon of gods and godlings. Some of their gods are Chukwu or the supreme god, Ani, the earth goddess, Amadioha, the god of thunder and lightening and Igwe, the god of the sky. These gods are worshipped throughout Iboland. There are a few others whose worship is done on local levels.

Central to the Ibo thought pattern and idea of the outcome of a person's life or his fortunes and misfortunes is the concept of *chi*. Chinua Achebe says of this idea: 'A concept so central in Ibo psychology and yet so elusive and enigmatic ... In a general way we visualize a persons *chi* as his other identity in the spirit land - his spirit being complimenting his terrestial human being; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it.'[28] Ilogu informs us that the *chi* is given to a person at birth by *Chukwu*, and it accompanies him from the cradle to the grave. It is strictly personal. A person's abilities, successes and failure in life depend on it and, because individual *chi* differs, every person is expected to prove the worth of his *chi* by engaging in various economic and social activities. Despite this, it is believed that even though a person's *chi* may be unfavourably disposed towards him, the person can, through 'medicine', prayers and sacrifices particularly to his ancestors, influence the performance of his *chi* for the better. If he, however, ends ignobly, despite his efforts, everybody sympathizes with him, agreeing that he did his best but his *chi* was unwilling to cooperate. Achebe notes, however, that a man determines his fortunes despite his *chi* because at the beginning of his

creation a man is given an element of choice to bargain with his chi and the outcome of his life is the result of the 'agreement he himself must have reached with his chi. There is a fundamental justice in the universe and 'nothing terrible can happen to a person for which he is not responsible'.[29] This is a belief that affirms that a person is the chief determinant of his tragedy.

The traditional pattern of Ibo life became disturbed in the middle of the nineteenth century when the Christian church started earnest evangelical work. According to Ilogu, Captain Trotter signed an agreement with Obi Ossai of Aboh in 1841. The treaty established that the Obi would accept Christian missionaries in his domain. Obi Ossai's death prevented any missionary activity from arising from the treaty. On 27th July, 1857, however, active mission work commenced in Ibo land as a result of the treaty signed between Obi Akazua of Onitsha and a group of missionaries led by Samuel Adjai Crowther. From then on various Christian sects which included the Catholic church, Methodists, Anglicans, and others arrived in Iboland. They started competing for converts, building churches, schools, and hospitals and setting up other modern amenities. Once entrenched in Iboland, conflicts

arose because of sharp differences between Ibo religio - cultural ethics and Christianity. The various advantages gained by the converts made it possible for the missionaries 'to overload the Christian message with western cultural values to the detriment of traditional culture'.[30]

Amadi, Achebe and Munonye in their works are preoccupied with the relationship between human beings and the spiritual universe, the religious conflicts engendered by Christian encroachment on tradtional African life and mankind's role in the shaping of his destiny.

CHAPTER 2

ELECHI AMADI:

THE CONCUBINE, THE GREAT PONDS, THE SLAVE*

Amadi's novels examine the nature of the influence of the supernatural on mankind's destiny. In his exposition of this theme in The Concubine, The Great Ponds, and The Slave, he confines himself to traditional African societies. The only Europeans mentioned are an elusive group of traders at the very fringes of the society who make no impact on the people or their way of life. Amadi thus depicts idyllic societies particularly in The Concubine and The Great Ponds, in which people go about their affairs oblivious of the rest of the world. Despite this serene exterior, underneath is a war between the people and their gods for the control of their destiny.

Unlike the gods in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God, the people here do not know how their gods came into being, they are woven into eternity. All the people

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* The Concubine, London, Heinemann, 1966, reset 1975 hereafter abbreviated as (TC). Further references given after quotation.

The Great Ponds, London, Heinemann 1969, reset 1975 hereafter abbreviated as (TGP). Further references given after quotation.

The Slave, London, Heinemann 1978, hereafter abbreviated as (TS). Further references given after quotation.

are acutely aware of is the gods' presence and infinite power. The mystery and ubiquity of the gods, their transmutation into time and space make their very nature incomprehensible to the people. Their wrath and power is the only aspect of their nature that the people are aware of. Anyika, the dibia says, of the Sea-king, 'He is too powerful to be fettered and when on the offensive he is absolutely relentless. He unleashes all the powers at his command and they are fatal (TC, P.196).' Ogbunabali, the god of the night, in The Great Ponds whose very name connotes death is 'one of the powerful gods in the Erekwi clan ... Ogbunabali had the peculiarity that it killed mostly by night. He had neither the dignity of Amadioha the god of thunder and of the skies nor the popularity of Ali the earth god, but he had a sombre reputation all his own' (TGP, P.85). Ali, the earth god in The Slave, 'is a gentle but relentless god' (TS, P.10). The people are consequently petrified of these gods and hold them in awe. Olumba, a warrior in The Great Ponds demonstrates this fear when he says to Ikechi, a young warrior who undermines the gods out of his admiration of Olumba's prowess in battle, 'Never play with the gods my son. They are powerful and should be respected. I would rather face a whole village in battle than have the weakest god after

very large measures to their own tragedy. Instead of being manipulated, they attempt to manipulate the will of the gods in their own favour. They know and accept that the gods are powerful and that the only guarantee for a happy life is to respect the wishes of the gods. Frailties in their nature such as avarice, obstinacy and vanity prevent them from doing so. The response of the gods to such slight is to punish these people with misfortunes and sometimes death. The gods are not vicious at such instances, they are only claiming their legitimate rights over mankind.

Ihuoma's tragedy in The Concubine is that of a good woman who is led to inevitable doom by her own conduct. The role of the Sea-king in her tragedy cannot be denied, but the god who destroys her is not inexonerable, capricious and arbitrary. Ihuoma has some measure of control over her destiny, and that of the men in her life, but she opts for damnation. Ihuoma's ruin is the result of her obstinate insistence to revert from being a goddess to a human being, while at the same time cementing her humanity by getting married. Emenike's doom is sealed the moment he takes her as his wife. Madume causes his own death by his greed. He desires Ihuoma and upon failing to gain this objective

insists on appropriating her piece of land. Ekwueme commits the same mistake as Ihuoma when he stubbornly insists on getting married to her despite the diviner's warning that death awaits any man who dares to do so. Also Ekwueme's boast and impertinent attempt to fetter the Sea-king compound his misdemeanours and precipitate his destruction. Ihuoma is the Sea-king's main interest and her male admirers are victims of circumstance and of their own misdeeds.

The tragic drama of Ihuoma's life begins when she is born in Omokachi village, where she marries Emenike, a respectable young man who dies six years after their marriage. His death is attributed to 'lock-chest', the result of injuries sustained in a fight with Madume, another young man over a piece of land. Madume himself dies soon after a confrontation with Ihuoma over the same piece of land. Ekwueme, the third man in Ihuoma's life suffers the same fate as the others, but before his death the diviner, Anyika reveals some things about Ihuoma. The first revelation is that Ihuoma was the Sea-king's wife in a previous existence; she owes her humanity to him and that he is bent upon doing away with any man who marries her. Anyika, however, points out that the Sea-king can be persuaded to relinquish some of his claims on Ihuoma by allowing her to become the

concubine of any man she chooses. This will only be possible after a series of placatory sacrifices. These revelations about Ihuoma are made at the close of the novel after most of the deaths have occurred. The dibia claims to have been blinded by the Sea-king hence the late discovery. Harrowing as this tale is, the Sea-king's stand on the issue of his relationship to Ihuoma is quite clear. Anyika expresses this succintly during his divination: 'Well she could be someone's concubine. Her Sea-king, husband can be persuaded to put up with that. But as a wife is completely ruled out' (TG, P.196). The Sea-king accedes to Ihuoma's wish at a small price: he requests her never to marry. She, however, fails to keep her own side of the bargain. Ihuoma prefers to be a wife and such a preference charts the course of her life.

Osundare tries to exonerate Ihuoma from any guilt when he writes: 'Only the Sea-king knows the whole truth about her. She herself is not even aware of her membership of the two worlds.'[2] Osundare's contention is open to dispute. The people of Omokachi are aware that spirits find their way into the world to mingle with men. Anyika confirms this fact: 'There are a few women like that in the world... they are usually very beautiful' (TC, P.197).

Ihuoma is shown to be such a woman. She is an epitome of perfection: 'Her complexion was that of the anthill. Her features were smoothly rounded ... Ihuoma's smiles were disarming. Perhaps the narrow gap in the upper row of her regular white teeth did the trick' (TC, P.10). Being so beautiful, she becomes the envy of most young ladies in the village who employ the aid of carvers to create gaps in their teeth so that they can be as beautiful as Ihuoma. Added to her beauty is her even temper, politeness, humility, courage and a good sense of decorum. She is the joy of her husband Emenike and the pride of Omokachi village. Her godly essence is manifested in her flawlessness, a state she sometimes finds oppressive especially when it prevents her from expressing her humanity. As a result of such flawless beauty, men find her very desirable and they are drawn irresistably to her and consequent doom, like moths to a flame. Ihuoma is a femme fatale whose very presence and actions precipitate tragedy.

Ihuoma holds the key to her own destruction. Even though the revelation about her true nature is made quite late in the text, Ihuoma would not have been impeded, by an earlier revelation, in her pursuit of the human happiness she hopes to find through marriage to Ekwueme, her most spirited lover.

She could have saved herself from misery and Ekwueme from death by refusing to be party to ' a marriage where it was believed the bridegroom was doomed to die' (TC, P. 197). Ihuoma could also have enjoyed Ekwueme's love and attention as his concubine; all Ekwueme desires is Ihuoma and he would have had her as wife or concubine. The Sea-king on his own part also loves Ihuoma and is benign enough to concede her the status of concubine. Ihuoma is however not happy with such a status. For her own selfish reasons, she deliberately chooses to be indifferent to Anyika's divination.

Ihuoma is tired of being a widow and an epitome of respectability in Omokachi village. She precipitates her own destruction, upon being told about Anyika's divination, when she cast aside all consideration for the Sea-king with the nonchalant statement: 'These things are strange and almost funny. I certainly don't feel like a daughter of the Sea'. (TC, P. 201). This is the least expected reaction from one in a society where people believe very much in gods and the power they have over men. Ihuoma's discontent with her status of widow, her struggle against loneliness, the advances of men and her attempts at maintaining the respect and admiration of the people of Omokachi, make her careless of the gods. She feels cloistered by the people's

admiration, 'she began to loathe her so-called good manners, she becomes less delighted when people praise her. It was as if they were confining her to an ever-narrowing prison' (TC, P.153). Ekwueme's love relieves her from all these pressures, she gets transformed into a new person and she experiences 'an inner peace and serenity that had eluded her for a long time' (TC, P. 192). Ihuoma is not ready to give up this new found happiness, not even out of fear of reprisal from her Sea-king husband.

The Sea-king does not even asks Ihuoma to give Ekwueme up, all he wishes is for her to remain a concubine of men. Ihuoma is, however, too finicky about respectability to accept concubinage. Omokachi, which believes very much in the gods' power, would not have frowned upon her having such a relationship with Ekwueme because they know it is a god's wish. Ihuoma refuses to abide by her societal beliefs, sees marriage to Ekwueme as a release, and pursues her goal with determination. She allows herself to be swept by Ekwueme's enthusiasm, fanned by Agwoturumbe's false assurances that the Sea-king can be fettered to 'prevent him from doing harm' (TC, P.199). She aggravates an already dangerous situation by promptly proceeding to fondle Ekwueme and calling him 'husband' even though the placatory sacrifice has not

been performed. These acts of insensitivity on Ihuoma's part infuriate the Sea-king and he strikes his rival Ekwueme dead, much to Ihuoma's unhappiness. We see Ihuoma, the belle of Omokachi village, at the end of the novel raving and clawing at the ground, a most pathetic figure to behold, as Ekwueme her beloved dies. The misery and pain she goes through is primarily of her own making, she is paying the price for her disdain of a force greater than her self.

Ihuoma's tragedy is compounded by devious dibias who toy with the helplessness of the people, when confronted with godly anger, out of sheer knavery and self-interest. Dibias are meant to be mediators between the gods and the people, but some dibias are more caring of their human charges than others. Anyika, the dibia in Omokachi village, couches his carelessness in the claims that he is blinded by the Sea-king, which is the reason for his late discovery of Ihuoma's true nature. But his admission, 'for a long time I have suspected this but have never bothered to investigate the matter thoroughly' damages his claim (TC, P.195). His gross negligence demonstrated in these lines show him up as a mischievous dibia who is happy to see the people suffer, for he knows and admits that women like Ihuoma leave behind them 'a harrowing string of dead

husbands', yet he does nothing (TC, P. 19). Anyika is not incompetent, only wayward, using his position to trifle with men. He steers his clients away from their real enemy by making his divination as vague as he possibly can. When he gets tired of his wicked game, he volunteers to pay for a divination, puts his mind to it and comes out with a clear-cut prediction. But alas the people are too far gone in their intent to listen or care. Dibias seem more capricious than the gods. The Sea-king gives his human foes opportunities to retrace their steps, but such opportunities are lost through the negligence of dibias who fail in their duty of protecting the people from the wrath of the gods.

Agwoturumbe, the dibia procured from Aliji by Wigwe, Ekwueme's father, is as unscrupulous as Anyika. He exploits the helplessness of his clients, in his bid to establish his superiority over Anyika and thus achieve economic advantage. His question directed at Wigwe, 'Is it because Anyika told you it is impossible?' embodies the rivalry between the two dibias (TC, P. 199). Agwoturumbe arrives in Omokachi with great flourish and for the period he is there, Anyika loses most of his customers. Agwoturumbe's boastful utterances enrage the Sea-king into action:

> I Agwoturumbe, have seen things some of which I can describe only at the risk of my life. Your case is the least difficult of the many similar jobs that I have done. I have had to contend with several water and land spirits at the same time. I have journeyed to the abode of the water spirits themselves to plead with them. What is more I can look into the future. As far as I can see we will all come back safely. More still, if by a rare chance the boat turns over, all you and your father have to do is hold on to Agwoturumbe and you will find yourselves at the bank safe and dry. (TC, P. 210).

These are the words of a vain narcissist. In every sentence is the first person pronoun. Agwoturumbe over-reaches himself in his bid for dominance. He uses the Sea-king's displeasure to achieve his own selfish end. Ihuoma's predicament provides Agwoturumbe, a proud dibia, an opportunity to establish his economic hold over Omokachi. His irresponsible bid to fame, more than the Sea-king's malevolence, puts the final seal on Ihuoma's fate.

Emenike, Ihuoma's husband, is the tragic victim of circumstances and a dibia's negligence. He is 'an ideal young man ... good-looking and well formed, a favourite with the girls ... He had won the old men's confidence and they always let him run errands that required intelligence and extensive use of proverbs' (TC, P.5). Such a promising young man falls to sudden ruin because he gets married to a god's wife. He receives a six-year period of grace

from the Sea-king because, as Obiechina explains, Ihuoma has not completed her transition from a spirit to a human being: 'She is a spirit feeling its way towards a human identity.'[3] The Sea-king sees her in this state as a concubine of Emenike. But as soon as Emenike falls ill after his fight with Madume, the Sea-king feels his position threatened. Ihuoma loses her normal composure, out of concern for her husband's safety, and reacts more like a human being. She pays loving attention to her husband, Emenike, and her Sea-king husband gets very jealous. Ihuoma's agitation is demonstrated in the attention she pays Emenike: 'She prepared dish after dish to tempt him. She brought out a new wrapper, and cushioned his head. The very logs of wood were especially collected' (TC, P. 7). The Sea-king can no longer bear the rivalry in which Emenike is gaining the upper hand, so he strikes him dead.

Emenike reads of his death in the eyes of the priest of Amadioha during a customary thanksgiving sacrifice to the god for seeing him through his illness. The very awe, wonder and majesty of the god is evoked in the description of his shrine:

> Rank trees bordered the dark path. Some climbers were so thick they looked like ordinary trees. At the shrine absolute stillness reigned and it was quite cold as the high majestic roof of thick foliage,

> like a black rain cloud, cut off the sun completely. Even the wind could only play meekly among the undergrowth ... Nwokekoro went into the temple and placed some kola nuts in front of two carved figures clothed in blood and feathers.(TC,P.17).

The god is transformed from an illusion to something more substantial when he appears in the form of a huge snake to partake of the sacrifice. In this awe-inspiring shrine, where other aspects of nature such as the wind seem cowered, Emenike dares to catch the eye of the chief priest, who, upon emerging from the shrine, assumes a new personality embodying the godhead. 'One could not help feeling that somehow there was a great understanding between him and the god ... His face was almost expressionless, but there was an incomprehensible look about his eyes. Instead of looking outwards they seemed to be staring inwards into his head' (TC, P.1). Emenike sets his eyes on this figure where other elders would not dare to look and he reads 'mild reproach and death' (TC, P. 17). When the reader next hears of Emenike, he is dead.

Anyika, the dibia, seals Emenike's fate by neglecting his responsibility towards him, as mediator between him and the god. Emenike's illness affords him an opportunity for a divination through which he will learn of Ihuoma's nature and his precarious position. The first night of his illness is ominous enough, with owls giving 'vent to a long

eerie hoot' which dies in 'a hair - raising diminuedo' (TC, P.6). But Anyika, plays down the seriousness of the situation with the vague statement: 'Too many evil spirits about' (TC, P.7). He leaves after putting a few amulets on the doorway. He fails to admit to the anxious family his inability to divine anything. An open admission of failure at this point may have made a difference to Emenike's fate. The aid of a stronger dibia would have been sought by Emenike's family. But Anyika is not willing to jeopardize his trade so he keeps quiet only to suggest in the end when all is lost, that he was blinded by the Sea-king. This singular act of wanton negligence on Anyika's part precipitates Emenikes doom.

Emenike does not have much of a chance to rectify his situation, but both Madume and Ekwueme, the other victims of the Sea-king, have enough time and receive ample warning about the danger that awaits them if they encroach on the Sea-king's rights. They are warned by the Sea-king through premonitions which abound in the novel. Osundare describes them as 'ostensibly inconsequential episodes that latter turn into vital ingredients of tragedy'.[4] They are also evidence of the benevolence of the Sea-king to help his foes from the path of destruction. These

opportunities are lost to those affected because the victims are determined to achieve their own goals. One of such premonitions is when Madume stubs his left toe at the entrance to Ihuoma's compound during his first attempt to woo her. He gives this ominous incident the seriousness it deserves by consulting Anyika. Anyika, in his characteristic manner, gives a vague and inaccurate divination, putting the stress on the wrong enemy, 'Unknown spirits, some of them from the sea, teamed up to destroy you, let me see, Oh yes, Emenike's father was among them (TC, P.58). Even though this divination is obsecure, it is nonetheless unequivocal: Madume must have nothing to do with Ihuoma. 'They don't want you to have anything to do with Ihuoma,' Anyika declares (TC, P.58). Madume is too greedy to heed this warning. He gives up Ihuoma, but insists on wresting from her the piece of land that had been the bone of contention between him and Emenike. He tries to restrain Ihuoma from cutting plantains from the land. Ihuoma's doleful cry: 'Abah! Abah! Death, I have you to blame for this', tears at the Sea-king's heart (TC, P.68). He cannot stand by uncaring, while his queen is being molested. He rushes to her aid in the form of a spitting Cobra and blinds Madume. Anyika refuses to help and when Wolu, Madume's wife, asks in despair about what to do, Anyika replies 'nothing' (TC, P.71). This crypt

answers evokes the frightening finality of man's fate when confronted with the power of the gods. Madume's death is as swift as Emenike's. Madume dies for his greed and molestation of Ihuoma.

Ekwueme, the third man in the tragic drama of Ihuoma's life is caught in the web of inevitable doom when he desires Ihuoma. He gets destroyed like Emenike and Madume not only because he wants Ihuoma as wife but also because he taunts and at the same time tries to bind the Sea-king. Amadi devotes so much time to this relationship that the reader gets convinced of Ekwueme's love for Ihuoma and is able to see the logic in Ekwueme's willingness to stake his life for the happiness he has found in Ihuoma. Ekwueme is so awe-struck by Ihuoma that he is at pains to express his love for her. He makes many clumsy attempts to express his feeling. On such occasions Amadi is able to evoke the tortured embarrassment Ekwueme feels in Ihuoma's presence by paying attention to small insignificant details which heighten Ekwueme's discomfiture. On one of such occasions, the stilted conversation between them and the tension charged atmosphere dramatize Ekwueme's shyness and immaturity as Ihuoma proves coy and uncooperative:

> 'Ihuoma, I would like to help tie up your yams ... will it displease you if I come?'
> 'How you speak! Why should it displease me?'

> 'Because you are a woman difficult to understand'
> 'I think I am straight forward.'
> 'Yes I know, but you are difficult nonetheless.'
> 'You are the one becoming difficult now. I can't quite get at your meaning.'
> Here was the chance at last to say something useful. Ekwueme swallowed hard, coughed, cleared his throat, coughed again and swallowed.
>
> Pia, pia, pia, Ihuoma's stone hammer cracked away. It did not make up for the silence (TC, P. 80).

Ekwueme fails to make his intention known and he leaves Ihuoma's house frustrated and angry with himself. The Sea-king promptly warns him to stay clear of Ihuoma in a dream he has after his second attempt to make his intentions known to Ihuoma. In the dream he escapes being borne across a stream by Emenike and some vaguely familiar villagers. His mother's cry, 'Amadioha protect you' dramatizes how portentous the dream is (TC, P.50). Anyika robs Ekwueme of the opportunity to avert doom by being as ineffective as ever. Upon being consulted, he gives Ekwueme some cuts where he rubs supposedly 'potent and protective' medicine (TC, P. 50). Even though unaware of the danger he is exposed to by courting Ihuoma, Ekwueme is steered off doom by his forced marriage to his bethrothed, Ahurole. This relationship is a cross-road for Ekwueme; concentrating on the marriage means salvation for him. He, however, opts for destruction when he sees Ahurole, his bride, as

an inconvenience he has to put up with for a short while only to please his parents. His lack of commitment to the relationship contributes to the breakdown of the marriage and an opportunity for salvation.

Osundare rightly observes that the marriage fails for 'both human and divine causes'.[5] The god that removes Ahurole from Ekwueme's life is not the Sea-king as Osundare points out in his statement, 'Ahurole, her mother and the dibia are all tools of an overwhelming superior force'.[6] Divine intervention in the marriage is effected by Mini-Weku, the god who inhabits the stream that separates Omokachi from Chiolu, Ahurole's home village. The god's special task is to prevent evil from crossing from one village to the other. The love potion procured by Ahurole's mother, Wonuma, is a harmful drug which, Anyika points out, can make 'active and intelligent men suddenly... passive, stupid and dependent' (TC, P. 159). Wonuma's hesitation at the stream and Anyika's refusal to prepare the potion are proof that the potion is wrong. Mini-Weku, in his capacity as a protector of the people, infuses the potion with a different quality and its effect on Ekwueme is devastating. Mini-Weku intervenes here as an aid to the defenceless than as a foil to human endeavour. The marriage is doomed to failure the very minute it is contracted because the parties to the relationship have incompatible

temperaments and lack the commitment to make the marriage succeed. It would have failed despite the potion.

The love potion Ahurole procures is proof that she wishes the marriage to succeed, but her character operates against her. The husband she gets cannot cope with such a wife. She is childish, stubborn and given to bouts of unwarranted tearfulness. Ekwueme, on his part, is an immature young man who sees his mother as the archetype female. Any woman who is worth his attention must resemble his mother, mature and dependable. He grows up to be so attached to his mother because she dotes on him and shields him from trouble. He is consequently ill-prepared to face up to the problems of adulthood. When he gets a sullen, unpredictable wife, he shies away from his problem in dreams of a more mature woman, Ihuoma. He makes no attempt to know or understand his wife. Ahurole could have fared better with a patient, understanding and loving husband, as proved by the success of the first four days she spends in Ekwueme's home. In those four days, 'kind words greeted her all round and she was happy. There is nothing that softens human nature as much as kindness and love. Surrounded by these Ahurole's better nature predominated' (TC, P.124).

Lack of commitment to the marriage forces Ekwueme into brashness. He is very harsh on Ahurole, criticizing all her efforts to please him thus reducing her to more tears. Ekwueme can be gentle and loving if he wishes to. His response to Ihuoma proves this. He is kind and patient with her, even when she rebuffs his attention he perseveres. Ekwueme is ready to make any sacrifice to win Ihuoma, she is his ideal woman. Ahurole is a sufferance to him when he compares her to Ihuoma and he makes no effort to put up with her. As both he and Ahurole find their expectations from marriage unfulfilled, they refuse to adapt to each other:

> Ahurole expected far more gentleness than her husband could give. On the other hand Ekwueme's ideal wife was a composed stable woman who could get on without too much help from him. More, he wanted a woman who would not only receive praise and encouragement but also give them in return; a mature woman, soothing and loving (TC,P.138).

These are all the qualities both Ekwueme's mother and Ihuoma have. Ihuoma's maturity heightens Ahurole's childishness and Ekwueme's irritation at her failings deepens. The marriage deteriorates to such an extent that connubial conviviality is demonstrated in infantile games and vigorous wrestling bouts in the bedroom. There is every suspicion that the failure of the marriage is Ekwueme's goal so he can go to his ideal woman. The marriage fails more out of

human indifference and incompatibility than as a result of the malevolence of the Sea-king.

As soon as the marriage to Ahurole fails, Ekwueme turns all his attention to Ihuoma without any inhibitions or hinderance. All parental and societal opposition have been swept aside by the role Ihuoma plays in Ekwueme's recovery. Amadi devotes some time to carefully charting the development of the relationship. He gives the readers details in touching romantic scenes which dramatize Ekwueme's love for Ihuoma and make his desire to take on the Sea-king in a duel over Ihuoma a plausible course of action. When Ekwueme dies in this attempt, these scenes help in intensifying the pathos in Ekwueme's ruin.

The effect Ihuoma has on Ekwueme is exhilarating. She is like heady wine to him. Here is the kind of woman who fits his ideals in a marriage partner. Under her influence his personality undergoes a dramatic turn for the better. He becomes a different person from the one who married Ahurole; his 'annoyingly boyish' mind matures (TC, P. 130). He learns to be considerate, patient, resolute and persevering. After his marriage with Ahurole breaks down, Ihuoma reciprocates his love and his happiness grows. He spends most of his time in Ihuoma's company, showering her with love and attention. He

had found it difficult to respond to Ahurole in like manner. The ease, freedom and joy he experiences in Ihuoma's company is displayed in the congenial snippets of conversation he holds with her and their winsome coquetry:

> 'Your lap is warm.'
>
> 'Yours is cold,' she said laughing
>
> 'Why is that?'
>
> 'I don't known.'
>
> Ekwueme tickled her sides and she laughed and twisted her body this way and that.
>
> 'look Ekwe, you mustn't do this.'
>
> 'Why?'
>
> 'People will think I am crazy if they hear me laughing at this time of the night.'
>
> 'No, they will say you are happy.'
>
> 'But I should control my happiness.'
>
> 'Yes that is exactly what you always try to do.'
>
> Ekwueme tickled her sides and she laughed again.
>
> 'Are you drunk tonight?' She asked still laughing.
>
> ' I am and it was you who gave me the drink.'
>
> (TC, pp.202-203).

Romantic scenes like this which are numerous in the novel evoke the tenderness in the moment of affection and the reader is wrapt in the happiness the lovers find in each other. Most West African writers tend to gloss over such uninhibited show of love.

As Ekwueme enjoys the euphoria of Ihuoma's attention, the Sea-king's bitterness intensifies.

Ekwueme exacerbates the Sea-king's rage by daring the god to a duel upon being told by Anyika that he cannot marry Ihuoma. Ekwueme raves:

> I shall marry Ihuoma. She is a human being and if marrying a woman like her is a fatal mistake I am prepared to make it. If I am her husband for a day before my death my soul will go singing happily to the spirit world. There I shall be prepared to dare the wrath of four hundred Sea-kings for her sake (TC, P. 197).

Here is a different Ekwueme from the one who married Ahurole, he is now more assertive. Unfortunately this is not the best time for bravado. A man cannot dare a god. Ekwueme's insistence to marry Ihuoma, despite his knowledge that she is a goddess and the wife of the Sea-king, though courageous, is tantamount to self-destruction. Ekwueme, however, is already smitten by Ihuoma and is displaying and unusually fanatic feeling over her that is unknown in Omokachi village, which 'was noted for its tradition, propiety and decorum' (TC, P.127). Ekwueme acts in contrast to expected societal ideals because he finds Ihuoma too priceless to lose. His marriage to Ahurole was a protracted wrestling bout. Here is happiness at last.

Ihuoma on her part leads Ekwueme on to doom by reciprocating his love and showing her indifference to

the dibia's divination. The Sea-king takes his vengeance on them by striking Ekwueme dead; thus showing how presumptuous it is for man to try and superimpose his will over that of a god. The poignant irony in Ekwueme's death is that the procurement of the lizard which leads to his death is irrelevant, the lizard necessary for the sacrifice has already been caught. Ekwueme and Ihuoma through their actions cut the thread when the prize is within reach. There is only a day to the sacrifice which will placate the Sea-king, but they are too impatient to complete all the rituals; they continue to fondle each other with Ihuoma calling Ekwueme 'husband'. The Sea-king becomes enraged at being shown such disrespect and disdain by mortals. The anguish Ihuoma feels at Ekwueme's death is greater than the pain she felt at Emenike's. She has invested much in this relationship only for it to be prematurely terminated at the peak of enjoyment.

The gods cannot be accused of injustice in The Concubine. The Sea-king gives Ihuoma beauty, grace and calmness, attributes that can bring her happiness in a world into which she has insisted on being born. All these endowments, which make her the darling of Omokachi village, are given at a small price. Her happiness is conditional to her remaining a concubine

rather than becoming any man's wife. She fails to keep her own side of the pact thus dragging the men who love her, and who are as stubborn as herself, to ruin. The characters in the novel are neither hapless nor helpless. They have about the same control as the gods over their destinies. They fail to excercise this control judiciously thereby bringing down disaster on themselves. The gods on their part are powerful and ruthless when angered, knowledge which the people have, yet they defy the god, the consequence of which is destruction. The dibias aggravate the people's sorry state by being careless in the discharge of their duty or by leading the people on to believing that the gods can be made impotent. Self-interest is the goal of these dibias when they behave in such a manner. Thus Agwoturumbe leads Ekwueme to damnation by offering to bind the Sea-king while Anyika claims to be manipulated by the Sea-king when he finds himself at a loss.

The Sea-king is not 'cold, indifferent and manipulative', staying in his 'watery remoteness' to toy with the lives of the people as Osundare asserts.[7] Instead he is benevolent and long suffering, giving the people several opportunities to avert their fate, while at the same time coming to the rescue of the defenceless. He only wreaks vengeance on defective

characters. To accuse him of wanton destruction is unfair to him.

In The Great Ponds, Amadi portrays man as the author of his own ruin. The defects in his character, more than the evil machination of the gods, cause his tragedy. The thematic emphasis of the novel is the relationship between man and other men rather than that between the gods and man as is the case in The Concubine. In this contiguity, man is shown to be egoistic, violent and wantonly destructive. He is more assertive than the gods and is consequently the prime mover of the events leading to his destruction. The gods are as ubiquitous and feared by the people as in The Concubine but they are not as overtly powerful. Their power depends on the people's illusion, and they turn out to be weak, shadowy, unkonwable fixtures woven into the people's lives by them, to help in the maintenance of law and justice.

The tragic tale of The Great Ponds is set in motion when two villages, Chiolu and Aliakoro, are locked in fierce battle over the ownership of the great ponds of Wagaba which are full of fish. Many lives and property are lost in the war, with each

village almost annihilating the other before the timely intervention of other members of the Erekwi clan. To call a truce, they suggest a god be called upon to decide the true owner of the pond. Wago, a notable warrior from Aliakoro, suggests that the dreaded god of the night, Ogbunabali, be chosen as arbitrator. Olumba, another warrior from Chiolu, agrees to take the Oath on behalf of his people. In the intervening period before Ogbunabali's judgement is effected, the people are faced with a universal pestilence, Wonjo or the influenza of 1918 which wipes off even more lives than the battles over the ponds. Ali, the earth god, also indicates his anger about two innocent women captured out of battle field by the allies of Aliakoro, Isiali. Ali is particularly displeased about one of the captured women being pregnant. A pregnant goat is never sold not to mention a human being. As the tortuous six months of Oath drags to a close, the people are happy to see the end of their problems, only for Wago to commit suicide in the pond, thus depriving every one of its use.

Greed, over-ambition, stubbornness and vanity are the vices of man which Amadi satirizes in this novel. He does this so skilfully that the satire is hardly perceptible. Satire is implicit in the way Amadi contrasts the majesty of nature to the pettiness of

man. While men squabble for an immovable and immutable part of nature, wreaking havoc on themselves in the process, the ponds remain passively removed from the chaos. This portrayal of nature's indifference to human suffering echoes Hardy's world view. The ponds of Wagaba remain the same, full of fish, even more so after Wago commits suicide in it. Contrary to what the people believe, Wago's suicide evokes no response from the impotent gods. Thus all the energy expended in the battle for the possession of the ponds is in vain. Man is thus scorned by his avarice and he evokes no pity in his suffering.

Emphasis is placed on manliness in the societies portrayed in this novel, as in Things Fall Apart, and the effect it has on the people is as tragic as in Things Fall Apart. The Great Pond is a novel without real people, the characters are symbols. Both Olumba and Wago symbolize valour which is not tempered with wisdom. Eze Okehi of Aliakoro and Eze Diali of Chiolu are symbols of the collective will of the people. All the other characters are extras used by the author to creat the illusion of real villages. Osundare aptly describes Wago as the epitome of 'the consummate Machiavellism of Aliakoro.[8] Wago's obssession is to improve Aliakoro's economic position through gaining the ponds of Wagaba. As he gets

frustrated by every move he makes to gain the ponds, he loses all scruples and places expediency above morality. He becomes so maniacal about his goal at the end of the novel that he is willing to sacrifice his life for his selfish cause, which is depriving Chiolu of the ponds. If Aliakoro cannot **have** the ponds, then no other village will. His suicide is a vindictive act which demonstrates the extent of man's egoistic rapacity.

Olumba resembles Wago in many ways, but he is not as villanous. They both share the same zeal for the improvement of their villages and Olumba is as obssessed about the unpredictability of the gods as Wago is to make Aliakoro great. While Wago is calculating and immoral, Olumba is irrational and impetuous. He hastily accepts to take the Oath on behalf of his people, despite his pathological fear of the gods, emanating from his morbid fear of death. His neurosis is manifested in the feverish manner in which he worships all the gods. His zeal shames even the priests. 'No sacrifice was too great to placate the most insignificant of his household god' and both he and his wives and children 'were bedecked with charms and amulets' for various purposes (TGP,P.27). Olumba is driven to distraction by his illusion that he is fighting against a god, Ogbunabali, for his life

as he awaits the expiration of the six month of Oath. His agitation finds expression in the two voices raging in his head, one optimistic and the other pessimistic. These two voices, which are reminiscent of Alfred Tennyson's 'Two voices' torture him as they struggle for dominance in his mind. In the struggle, the optimistic voice cries, 'No matter, I shall survive it,' while the persimistic voice counters, 'You will not survive it. You are dead already. It is only your shadow that is on this side, your soul is gone' (TGP, P. 129). As these battles rage in his head, he gets reduced from a great warrior to 'a risen skeleton beating the Ikoro for the last time to announce the end of the world' (TGP, P.157). Olumba's helplessness and suffering leave the reader cold. Ono feels no pity for him in his martyrdom. He has deliberately and impulsively subjected his fate to a cause and a god he is not sure of. He is therefore only paying the price for his rashness. He gets tortured by his owr insecurity. 'The ponds of Wagaba - who were the rightful owners?', he muses (TGP, P.87. 'Were the gods wise?', he asks (TGP, P. 90). He can find no answers to these questions and he consequently feels oppressed by Ogbunabali, 'I am fighting with a spirit now' he says to Eze Diali (TGP, P. 92). But the god is ineffectual and his real enemy is his

psyche, which is the author of his neurotic fear of the gods.

Eze Okehi, Eze Diali, Olumba and Wago precipitate and escalate the war over the ponds in an attempt to efform a place for themselves in the history of their society. Both Ezes refuse to reach a compromise that may lead to some form of cooperation over the use of the ponds. Negotiations breakdown as they irresponsibly plunge their people into a war that cost them their peace of mind. Their vanity gets in the way of their reaching a compromise:

> 'What compromise? Diali asked.
> 'That is for us to work out. For instance the two villages might share the pond.'
> 'Never! Not in my lifetime!' Diali exclaimed.
> 'Well my men will fish there as of right in my lifetime,' Okehi declared.
> 'In fact they will fish there tomorrow.'
> (TGP, P. 25).

The Ezes cast aside their legitimate duty of leading the people in all good faith, for their own personal aggrandizement.

Even dibias, who are the link between the people and their gods, sell their conscience and fear of the gods to prove they are manly. Thus Igwu, the dibia, is spurred on by Wago to use his power deviously on Olumba. All these characters who are outstanding members of both communities have no depth neither do they learn from their suffering. They, rather than

assert their prowess and bestiality in battles. The dibia Igwu instils confidence in his clients by giving accurate divination. He promptly incapacitates Wago by striking him down with severe illness upon being challenged and disgraced by Wago in the wrestling arena. He successfully harms Olumba, despite Ogbunabali, by 'cooking' him (TGP, P. 120). Anwuawu, the dibia from Abii, hired by the people of Chiolu, effectively counteracts Igwu's attempts on Olumba's life so that Igwu is forced to admit his capabilities. Igwu declares: 'Anwuanwu is a great dibia. If I had not been vigilant I should have been dead by now' (TGP, P. 119). While dibias are duelling, and proving their might the gods are impotent. The dibias thus prove Anwuanwu's statement that 'tough dibias can do many things' and are sometimes 'more powerful than a god' (TGP, P. 101-102). Even Ali, the earth god, who registers his anger at the kidnapping of Oda, Olumba's pregnant wife in two flightless birds who appear in Eze Okehi's compound, and Eze Okehi's nightmares, turns out to be as weak as Ogbunabali. Nothing more happens after Igwu's divination. Eze Okehi loses his peace of mind like Olumba, out of his own pyschical illusions than out of the bellicosity of Ali. A contrast can be drawn between the activities of the Sea-king in The Concubine and in The Great Ponds

Madume is warned to stay clear of Ihuoma; he does not heed the warning and is immediately attacked by the god. Here, the god who is said to be relentless when angered turns out to be incapable. His bark is worse than his bite. He does not punish the kidnappers from Isiali or the people of Aliakoro. These omens are simply melodramatic and do not advance the plot of the novel. Eze Okehi is only being tortured by his own conscience. He has stood by, without doing anything to prevent Isiali from using unethical means to gain war booty.

The gods in The Great Ponds are remote and uncaring, never actively interfering in the people's lives until they are prodded to life by them. Ogbunabali is aroused to showing interest in the people of Chiolu and Aliakoro when the people reach a deadlock. 'The gods must decide' somebody says (TGP, P. 84). The gods do not however decide; instead Wonjo, a universal pestilence, indicts the warring parties for their greed and selfishness. Wonjo cuts more people down than even the war over the ponds. Inspite of the numerous sacrifices and the willingness of the fighters to call a truce, if only to save the situation, Wonjo rages on, unchecked by either the powerful dibias or the weak gods. Ogbunabali and the dibias are out-done by a greater force and Ogbunabali

is stripped of his illusory ferociousness in broad day light.

The Great Ponds can be divided into three parts. The first part describes the battles fought by the people over the ponds. The racy pace of the narrative in this section dramatizes the excitement, thrill and heroism of battles. The agony, confusion and doubts which Olumba experiences as he awaits the end of his bondage to Ogbunabali are dramatized in the snail pace of the narrative in the second part of the plot. The pace quickens, however, as soon as Wonjo barges into the narrative. Wonjo's reign of terror is evoked in the speedy manner in which the people's destruction is effected. Misery and pain are the order of the day. The gloom is, however, relieved by the melodramatic return of Oda and Chiza, the two kidnapped women. The racy pace of the narrative abruptly peters out in the authorial intrusion: 'But it was only the beginning. Wonjo, as the village people called the influenza of 1918, was to claim a grand total of some twenty million lives all over the world.' (TGP, P. 192). Amadi breaks the narrative so suddenly that the reader is left with the impression that the author is at loss about what more fantasy to add to the belaboured plot. The authorial intrusion demonstrates the ineptitude of the

gods who turn out to be figments of the people's superstitious imaginations. Chiolu and Aliakoro are not idyllic villages in a remote African past, like Omokachi in The Concubine. Instead they are villages which seem to be left behind in the progressive twentieth century.

Despite the gods' proven inertia, the people believe very much in their existence. They are embroiled in the people's lives and are feared and believed in by the people. They do not lose their credibility before the people in this nov l as Ulu in Arrow of God, instead they remain 'invisible, elusive, woven into the very bodies of their worshippers ... only idiots were free from the fear of the gods' (TGP, P. 130). The ubiquity of the gods transcends time in the peoples' illusion and they remain despite their impotence, 'Bastions of morality and the ultimate arbiter of justice'[9], while the people, on the other hand, remain the architect of their own ruin.

In The Slave, Amadi focuses on the individual and his response to the challenges of a hostile and competitive world where men scheme and struggle for eminence and the gods are seemingly oppressive and relentless. Olumati's misery in Aliji stems from his

states unequivocally that Olumati does not belong to Amadioha. With this issue resolved the people's minds are put at ease and Olumati settles into Aliji society. He is befriended by Nyche, Eze Minikwe's son, who teaches him rudimentary skills necessary for economic survival in Aliji, farming, hunting and tapping wine. With the problem of survival settled, Olumati wins respect for himself by defeating Aso, the Champion wrestler. He also wins the admiration of the most desirable girl in the village, Enaa. At the peak of his enjoyment of his successful return to Aliji he loses his mentor, Nyege, his grandmother, and his beloved sister, Aleru. Aleru's death makes it impossible for him to propose to Enaa, at the appropriate time of her coming out of Mgbede. He is thrown further into a state of despair when Enaa marries Wizo, a man Olumati feels does not deserve her. His unhappiness is aggravated when Adiba, Wizo sister, tells him that the people of Aliji still believe he is a slave of Amadioha. With this revelation, Olumati's misgivings about remaining in Aliji grows. He returns to the Shrine of Amadioha, without fulfilling his dream of restoring his family's name to its former glory.

Godly interference in human affairs is suggested when Olumati returns to the shrine of Amadioha, and all

the misfortunes he suffers in Aliji interpreted as the god's efforts to force his intransigent slave back to his fold. Amadi does not, however, succeed, in realizing his intentions. He concentrates so much on the activities of men to the general neglect of the gods. The gods Ali and Amadioha, who are alleged to be so vengeful that they almost wipe out the Echela family, are rendered insubstantial and implausible. They are so hazy that the reader is unable to suspend his disbelief in the supernatural. By contrast in The Concubine, the Sea-king and Amadioha are made so concrete that their very presence and power suffuse the novel with their mystery and splendour. In The Slave, the gods are rendered so unconvincing that they only exist in the people's minds. The god's power depends on the people inordinate fear of them. They are useful to the people in that they are the foundation of the people's private and public morality. Without fear of the gods, chaos and destruction would reign supreme in the land. The gods are called upon by the people to settle land disputes and other controversies. They deter the people from anti-social behaviour such as murder, theft and incest. Amadi resorts to pedantry as he describes these functions of the gods, instead of demonstrating the fact as he does in The Great Ponds.

He writes: 'Medicine men usually declined to hurt anyone in their village. Wicked villagers had to seek outside help. One strong reason for this convention was the knowledge that Ali the earth god would quickly kill off any dibia who operated against members of his own village (TS, P. 89). Amadi is being prosaic here, artistery has been thrown to the winds.

With the gods made so insubstantial and incredible, Olumati's misfortune can be explained in social and scientific terms. The first misfortune he faces is his grandmother's death. This loss, even though ill-timed and painful to Olumati, is natural. His grandmother is an old lady. Her death is of great significance to Olumati because he needs her to help and guide him until he finds his feet. Aleru, his sister, takes over this role but soon dies too. Her death is sudden but not inexplicable. She dies of haemorrhage caused by a miscarriage. Aleru loses her baby because she has worked in her brother's farm harder than is necessary and expected of a pregnant woman. She also has to cater for two households, hers and her brother's. Olumati's lack of exposure and consequent immaturity make it impossible for him to cope with these death. We find him confused at his grandmother's death and inconsolable at Aleru's.

These are some of the reason for his inability to survive in Aliji.

A remarkable aspect of this novel is Amadi's skill at characterization. He shows Olumati as the true ingenue who is unable to survive in the materialistic and highly competitive world of Aliji, where men are quarrelsome, evil-minded and sly. The impressionable years of his life, which he spends in the serene and peaceful Shrine of Amadioha, where 'fighting and injustice were unknown' leaves him artless and unsophisticated and therefore ill-prepared to survive in Aliji (TS, P.36). He has to be taught basic skills necessary for survival and soon excels in these activities. He is, however, mentally incapable of withstanding the hostility of his enemies such as Aso, who sees Olumati as a rival.

Aso stands in antithesis to Olumati. He is the villian of the piece who would stop at nothing to achieve his goal, which is to maintain his and his family's esteem in Aliji. Where Olumati is peace-loving, concilliatory and modest, Aso is a prickly, pugnacious vain-glorious narcissist. He is a completely revolting character, like Wago in The Great Ponds. He is so full of himself that on being turned down by Enaa, he breaks out into an arrogantly childish outburst':

> 'Whom will you marry, you stupid girl? Can't you recognize a good thing? Well, we are together in this village. I shall not die today or tomorrow. I shall see that paragon of yours' (TS, P.97).

His defeat by Olumati in the wrestling arena and consequent hunchback evokes no pity for him. His disgrace is well deserved. There is need for him to be cut to size. Aso intensifies the age-long rivalry between his family, the Okani and Olumati's the Echela. He openly provokes the Echela family, challenging Olumati to a fight the very first time he meets him, while at the same time rebuffing all attempts made by their common friends Nyeche and Wizo to settle the dispute. Aso' antipathy deepens Olumati's discomfiture in Aliji, Olumati wakes up most morning to find freshly dug up soil in his compound, indicating where charms have been buried. Olumati was able to contend with this unhealthy rivalry when his grandmother and sister were alive. Their death leaves him exposed and unprotected.

An atmosphere of fear, insecurity and loneliness pervades the novel. Amadi is able to evoke this feeling in the various levels of conflict and rivalry in Aliji. Aso, the most outstanding young man in Aliji, finds his position threatened by Olumati's presence in the village. Until Olumati's arrival he was clearly a champion. He is handsome, a great

wrestler and farmer, a ladies man and comes from an important family in Aliji. He has every reason to be arrogant. Olumati's presence evokes jealousy in Aso which finds expression in his constant harassment of Olumati. The harassment intensifies Olumati's fear and insecurity in Aliji. Most of his family have died or disappeared in mysterious circumstances, his mother refuses to come to Aliji, while his grandmother is forever warning him about enemies and families to avoid. All these assaults, mental and physical, are a source of deep anxiety to Olumati. He tries to stem this feeling by building a miniature Shrine of Amadioha in his bedroom: 'Since his return to Aliji he had missed the Shrine of Amadioha where he was brought up; the miniature temple would not only protect him but also cure his nostalgia' (TS, P.85, 86). Here lies the primary cause of Olumati's discomfort in Aliji, where he has to cope with secular issues of survival. He is now put in a real world where men display their prowess in competitions.

Olumati is able to brave most of his misfortunes until he loses Enaa, his dream girl. This single incident drives home forcibly to him that he does not belong in Aliji. He is particularly distressed about what he considers treachery on Wizo's part. He feels Wizo is his friend and so should have told him he is

proposing to Enaa. He is amazed at the supposedly sly underhand manner in which Wizo has robbed him of Enaa. The apparent dishonesty in man hits him with all its intensity. Amadi craftily uses the joy and conviviality of the occasion of Enaa's Mgbede to dramatize and accentuate Olumati's loneliness. While Olumati is stunned, flounders, seeking a comforting shoulder to lean on, as he learns at the last minute that Wizo has proposed and has been accepted by Enaa, the rest of the crowd is deeply engrossed in their enjoyment totally oblivious of Olumati's pain. Adiba, Wizo's sister, is the only person who is aware of Olumati's agony, but she compounds his unhappiness by reminding him of the controversy surrounding his return to Aliji.

Olumati, however, has only himself to blame for the loss of Enaa. If he had proposed early enough, as Aleru had adviced, he would have been accepted. Enaa likes him already. He has, however, been waiting for a suitable time when he would be rich enough to be worthy of her, forgetting that an Mgbede cannot wait forever. Wizo proposes to Enaa as Olumati seems uninterested. Olumati's inadequacies, his simplicity, guilessness, and the evil machinations of his enemies rob him of peace in Aliji and he returns to the Shrine of Amadi[illegible] where he feels secure.

The gods cannot be blamed for man's failure in this novel.

Despite Amadi's inability to achieve his intention of creating a universe where people are under the control of gods in The Slave, the reader's interest is captivated by his vivid and credible discription of village life. We see the people at work and play. There are exciting wrestling matches and other celebrations. Aliji village comes out of the pages of the novel genuine, and real.

Amadi's, in his novel , tries to paint a picture of a world riddled with fear of the gods, real or imaginary. In The Concubine, the people's fear is credible as their gods are rendered tangible and omnipresent. In The Great Ponds and The Slave, the reverse is the case. The gods are so vacuous and insubstantial that they turn out to be the figments of the people's superstitious imagination. Despite the reality, power and awesomeness of the gods in The Concubine the characters are the authors of their own misfortune, as in the other two novels. In The Great Ponds and The Slave, the gods are so unreal and the people so belligrant that they wreak havoc upon each other. Even though in the end the people are the primary agents of their tragedy, the gods, despite their intangibility, remain, for the people, an expedient

presence in their lives. They are the foundation of the people's social and moral ethos.

CHAPTER 3

THINGS FALL APART, ARROW OF GOD

In Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Achebe portrays human beings as dominant in their relationship with gods. Even though the people hold their gods in high esteem, they are not as petrified of them as the men in Amadi's novels. The men in Amadi's novels think and believe that success and failure in their lives depend on the whims of their gods. They therefore make every attempt to propitiate them with sacrifices. Achebe's characters on the other hand, believe that even though the gods are important and necessary for their well-being, a man succeeds or fails in any undertaking according to the 'strength of his arm' (TFA, P. 13). Achebe's characters are consequently shapers their own destiny. The gods in Achebe's novels are not powerful, they usually stand aside watching the tragic drama in the people's lives and at other times, as in Arrow of God, they get used.

Things Fall Apart is about the ruin of a notable man, Okonkwo and that of his society, Umuofia. Okonkwo conceives of his tragedy as having been designed by a

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* Things Fall Apart, London, Heinemann, 1958, reset 1976, hereafter abbreviated as (TFA). Further references given after quotation.

Arrow of God, London, Heinemann, 1964, 1974 edition, hereafter abbreviated as (AOG). Further references given after quotation.

polymorphic and inauspicious chi or guardian spirit. Okonkwo feels he has tried his best to be a success according to Umuofia's dictates where a high premium is layed on masculinity, but his chi is devious and will not cooperate with him. He laments his bad luck:

> Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi. The saying of the elders was not true - that if a man said yea his chi also affirmed. Here was a man whose chi said nay despite his own affirmation (TFA, P. 92).

Bernth Lindfors corroborates Okonkwo's views in his argument about the fall of the protagonist in Things Fall Apart. Lindfors says: 'When Okonkwo returns from exile he makes the mistake of believing that if he says yes strongly enough, his chi will agree ... But although he said yes very strongly, his clan and and his chi says nay.'[1]

Okonkwo's chi cannot be blamed for his ruin. Okonkwo achieves eminence and success through hard work and not through his chi's favours and when he falls to ruin he has only himself to blame. His obdurate nature and pathological fear of failure make it impossible for him to adapt to changing times. He adheres rigidly to the high standards of manliness he has set himself and which his society propagates. In his frantic bid to attain greatness, Okonkwo fails to

realise that the change in Igboland, caused by the advent of the whiteman, cannot be forestalled with force. Instead sagacity is the keynote to survival in the situation. Okonkwo lacks the intellect to perceive this.

Things Fall Apart opens at the height of Okonkwo's glory. He has achieved everything that makes a man command respect in Umuofia. He has three wives, many children, titles and a huge barn full of yarms. He has also made his mark in war and at the wrestling arena. He has five human heads to his credit and he has defeated Amalinze the cat, the champion wrestler. With these achievements he becomes one of the notables in the land. He is therefore sent as 'the proud and imperious emissary' of war to Mbaino and made the custodian of the ill-fated boy, Ikemefuna (TFA, P.9). Okonkwo gets harried by the desire for greatness because his father Unoka had been and Efulefu, a worthless person, who at his death bequeathed his son debts and shame.

Okonkwo inadvertently kills a clansman and is forced by law to flee the land to his mother's village Mbanta, where he continues to prosper. In the intervening period, the European comes into Igboland with his religion and administration. Some members of the clan, including Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, join the

church and an intransigent village, Abame, is annihilated. Okonkwo returns to Umuofia with the singular motive of unseating the whiteman, and forestalling the spread of his religion. Okonkwo beheads the whiteman's messenger during a gathering of Umuofia to determine what to do about the whiteman. Umuofia does not engage in the joint action which Okonkwo had envisaged, instead they scatter in disarray. Okonkwo then realizes the futility of his action and he commits suicide in disillusionment.

Okonkwo's ruin is caused by his inordinate quest for success. This desire grows into a psychosis which paralysis him. He becomes impervious to reason and fails to adjust to the change in his society brought about by the arrival of the whiteman. Okonkwo's psychopathic fear of being found effeminate, and consequently a failure, is born of the contempt in which he held his father, Unoka, who had been a failure by Umuofia's standards. Unoka was a lazy rascal, who loved his wine and music to the detriment of all else. He could hardly feed his family and he owed much to people. His death was as contemptible as his life. He died of a swelling disease and got thrown into the bad bush. A life as worthless as his made him the laughing stock of Umuofia, a fact that galls Okonkwo. The desire not to be like his father becomes the

guiding principle in Okonkwo's life, so much so that he becomes self-centered in his singular quest for eminence. Okonkwo's agony and fears are dramatized in the authorial analysis of his predicament:

> But his whole life is dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than fear of evil and the capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest and forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep in himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father (TFA, P. 9).

This morbid fear of failure, and not his chi leads to Okonkwo's destruction. He rules his household with sternness, fearing to show them love and gentleness. He beats his wives and children at the slightest provocation and soon earns the reputation of being a man who does not 'stop beating somebody half-way through not even for fear of a goddess' (TFA, P.21). Thus he beats his junior wife, Ojuigo, during the week of peace, at the risk of incurring the wrath of the goddess, for going to plait her hair without preparing his afternoon meal. He shoots at his second wife, almost killing her, for daring to deride his poor hunting skill, after he had beaten her for cutting a few banana leaves from a plant. All this violence stems from his having grown restless due to idling during the New Yam festival. His ultimate show of

manliness is his joining in the dastardly act of killing Ikemefuna, a boy who has become more like a son to him. This significant event in Okonkwo's life heightens his tragedy and drives his son, Nwoye, to the church. The arrival of the whiteman seals Okonkwo's ruin.

Unoka's fate reiterates the point that a man is the architect of his own misfortunes. Unoka was clearly a man who said no to his chi and he got a reply in accordance with his wishes. The priestess of Agbala, the oracle of the caves, makes the point very clear when Unoka goes to her for a divination on the causes of his failure in life. Umuofia's impatience with Efulefus like Unoka is carried in the stinging reply Unoka recieves:

> Hold your peace ... You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his god and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strenght of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your matchet and hoe ... Go home and work like a man (TFA, P.13).

Okonkwo makes hard work the pivot of his life. His chi works in consonance with him so that, despite a poor start in life, he acquires great wealth and renown at a very tender age.

Okonkwo's fortune begins to change with his return from exile. To a man of less rigidity, his

exile could have been of no tragic consequence, for it is an accepted moral ethos in Umuofia that a man must flee the land of his birth if he commits murder. That is the only way the people believe they can expiate for this crime against the gods of the clan. Uneto, who also commits murder as Okonkwo has done, suffers a worse fate at the hands of the Europeans. Okonkwo continues to prosper in exile. Instead of accepting exile as necessary, he however, sees it as a monumental misfortune. He believes it has deprived him of his position in Umuofia and this causes him great pains and fear. He expresses his apprehension in one of his numerous reflections while in exile:

> A man's place was not always there waiting for him. As soon as he left someone else rose and filled it ... But these losses were not irraparable. He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish and regain the seven wasted years (TFA, P. 121).

Okonkwo is not satisfied with the warm welcome he receives in Mbata and the fact that he is allowed to participate fully as an elder in the affairs of the village. He spends all his energy and time in preparing for a notable return to Umuofia, where he hopes to re-establish his former greatness. He is so wrapt up in his dream that he becomes myopic and insensitive to the change that is blowing through Igboland, even though Obierika, his friend, keeps him well-informed

about such changes.

The people now have to contend with a greater force than any they had ever known. Umuofia, where bravery and manliness are greatly valued, soon realizes that force is not the solution to the vexing issue of European incursion into their religious and circular life. Obierika draws Okonkwo's attention to this point during one of their conversations about the Europeans. Okonkwo, in his hot-headed manner suggests: 'We must fight these men and drive them from the land' (TFA, P.124). Obierika points out the simplicity and foolhardiness in such a move when he counters:

> Our men and our brothers have joined the rank of strangers. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the whiteman in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame (TFA, P.124).

The sharp contrast in this exchange of views between Obierika and Okonkwo dramatizes Okonkwo's insensitivity. Destruction is the only inevitable end for one who is so rigid that he cannot adapt to changing situations. As Achebe himself says: 'Life just has to go on; and if you refuse to accept changes, then tragic though it may be, you are swept aside.'[2]

Umuofia has already tested of the white administration's brutality in the arrest of her elders,

consequent upon their burning the church. Achebe evokes the helplessness of Umuofia in this new situation with conciseness and in highly dramatic imagery. He compares Umuofia to a cornered game: 'Umuofia was like a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent ominous air and not knowing which way to run' (TFA, P.139). The tragic predicament of Umuofia cannot be better expressed. Umuofia realizes with all certainty that violence is not the solution to their problem. Okonkwo, however, fails to appreciate this point. He is blinded by his singular determination to regain his lost position in Umuofia. The pathos in Okonkwo situation lies in the great disparity between his intellectual aridity and his brawn. Sadly, the strongman of Umuofia cannot recognize that the glorious Umuofia of his pre-exile is lost forever. Okonkwo's heart-rending mental deficiency is succinctly demonstrated in his infantile excitement at the prospect of war, after the release of Umuofia elders from prison:

> Okonkwo slept very little that night. The bitterness in his heart was mixed with a kind of child-like excitement. Before he had gone to bed he had brought down his war dress, which he had not touched since his return from exile. He had shaken out his smoked raffia skirt and examined his tall feather head-gear and his shield. They are satisfactory (TFA, P.141).

The pathetic paradox here is that Okonkwo's traditional

war dress, which is symbolic of his past glories, is redundant in this new situation. Ironically, Okonkwo ends up like his father Unoka, dying in a contemptible manner, in the very effort he makes not to be like him. Okonkwo gets driven to ruin, not by the 'contrariness of his destiny', but by himself.[3] He stubbornly fails to temper valour with discretion as he gets driven by his singular quest for greatness.

Okonkwo fails to recognise the symbolic note in the town crier's voice as he announces the meeting during which Okonkwo murders the head messenger. The criers voice is fainter than usual, Okonkwo strains to hear it, but does not see it as a herald of the gradual disintegration of Umuofia's nobel past.

Achebe's primary interest in Things Fall Apart is the African past. This is a fact pointed out by Abiola Irele in his discussion of the novel: 'The immediate subject of Chinua Achebe's novel is the tragic consequences of the African encounter with Europe.'[4] Outside its being about Okonkwo's tragedy, Things Fall Apart is also about the tragedy of a community, caught in the inevitable storm of change over which they have no control. Much as the people's fate has been taken out of their hands, they could still have made their encounter with Europeans less traumatic and agonizing. Their response makes the change more far-reaching.

The whiteman's arrival exposes latent weaknesses in the society which the people had accepted as a way of life. Such weaknesses are the heinous act of killing innocent people such as Ikemefuna simply because the oracle wills it, the destruction of twins, ostracizing Osus and the high premium put on success. These are the aspects of the people's lives that ironically hold them together. However, the whiteman's arrival creates a spirit of rebellion in the people adversely affected by the decrees of the land. Such people flock to the church in large numbers, thus embracing the enemy into their midst. As soon as they do this, they become the tools with which the whiteman destroys their society. Obierika makes this point effectively when he laments the destruction of the clan in a conversation with Okonkwo:

> The whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife in the things that helds us together and we have fallen apart (TFA, P.125).

Even though the whiteman brings about change, the members of the clan accelerate the pace of destruction. The economic, educational and medical advantages to be gained by the people from associating with Europeans, entrench the whites in the society. The unvarnished manner in which Achebe states this issue accentuates

the tragedy:

> For the first time palmoil and kernel became things of great price and money flowed into Umuofia ... 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; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the lord's vineyard (TFA, Pp. 126-128).

The sarcasm in the last sentence of this piece carries the shame and pain of a people as they sell their birthright and open themselves to exploitation. The people are so concerned with their individual interests that they fail to see their collective ruin, the ruin which Okonkwo sees on his return from exile. The reader sees the destruction through Okonkwo as he laments: 'The clan had undergone. Such profound changes during his exile that it was barely recognizable. The new religion and government and trading stores were very much in the people's eye and and mind (TFA, P. 129). Okonkwo finds himself alone in his grief and mourning for the clan which he sees breaking up and falling apart. The anguish he feels is profound and greater than Obierika who sees the change but resigns himself to it. Okonkwo, on the other hand, transforms the communual tragedy into a personal one by attempting to halt the change single-handed thereby proving his manliness.

The arrival of Reverend Smith, the missionary who replaces Mr. Brown, accelerates the course of change in Umuofia. Reverend Smith is not as accommodating as Mr. Brown. He is as rigid as Okonkwo in his beliefs. Achebe describes his narrow-mindedness thus: 'He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness' (TFA, P.130). His bigotry gives over zealous converts such as Enoch, the son of a snake-priest, room to manoeuvre. Enoch sets off open conflict between the church and the clan by unmasking an Egwugwu, the ancestral spirt. The consequence of this action is the burning of the church followed by the arrest of Umuofia elders and Okonkwo's decapitation of the head messenger. Achebe catches the explosiveness in the moment of Okonkwo's action and Umuofia's consequent disarray with economic excellence:

> In that brief moment the world seemed to standstill, waiting. There was utter silence. The men of Umuofia were merged into the mute back cloth of trees and gaint creepers, waiting ... In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger couched to avoid the blow. It was useless ... The waiting back cloth jumped into tumultous life (TFA, P. 144).

The short, staccato sentences aptly catches the cinematic nature of the incident and dramatize the tension in the moment. Okonkwo, by his action, breaks

the last cord of unity amongst the people. They fear that the fate of Abame will befall them too, so they scatter in confusion. Okonkwo realizes that the clan has gone soft and will not react, so he commits suicide. Obierika drives home forcibly Okonkwo tragedy in his accusation of the white District Commissioner: 'That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog' (TFA, P. 149). The Commissioner's insensitivity is pointed out when he reduces Okonkwo's death to 'The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself' (TFA, P. 141). Both Okonkwo and Umuofia act as agents of their own ruin in the hands of the whiteman.

Achebe does not give much attention to the people's gods in this novel. The little he shows about their role in the people's lives is that the people are not petrified of their gods. They only uphold the will of the gods when the issue at stake is a public or communual one; once it becomes a personal issue, they challenge the gods. Thus we find both Okonkwo and his wife, Ekwefi, actually trying to stand in the way of a goddess. The goddess of the cave demands through her priestess, Chielo, that Ezimma, Ekwefi's only child and Okonkwo's favourite, be brought to the cave. Okonkwo, who had earlier

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joined in the killing of Ikemefuna because it was the goddess' will tries to restrain the priestess. Ekwuefi, on her part, follows the priestess to the cave, carrying blasphemous thoughts in her heart. She swears inwardly 'that if she heard Ezinma cry she would rush into the cave to defend her against all the gods in the world' (TFA, P.76). Despite such utterances, nothing happens to her. A contrast can be drawn between this incident and Ekwueme's fate in The Concubine. Ekwueme dares the Sea-king and pays dearly for his indiscretion. In Things Fall Apart, human beings defy and deride the gods with very little fear of the consequences. There is the story of Obiako, one of the villagers, who, on consulting the oracle and is told that his dead father demands the sacrifice of a goat from him, replies the oracle: 'Ask my dead father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive' (TFA, P. 15). The people around laugh as the tale is told and nobody is afraid for Obiako.

The gods do not play the significant role of administering justice to the people, as they are made to do in The Great Ponds. In Umuofia, Ekwugwus perform such functions. Even they are stripped of their mystery by the authorial comment: 'Okonkwo's wives and perhaps other women as well might have noticed that the second Egwugwu had the springly walk of Okonkwo

And they might have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men who sat, behind the row of Egwugwu (TFA, PP. 63-64). This comment reduces Egwugwu from the realm of spirit to that of men. Being so weak, both the gods and the Egwugwu are swept aside by the whiteman's religion.

In Things Fall Apart, Achebe deftly paints the picture of a glorious African past in all the details, he gives the readers about the peoples' way of life. He highlights the wisdom in the African world view in his apt use of proverbs. He manipulates English in such a manner that the vibrant colour in African languages is reproduced. He shows the gods and spirits as necessary and important to the people. The gods are, however, subject to the people's whims. They do not control the people and the people's tragedy is more of their own fault than the gods'.

In Arrow of God, Achebe portrays a society where the people are so powerful that they control their destiny and that of the gods. The gods are a convenience created in man's image, by the people themselves, to help them enforce unity, security and morality; and the gods are disposed of when they become redundant. In such a situation the men tower above the gods and their tragedy is primarily of their own making.

The novel is focused on Ezeulu, the chief priest of the most important god in Umuaro. Ezeulu initiates his own ruin and that of Ulu by his actions. Ezeulu, like Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart, is dogged by a neurotic obsession; while Okonkwo's obsession is with success and manliness, Ezeulu's is with power. Ezeulu's obsession with power is born of his overwhelming sense of insecurity and vanity. These emotions are off-shoots of Ezeulu's exaggerated opinion of his office and the curtailed power of Ezeulu; his father had been a very powerful Ezeulu. Ezeulu sees his office as that of a sacrifice, a carrier of Umuaro's sins before the god and is consequently dissatisfied with the diminishing support he gets from Umuaro, and his tutelary relationship with Ulu. Ezeulu is a man of great intellect, a virtue which becomes his undoing. Being so intelligent, he understands the nature of his rights and hold over Umuaro; he sees it in its clearest perspective as that of a custodian of the people's will, but his vanity will not allow him accept such an insignificant role. His inability to accept his real place in the power structure of Umuaro leads to his insecurity, a feeling that intensifies until it borders on a neurosis which impairs his judgement and reason. He gets so numb and insensitive with bitterness and hate against Umuaro for her lack of support that he is hardly able to distinguish between the most

important of these two; his responsibility to himself or his people and his god. He precipitates his ruin and that of his god when the need to serve himself over-rides his duty towards his people. He abuses the power vested in him by the people and is consequently abandoned by them. The complexities in Arrow of God lie in the complexity of the motives of its chief protagonist, Ezeulu, whose actions are open to various interpretations.

Arrow of God opens with the whiteman already entrenched in Igboland, with his school and religion, vying for converts. Umuaro the African village which is the centre of all the activities in the novel is rendered unstable by the rivalry between the two prominent gods of the land Ulu and Idemili, through their chief priest Ezeulu and Ezidemili. The white administration quells a fight between Umuaro and her neighbour, Okperi over a piece of land. Ezeulu testifies against his people. For this reason, he is chosen by Captain Winterbottom, the District Officer who sees Ezeulu as the only honest man in Umuaro, as candidate for the position of Warrant Chief. Ezeulu does not respond to the whiteman's call to Okperi immediately. He gets detained for two months when he shows up. Bitterness wells up in Ezeulu against Umuaro for his arrest, he decides to punish them by refusing

to call the New Yam festival despite the people's plea. They abandon Ulu for the Christian church when the famine becomes unbearable. Ezeulu loses his sanity under the strain of his abandonment by Umuaro, a situation which is compounded by Obika's, his favourite son's, death.

Many critics and even Ezeulu himself try to blame Ulu for Ezeulu's suffering. Both Irele and Taiwo see Ezeulu as the scapegoat in a fight of giants, the gods Ulu and Idemili. Taiwo summarizes this view when he says: 'These characters are mere arrows with which anthropomorphic gods, Ulu and Idemili, shoot one another ... the confrontation in the novel ... is - a fight of the gods in which the god who loses is destroyed with his chief priest. Ezeulu suffers because his god is defeated in this viscious contest.'[5] Ezeulu himself attributes his suffering to his desertion by his god when he is most vulnerable. He expresses his enigma in highly figurative proverbial images:

> But why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it... who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took and axe and felled the tree? (AOG, P. 229).

This is an unjust accusation. Ulu cannot be blamed for Ezeulu's ruin. Ulu is an impotent god who is as transient as all the other gods of the land who

are cast aside when they become redundant in the people's lives: 'Some of them would be very old, nearing the time when their power would be cast aside; and some would have been made only the other day ... Perhaps this year one or two more would disappear, following the men who made them in their own image and departed long ago' (AOG, P. 202). Whatever power Ulu wields over the people is determined by the people themselves. They created Ulu as a security measure against the menace of the Abame warriors. He is therefore the symbol of the people's collective will and unity. His longevity depends on the performance of his chief priest who is an intermediary between him and the people, and also on the people's goodwill. Despite the restrictive nature of Ulu's creation, he would have survived the whiteman and his religion, but for his ambitious, vain and headstrong chief priest. Ezeulu's character is a handicap to the performance of his duty as chief priest of Ulu.

Emmanuel Obiechina attempts to exculpate Ezeulu of much guilt for his ruin when he says: Ezeulu is unaware of the limitations of his power and of the precise nature of his priesthood as the expression of a corporate rather than a personal will.'[6] Ezeulu cannot be absolved of guilt on the basis of unawareness. Ezeulu is a man of great knowledge. He displays his

sagacity in the numerous apt proverbs he uses in advising and admornishing both members of his family and Umuaro. Ironically, Ezeulu's handicap in this instance is his intellect. Ezeulu understands too well his precarious position as chief priest of Ulu. He understands clearly that his power over Umuaro is illusory and dependent on the people; that he is only a custodian of the people's will. His vanity, however, makes it impossible for him to accept this subsidiary role. He believes his office makes him a sacrificial object, a carrier of Umuaro's sins before the gods. He also believes, therefore, that he should have more power than he already has. He attempts to assume more power than is legitimately his. Umuaro, a truely republican society, repudiates Ezeulu's attempts at authoritarianism. Ezeulu chooses to interprete Nwaka's opposition as a sign of Umuaro's lack of appreciation of his office and he decides to exact revenge on them out of bitterness. The paradox in the situation is that Ezeulu is destroyed in his attempt to bring Umuaro to order.

Ezeulu's understanding of his subsidiary role as chief priest is explicitly dramatized in his meditation at the beginning of the novel.

> 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...

> 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. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused so it could not be done. He would not dare (AOG, P. 3).

Ezeulu is thus shown to be fully aware of his responsibilities towards Umuaro. The key to Ezeulu's ruin is his refusal to accept the limitations of his office. But Ezeulu is such a vain man, that he becomes resentful that his power is so little. His pique finds expression in his railing,on the same meditation, at his imaginary enemy who dares to suggest that Ezeulu's power is insignificant: 'Take away that word dare ... 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 has not been born' (AOG, P.3). Ezeulu's introspection impresses forcefully on the reader the extent of Ezeulu's self-worth. Ezeulu has such an inflated opinion of himself and his office that he finds it impossible to accept that his role is only that of a custodian.

Ezeulu also knows that Ulu's power is collective. He reiterates this fact as he sings the song of Ulu's creation at every festival of the pumpkin leaves:

> And we set to work. That day was Eke. We worked into Oye and then into Afo. As day broke on Nkwo and the sun carried its sacrifice I carried my Alusi and, with all the people behind me, set out on that journey. A man

> sang with the flute on my right and another replied on my left, from behind the heavy tread of all the people gave me strength (AOG, P. 71).

The symbolism of the dancer and his praise singers is evoked in this excerpt. One cannot do without the other. The dancer, however, needs the singers more. Thus Ezeulu dramatizes the collectivity of Ulu's strength.

The extended metaphor with which Achebe describes Ezeulu's abandonment by the people at the end of the novel also effectively dramatizes the necessity of the people's support to Ezeulu's well-being.

> But the heaviest load was on Ezeulu's mind. He was used to loneliness. As chief priest he had often walked alone in front of Umuaro. But without looking back he had always been able to hear their flute and song which shook the earth because it came from a multitude of voices and stamping of countless feet (AOG, P. 219).

Ezeulu's isolation by Umuaro has been thoroughly effected at this point. Even though Ezeulu is dejected and suffers such excruciating pain at being thus abandoned, he abdurately insists in carrying on with his fight with Umuaro. Achebe evokes Ezeulu's agony in such lucid images that Ezeulu shows himself up as a masochist, a man who is ready to punish himself to make others suffer:

> 'With each passing day Umuaro became more and more an alien silence - the kind of silence which burnt a man's inside like the blue, quiet razor-edge,

> flame of burning palm nut shells.
> Ezeulu writhed in pain which grew
> and grew until he wanted to go outside
> ... and shout at Umuaro' (AOG, P.219).

Ezeulu does not shout at Umuaro instead he refuses to yield to the people's wish to name the festival. He will rather suffer than please Umuaro; his rigidity is self-destructive.

Despite this awareness Ezeulu still pits himself against Umuaro. This is so because in counterpoise to Ezeulu's awareness of the true nature of his office is his personal interpretation of his role in Umuaro. Ezeulu's concept of his role is suggested as he ponders his mental and physical exhaustion the morning after the feast of the Pumpkin leaves: 'The exhaustion he felt after the festival has nothing to do with advancing age ... It was part of the sacrifice. For who could trample the sins of all umuaro and not bleed in the feet?(AOG, P.81). The confutation, in Ezeulu, between the reality of his role in Umuaro as Chief priest and Ezeulu's bias and myopic concept of his role creates a feeling of insecurity in Ezeulu. This feeling is exacerbated by Ezeulu's realization that the power he wields over Umuaro is not as strong as that of his father, the previous Ezeulu, a fact that is compounded by Nwaka's opposition.

Ezeulu, like Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, is gored by his father. While Okonkwo's insecurity stems

from his father's failure, Ezeulu's derives from his father's success. His father was a very powerful chief priest: 'Ezeulu's father had indeed been a great medicine-man and magician ... There were few priests in the history of Umuaro in whose body priesthood met with medicine and magic as they did in the body of the last Ezeulu. When it happened the man's power was boundless' (AOG, PP. 146 - 147). The present Ezeulu has to share all the power vested in his father with his half - brother, Okeke Onenyi. This situation deepens Ezeulu's dread and vulnerability.

Nwaka completes Ezeulu's mortification when he opposes him. Ezeulu views Nwaka's attacks as undeserved and indicative of Umuaro's lack of appreciation of his role of carrier of Umuaro's sins. Nwaka and Umuaro on their part, see their role as being to curb Ezeulu's excesses. Nwaka declares: 'I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition; he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all' (AOG, P. 27). Nwaka conceives of himself as the arch-democrat whose duty is to repudiate the totalitarian drive of an ambitious chief priest. 'Igbo people knew no kings,' Nwaka declares during one of his attacks on Ezeulu. This rivalry intensifies Ezeulu's insecurity and resentment against Umuaro. Ezeulu fails to recognise the cautionary note in Nwaka's opposition. He chooses to see it from the restricted view - point

of its being the action of a stooge fighting the cause of a jealous god, Idemili. Ezeulu's resentment against Umuaro, for allowing themselves to be swayed by Nwaka, grows into a destraction that blinds him to reason. Ezeulu, despite his intellect cannot contain his vanity and vindictive tendencies. Paradoxically he undermines further his already weakened position.

Ezeulu's ambition, vanity, vindictive nature and bitterness at being so poorly used by Umuaro finds expression in the discrepancy between his actions and his words. He claims, when he sends his son Oduche to the church, that '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' (AOG, P. 46). This proverb suggests that Ezeulu alone 'understands the nature of the presence of the whiteman in their midst ushering in an age of new adjustment' and he is making such genuine adjustment, but Ezeulu's actions show that this is not the case. The truth in the matter is that Ezeulu understands that Ulu's weak authority over Umuaro is soon to be superseded by an even greater power, the white administration. He therefore thinks it is wise to have one of his own in the new seat of power. He makes this point very clear on his return from prison when his bitterness against Umuaro over-rides his

caution and he says to Oduche:

> I have sent you to be my eyes there ... When I was in Okperi I saw a young whiteman who was able to write his book with his left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply (AOG, P. 190).

Comical as this piece is, it embodies the extent of Ezeulu's distraction. Ezeulu is so blinded by his insecurity and preoccupation with power, that he is willing to sacrifice his son to the Christian God in order to hold on to some kind of power. Both Ezeulu and Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart are confronted with the presence of the whiteman in their land, and they both selfishly try to use the situation to their own advantage. While Okonkwo passionately wants to unseat the whiteman to prove he is yet brave despite his exile; Ezeulu hypocritically uses the whiteman to ensure that power will still remain with Ezeulu, inspite of his diminishing hold over Umuaro. Ironically, both he and Okonkwo end up in ruin in their very effort.

Seen against this background Ezeulu's ambition becomes real. His testimony against Umuaro in the Okperi, Umuaro land case is thus a sign of his deep-seated anger for, and revenge against Umuaro. He claims to

uphold the will of his god, Ulu, who will not fight a war of blame, while taking the action but the reality is that Ezeulu is annoyed with Umuaro for not listening to him, thus showing him the respect he believes his office deserves. He therefore decides to take revenge on Umuaro, in so doing he allows his personal hurt to prevail over his duty towards his people. His friend, Akuebue tries to draw Ezeulu's attention to the danger in his action by saying: 'No man however great can win judgement against a clan' (AOG, P. 131). Ezeulu is, however, not a man to accept his fault or listen to advice. His response to this advice evokes effectively his haughty indifference to people's opinions on any matter. He replies Akuebue:

> I have my 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 are my friend and you know whether I am a thief or a murderer or an honest man. But you cannot know the thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances. I can see tomorrow; that is why I can tell Umuaro: Come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it. If they listen to me, O - O; if they refuse to listen, O - O. I have passed the stage of dancing to receive presents (AOG, P. 132).

With the frequent use of the first person pronoun, Achebe deftly depicts all there is to know about Ezeulu's character. Ezeulu is indeed shown to be an

ambitious, vain-glorious, odious, megalomaniac who draws little pity from the reader as he wilfully plots his own end. In the course of the discussion with Akuebue Ezeulu reveals the source of his bitterness against Umuaro. As Ezeulu sings the praise of his ancestors, Akuebue tries to draw his attention to the collectivity of Ezeulu's power, but Ezeulu will not listen, he is more interested in his loss of power when contrasted to the great power his ancestors wielded:

> You knew my father who was priest before me. You knew my grandfather too, albeit with the eyes of a little child.'
> Akuebue nodded in agreement. 'Did not my grandfather put a stop to ichi in Umuaro?...
> 'He did it,' said Akuebue.
> 'What was Umuaro's reply to him? They cursed him; they said: how is a man's endurance to be tested? Today who asks such a question?'...
> 'What you say cannot be doubted,' he (Akuebue) said, 'but if what we are told is true, your grandfather was not alone in that fight. There were said to be more people against Ichi in Umuaro than...'
> 'Was that how your father told you the story? I heard differently. Anyhow the important thing was that the chief priest led them and they followed. (AOG, PP. 132- 133).

Umuaro will not acede absolute authority to Ezeulu and follow him blindly. As Ezeulu's desire is unfulfilled, his personal will becomes at variance with the will of the people and he is destroyed in his attempt to force his will over Umuaro; the same way Ihuoma is destroyed

in The Concubine, when she desires to superimpose her will over that of the Sea-king. Ezeulu's testimony at Okperi is then proved to be the action of a spiteful chief priest. Umuaro has to be proved wrong and disgraced so that their chief priest can be proved right. They will then realise his worth. Ironically, instead of reinforcing his power over Umuaro, Ezeulu becomes further alienated from them.

Ezeulu sees himself as an embodiment of the godhead, hence his indignation and bitterness at Umuaro for his detention at Okperi. Ezeulu believes Umuaro has been allowed to undermine the position of the chief priest for too long. Their liberties must be curbed. Ezeulu therefore sees his detention as an opportunity for a showdown with Umuaro. He even sees the rain he is exposed to on his way home from Okperi as 'part of the suffering to which he had been exposed and for which he must exact the fullest redress' (AOG, P. 182). He, however, fails to see the foreboding symbolism behind the storm. It is the gathering of the storm that precipitates his end.

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Achebe's remarkable economy, grace and ease of style is depicted in the skilful manner in which he dramatizes life's ironies by introducing the Head Messenger with the summons for Ezeulu from a superior power, soon after Ezeulu has spoken arrogantly of his

infinite powers. Ezeulu is not all powerful after all, as he would wish. From the arrival of the messenger, the narrative gathers momentum and hastens to a denouement.

Ezeulu deliberately plots the end of Ulu when he diverts his annoyance towards the whiteman to Umuaro. He allows his personal grievance to supercede his responsibility towards his people and, as Mahood points out, 'nothing other than disaster can overtake a man who directs his psychological hurt, his sense of being impaired, against the community itself and the objects that symbolize its continuity and validity.'[8]

Ezeulu gets carried away by his desire for revenge, and gloats over his refusal to call the New Yam Festival, that he fails to heed the cautionary note in the innocent, childish chatter of his children as they try to scare a python, a symbol of the people's threatened traditions:

> 'Python, Run! There is a Christian here.'
> 'And what does it mean?
> 'Akwuba told us that a Python runs away as soon as it hears that.'
> Ezeulu broke into a long, loud laughter. Nwafor's relief beamed over his grimy face.
> 'Did it run away when you send it?'
> 'It ran away fiam like an ordinary snake.'

By justaposing this scene with the one in which Ezeulu refuses to name the day for the New Yam feast, Achebe, forcefully brings out Ezeulu's wilful recklessness as

he tries to punish Umuaro at the time he does. The time is ill-opportuned. The church is gradually eroding the people's traditions and is around to win more converts. Ezeulu had noted earlier in a conversation with Nwafor, that the church bell must be 'singing a song of extermination' if it asks the people to leave their yams and cocoyam and come to church (AOG, P. 42), yet Ezeulu presses on with his revenge. Ezeulu responds to the children's chatter with glee. When he made the first observation about the church, he cared about Umuaro, but he is now, however, indifferent towards Umuaro. Despite the danger he realises the presence of the church poses to Umuaro's religious well-being, he presses on to get his revenge inspite Umuaro's vulnerability.

Ezeulu's neurotic desire for revenge expresses itself in the hallucinatory voice of Ulu, which he claims to have heard, and with which Ezeulu tries to justify his revenge: 'Ta! Nwanu ... who told you that this was your fight' (AOG, P. 191). In constituting himself into a whip in his god's hands Ezeulu becomes 'like the little bird, Nza, who ate and drank and challenged his personal god to a single combact' (AOG, P. 14). Ezeulu's words of chiding to Umuaro, when Umuaro was adamant about going to war with Okperi, can here be applied to him. Ezeulu challenges his

chi when he challenges Umuaro. The people are the very foundation of his existence, for without the people there can be no Ulu, and without Ulu no Ezeulu. Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart blames his chi for being uncooperative, while Ezeulu deliberately challenges his chi.

The ironic ambivalence between Ezeulu's words and actions show him as a man who 'does not care if his head rolls as well in a conflict' (AOG, P. 231). In his blind desire for revenge, Ezeulu forgets his own advice to his son Obika about his fiery temper when he chides him. 'It is praise worthy to be brave and fearless my son, but sometimes it is better to be a coward ... The man who has never submitted to anything will soon submit to the burial mat' (AOG, P. 11).

Ezeulu's intellect is over-shadowed by his flaws: his arrogance, bull-headness and vindictive nature. The situation leads to his tragedy. Killam's conclusion that 'in the end he (Ezeulu) is defeated by the god himself' is hardly tenable.'[9] The reverse is true. Ezeulu adheres rigidly to the traditions of his people when a public cause is at stake but fails to do the same when the issues involve his personal interest. He chooses an inauspicious time to punish Umuaro and the blow meant for them falls on his own head.

He and his god are swept aside. He becomes, in his own words to Oduche, his son, the proverbial 'lizard that ruined his own mother's funeral' (AOG, P. 221). Ofoka's observation that 'A priest like Ezeulu leads his god to ruin himself' is proved right (AOG, P.213).

The tragic drama of human existence is set in motion in Achebe's two novels Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart, when man fails to restrain himself. Both Okonkwo and Ezeulu fail to realise their limitations. They see their power and energy as boundless and they get broken in their attempt to force their will on others. Their rigidity is their undoing. The gods in both novels are rendered so powerless that their survival depends on their usefulness to man. Man is thus shown as the superman who controls the universe and his destiny.

CHAPTER 4

JOHN MUNONYE:

THE ONLY SON AND OBI*

In The Only Son and Obi, John Munonye follows in Achebe's footprints in the interest he shows in the response of Africans to their colonial past and the effect it has in the shaping of the people's lives. Religion is the focal point of interest in this culture contact. Achebe views the conflicts created in the peoples' lives from the communual level. Munonye personalizes the conflict in Nnanna and Joseph, the protagonist of both novels. The main interest in The Only Son is the arrival of Christianity in Igboland and its destructive influence on personal relationships, in this case filial affiliations. Obi concentrates on the traumatic effects of colonialism on the individual's pysche. The extent of alienation the Christian convert experiences is revealed in the novel Obi. The African consciousness of himself has been warped: 'We have accepted everything alien as good and practically everything local or native as inferior.'[1]

Tragedy in The Only Son results from the search for identify by Nnanna. Nnanna finds an anchor and a place for himself in the church, away from his

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* The Only Son, London, Heinemann, 1966, reset 1976 hereafter (TOS) following quotation from text.

Obi, London, Heinemann, 1969, hereafter (Obi) following quotation from text.

traditional roots. Chiaku, like all mothers, has high hopes for her son's success in society. She dreams that he will achieve everything that makes a man in the traditional community: 'tall, well-proportioned, handsome ... a man of great skills and strength ...a masquerader, wrestler, hunter, dancer, a successful farmer with twenty double rows of rich rotund yams in his barn ... the husband of two and father of many. In short the best any mother could expect in a son' (TOS, P. 48). Chiaku works very hard to save enough money with which to initiate her son into society. A great bond grows between them as they work together to achieve her dreams for him. All her efforts are dash to pieces when he is lured to the church. She does all she can to win him back to the traditional fold but fails and resigns herself to her fate. She decides to start a new life without him. She remarries and has other children to comfort her.

Despite Dathorne's dismissal of the novel, when he says: 'there is little humour to save the book from its dry barrenness'[2]; the novel is memorable for Munonye's delicate and sympathetic treatment of the problems of single - parent families and adolescence. The novel draws its charm and beauty from Munonye's understanding of the psychology of a widow with an only child. Chiaku's growing son rebels against her

suffocating love and attention. He finds an outlet to exert his individualism in the church.

Munonye does not display the same skill as Achebe in his portrayal of the African society in this novel. Where a noble and proud African society is depicted in Things Fall Apart, the picture of a convincing larger society is lacking in The Only Son. Munonye concentrates so much on the mother - and - child relationship that the picture of a coherent larger society is hardly achieved. There are no heroes of Okonkwo's and Ezeulu's calibre, nor is the language in which the story is written as African, colourful or vibrant as Achebe's. Munonye's success, however, lies in his ability to recreate with deftness the fine subtlety and joy of consanquinity.

The novel is divided into three parts, each dealing with Nnanna's progressive alienation from his traditional roots. The first part depicts the caring and loving relationship Nnanna and his mother share. The second part deals with Nnanna's acceptance of Christianity and the third with Chiaku's attempts to win her son back to the traditional fold.

Nnanna's spiritual death and alienation from his people are reflected in his severence from his mother's hold. This severence effectively dramatizes the struggle between the traditional way of life and Christianity.

Nnanna and his mother share a loving relationship which is richly satisfying, harmonious and rewarding. These attributes are well displayed as the relationship changes from a healthy one with Chiaku sharing her dreams, aspirations and problems with Nnanna, to a discordant one as she nags, coaxes and beats him. Nnanna is at first wrapped in the warmth of his mother's love. She showers him with endearments, 'heart of the mother!, ... My many in one! His mother's hero, (TOS, P. 10). He reciprocates her love with filial duty and loyalty. He fetches her water, farms and hunts for her. This bond is severed by the advent of Christianity, which is shown as a disruptive force in the people's lives.

Christianity becomes entrenched in Nade, Nnanna's maternal, through persuasion and coercion. The attack is directed at the youth, and the bait used is education. Once attracted to the church, there is no turning back to the traditional way of life; one is forcibly withheld in the church. The church provides a place in society for the out-cast and children with shaky family background. Machie and Ibe who lure Nnanna to the church, are not favourites with their fathers. Nnanna himself is fatherless, none of his uncles can play such a role to him. The church provides a sense of belonging which they lack

at home. The education the church provides is seen by the converts as a means to achieve recognition in society. Ibe put it perspicuously when he explains to Nnanna the necessity of joining the church: 'All those who go to school today will one day be great men in the land' (TOS, P.72). Munonye notes, as Achebe does in Things Fall Apart, that early converts to Christianity were the inconsequential people in society: Osus, ex-slaves and worthless people. The rules of the new religion gave them a sense of self-worth for, 'The church arrived and preached, among other things, equality of all human beings, great or small, man or woman, slave or free, before the maker' (TOS, P.56).

The immediate attraction for Nnanna in the church is the ability to read and write. Nnanna is filled with wonder as Ibe demonstrates his newly acquired knowledge:

> 'look,' he wrote on the ground ...
> 'Thats my name, 'he said, then spelt. 'Every one of us knows how to write his name.'
> 'You must be learning a lot of interesting things there,' Nnanna remarked with a faint hint of regret. 'Can you write my name too?'
> 'Easy.' He bent down to write ...
> Nnanna tried to reproduce the writing. The letters he formed were almost unrecognizable.
> Ibe laughed patronizingly
> (TOS, P. 72).

In this way Munonye traces the painstaking manner in which education, the bait that lures Nnanna to the church, is laid.

The church, represented by Joseph, the African founding missionary who sets up the school, is intolerant, vicious and determined to draw 'converts towards what the missionaries thought was proper, civilized and Christian expression of the new faith'.[3] He openly decries the traditional religion of the people in his various sermons:

> ' I tell you again, men and women of Nade, it's very foolish to say that spirits inhabit trees and bushes. It's even more foolish to talk about idols. Come and join the church, all of you, and stop those foolish things you do. Come and worship God. And when I say God I mean the only true one. Igwe which you people adore is nothing, and his shrine there' - he pointed northward - 'is only a hut over a mound of earth.' (TOS, P.56).

Munonye's narrative gets over burdened by such proselytizing. The older generation in Nade are horrified by such attacks, but are helpless, so also is their god. The church gradually erodes the African's perception of himself and way of life, thus creating what Achebe describes as the 'crisis in the soul'.[4] Converts are brain-washed to see everything African as evil. Thus we find Nnanna rejecting his mother's commonsense treatment of a bruise he receives with broken eggs as sinful. A convert must not keep

non-christian friends or participate in traditional festivals and games.

The church does not only shake at the very foundation of the African's spirituality, it also attacks the traditional economic life of the people. Children who go to the school can no longer work on the farms. The symbolism of the church as a force trying to squeeze the very life blood of the African is effectively evoked as the children are gradually but surely alienated from their people.

The people's response to Chrisianity depicts the conflict between the old generation and the new. The older generation, represented by Chiaku, sees Christianity as sounding the death knell of their traditional way of life; while the younger generation sees it as a source of advancement. Chiaku's reaction to the church is as strong as Okonkwo's of Things Fall Apart. While Okonkwo faces the problem with indifference towards and disowns Nwoye, his son; Chiaku is determined to fight to win her prodigal son back to his traditional ways. The older people see Christianity as so inimical to orthodoxy that they refer to it in images of sickness and decay. Oji, Chiaku's brother, in a conversation with his sister about the rapid manner in which the religion is spreading, says: 'My sister, this thing (the church) is beginning

to look like the bad ulcer which thrives on the very medicine you apply to it' (TOS, P.76). Chiaku herself refers to the church men as the 'abominable group in town ... people call them churchmen but I call them lunatics' (TOS, P.23). Much as the people abhor and wish to abolish the church, like the people in Achebe's novels, their sons and daughter have joined and they are afraid of 'gruesome carnage from the Commissioner's soldiers at Ania' (TOS, P. 58).

The pain and confusion Chiaku feels at her son's rejection of her and his people are aptly dramatized in the scene where she violently attacks Nnanna. The dramatic vividness of the scene effectively recreates a mother's grief and disappointment:

> 'What! she cried insanely ... she leapt up and pounced upon Nnanna. A second later she had wound her hands round his neck, crushing and choking him ... 'let me go, let me go!' Nnanna managed to utter struggling very hard, he succeeded in un-winding the hands ... Confused, senseless, exhausted, Chiaku looked right and left. Her eyes fell on the stout wooden pestle which she had ready for grinding maize that afternoon. She picked it up. But as she was about to rush at Nnanna, Oji intervened (TOS, pp. 85 - 86).

On being thus restrained she weeps bitterly, recounting all her woes as a widow. After this incident Chiaku becomes frantic and pitches her traditional religious beliefs against Christianity she decides to win her son back with the aid of a <u>dibia</u> through charms.

Munonye fails in his attempts to recreate a universe in which the traditional gods are annoyed with human beings. The melodrama of the sudden and large-scale death of Chiaku's domestic animals and the blowing off of her roof in a storm fall flat. The incidents are unconvincing and ineffective, and do not further the plot in any significant way. Chiaku is, however, convinced of the god's displeasure she laments: 'His offence has drawn the anger of the gods upon my house' (TOS, P. 102).

The traditional religious belief of the people is portrayed grossly. One does not get the same feeling that one gets upon reading Amadi's The Concubine, where the supernatural is shown as an essence and credible presence in the people's lives. The church receives better treatment. Here, agents of the traditional religion, dibias are depicted as quacks. They cheat and extort money from the people without giving them any service. Ezedibia, the dibia Chiaku consults who is reputed to be so powerful, 'some said he died and resurrected once a year, each time rejuvenated', is shown to be a dupe (TOS, P. 105). His ineffectiveness is shown in his ineffectual charms and the lame excuses he gives for his failure. Ezedibia accepts his limitations in dealing with the new religion when he says: 'The case of people who have already joined is beyond me and beyond any dibia. One could perhaps try

at the early stages, but once that stage is past it becomes hopeless' (TOS, P. 107). Despite this acceptance, he insists on being paid to retrieve Nnanna. His greed is displayed thus: 'I know it is not easy to bring out even half a bag (of money) much less two bags ... all the same we want this thing to be successful. The two bags will not do, you will have to find a third. There is something I did not foresee at the beginning' (TOS, PP. 107). He blackmails his clients into giving him more money knowing fully well that he will not succeed. His failure and roguery evoke, very painfully, the ineffectiveness of the traditional way of life when confronted with modernity. It also prepares the reader for further developments in the novel and dents the credibility of dibias. The institution of dibias is further reduced in public esteem when Oji, Chiaku's brother, wakes up one morning to become a dibia. The suddenness of this new development makes a farce of the office of dibia.

Munonye's treatment of traditional religion in this manner reflects the changing mood of the period he is dealing with. He makes a weak - hearted attempt to match traditional beliefs against Christianity in the story about the failure of early missionary attempts in Nade. What happens to the early converts in Nade is rendered unconvincing and echoes similar incidents

in Achebe's Things Fall Apart. Francis Osita, the first Missionary convert from Ania, flees the land covered in large 'leprous patches', the consequence of his confrontation with a masquerade (TOS, P.55). George, the second African Missionary, leaves Nade hurriedly after having been blinded in one eye by his wife with a soup ladle. She was jealous of his attention to other ladies in the church. The people believe it is the handiwork of Igwe. Dominic and David die in the same mysterious circumstances as Enoch in Things Fall Apart after their attack on the shrine of Igwe. All these events are implausible; the gods of the land are not credibly shown to possess such power.

On failing to win Nnanna back, Ezedibia decides to work on Chiaku to make her forget her son. Chiaku's psyche is more amenable to a quack dibia's exploits. Chiaku's efforts to win her son back and her final resignation show the traditional religion of the people succumbing to Christianity. Chiaku's second marriage and pregnancy are symbolic of the death of the old life giving way to modernity.

Munonye's style in The Only Son is stiff and artificial. It lacks the grace, poise and African character of Achebe's style. Most of his descriptive pieces are bare and unimaginative. Munonye's choice of weigh down the narrative. Examples of this abound in

the novel:

> 'Oji laughs enigmatically' (TOS, P. 16).
>
> The diviner shakes his 'divining seed apoplectically' (TOS, P.29).
>
> 'Iko's bane!' Ibe eulogized (TOS, P.40)
>
> 'Your father' Nnanna pointed pugnaciously. (TOS, P.41).

Munonye employs such high sounding words to little effect. A description of a children's game is robbed of its gaiety and excitement, in its very plainness,

> Another group, aged roughly between eight and twelve were doing a mock warfare. They stood in two lines, facing each other, with about six feet between. One line sang threats and the other, responding, sang defiance. At the end of each such song the latter would turn and take flight and the former would pursue. Those caught before the finishing point stood out as war casualties. Then continuing, the procedure would be reversed. And so on, until one of the sides would lose all its members and was consequently declared annihilated (TOS, P. 25).

This description evokes the mechanics of a Chemistry experiment. The same treatment is given to festivals and other aspects of traditional life that express the conviviality and communality of African traditional life. Munonye, however, succeeds in demonstrating the unity and brotherliness of the extended family. Chiaku and Nnanna are received into Nnanna's maternal village, given moral support and showered with monetary gifts, with such genuine feelings that their return to Nade is made easy.

Nnanna's and Chiaku's misery in The Only Son stems from Nnannas attempts to gain recognition in his society by joining the church, a situation that leads to his spiritual death and alienation from his people and their gods. The socio-economic advantages offered by the church are the seeds of discord that erodes Ibo traditional life.

Obi is a sequel to The Only Son. The latter novel ends with Nnanna's departure to the missionary station at Ossa as a father's boy. By the time we see him in Obi he has undergone profound transformation, both mental and physical. He is now a grown man with the Christian name of Joseph and has a Christian wife, Anna. Munonye explores the theme of alienation in this novel. The pivot around which the tragic drama unfolds is the childless marriage between Anna and Joseph, both Christian converts. The pressure on the stable relationship of their marriage emanates from the ambivalence between their Christian ideals of marriage and the traditional expectations of the Umunna or extended family. The two opposing forces find expression in the confusion in Joseph's and Anna's minds as they seek a traditional cure for Anna's infertility. In the background is the larger theme of the struggle between the traditional way of life

and the new in the lives of the people. This struggle is expressed in the rivalry between various Christian sects and within the church, and through the subtle but sure socio-economic and political changes in the society. The ironic dramatic twist at the end of the novel is that despite Joseph's and Anna's claims to modernity, they succumb to tradition when they are forced to abandon their dream of restoring his father's Obi because Joseph has committed a crime against the earth god, Ali, when he kills a clanswoman.

Obi is set in the pre-independence period. The hero of the novel, Joe, returns to his paternal village, Umudiobia from which he and his mother had fled, with the sole aim of restoring his father's homestead or Obi. He is welcomed to the village with fanfare, settles down, builds a zinc roof house, the new symbol of wealth in Umudiobia. His happy and successful stay in Umudiobia becomes strained because of his childless marriage. He and Anna his wife are ready to wait until they are blessed with a child. The extended family does not have such patience. They wish Joseph to marry a second wife. Pushed to desperation by their taunts, they seek help from a dibia. Upon failing to achieve any results, they get help from the hospital in Ania, Anna becomes pregnant. They are quite happy, only for them to be forced out of Umudiobia for traditional reasons.

Despite echoes of events that happened in Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Joseph does not tower forcefully above other characters in the novel as Okonkwo does in the earlier novel. A vile temper is the only area of similarity between Joseph and Okonkwo. Where Okonkwo is rigidly forceful, Joseph is compromisingly placid. Anna, his wife, is a more assertive character than her husband. Where she is quite dogmatic about her Christian beliefs, Joseph is attracted to Christianity primarily because of the economic advantages it holds for the convert. He sees defection from the church as economic suicide. He gives a very materialistic reason for remaining in the church when the Umuada suggests he should take another wife to bear him children. He declares: 'Thats all very foolish,' ... You've never considered that I would not have been so well off but for the church' (OBI,P.102).

Anna, on the other hand, sees the teachings of the church as the bed-rock of her existence. Her alienation from her traditional root is total like Nnanna in The Only Son, the church provides a sense of belonging to her. Both her parents are dead and she is brought up in a convert. She is an extremist in her views, anything traditional is evil and every thing to do with the church is good. Thus she reacts very violently to the procurement of a charm from a dibia

as a cure to her infertility. At first she refuses to accept the charm given her by the dibia. The exchange between Joes, Anna and the dibia dramatizes the degree of alienation:

> 'What?' Joe protested.
> Anna cried: 'lets go away!'
> Obieke remained cautiously silent.
> The doctor held the belt suspended
> in his hands.
> 'What is wrong?' asked he embarrassed.
> 'If you have no other medicine for us
> we better go away. We won't take that
> one' Joe replied.
> 'Why?'
> 'Because it is a charm.' He grunted.
> 'So you won't take it?'
> 'No!' Anna snapped, her face screwed up.
> 'We won't even touch it' Joe added.
> 'Just as you wish. But don't blame
> me if you fail to obtain the result
> you expect.
> 'Yes let it be so,' she retorted.

The trauma in being alienated is effectively depicted here. Joseph and Anna know what a traditional cure would be like, yet they subject themselves to it only to reject it violently. Anna goes back for the charm. The excruciating pain and sense of guilt she feels show her to be a true pilgrim in the tradition of John Bunyan's characters. She is shown to be the true Christian who fall due to temptation but eventually triumphs over sin, Anna's agony is vividly evoked:

> For the next few days she was utterly
> restless. She moved clumsily and
> nervously. At times she would halt,
> turn and look around, like one haunted
> by invisible shapes ... 'You're trying
> to deceive God, are you? ... The
> catchism is definite about it: "The
> first commandment forbids divination,

> pagan sacrifices, charms" 'That belt is a charm.' It was with such words that the silent voice pricked Anna's mind for hours on end that night ...
>
> Anna watched the leather belt as it burnt. And, as if to affirm her decision she poured more kerosene ... She crushed the ashes. With that, she felt a sense of release and a return of inward peace. She would pray to God for forgiveness. She would pray to the Holy mother for intercession (OBI, P. 150).

Anna is shown here as a completely alienated African. She has lost her self-worth, she can only find peace in an alien religion. The short sharp sentences in the piece evoke the medley in Anna, while the deliberate show pace of the second part expresses the tranguility she undergoes.

The arrival of the church does not only rob the individual of her self-respect, it also creates discord in the land. The disunity in Umudiobia is depicted in the various levels of rivalry in the church and between the various Christian sects. The arrival of Joe who is a member of the Catholic church, intensifies the rivalry betwen the various sects and within the Catholic church. The rivalry between the sects is captured in the vivid passage that describes a fight between children from the Catholic and Anglican churches:

> 'The man who began your church had eight wives. Deny that.'
> 'You are not allowed to read the Bible. Your father is afraid you will discover God's true words and dispense with his service. Deny that.'

'Vagabond'
'Judas Carrot'
'Why did you push me?
'He punched my nose? (OBI, P.58).

The fierceness with which these innocent children fight over what they do not fully understand depicts and accentuate the pathos in the situation. The old way of life is being gradually and surely torn to shreds. Even children are not free of the confusion.

The rivalry between the old generation and the younger generation in the Catholic church is personalized in Jerome and Joe. Jerome, nicknamed 'Pillar' because of his dogmatism and pugnacity, sees Joseph's presence as a threat to his authority in the church. The older generation feel they should have the final say in what happens in the church because they have made more sacrifices than the younger generation. The younger generation wish for more liberalism than the older one is willing to give.

The priests are not free of the jealous and profane rivalry that characterize members of their respective congregation. The comic incident between the Reverend Godson and Father George displays such animosity. Father George refuses to give any petrol to the Reverend Godson, in the following words: 'Off at once fellow. Tell that protestant, Devilson or what-ever he calls himself to protest against my petrol too' (OBI, P. 54). The whitemen in this novel

display the same paternalistic attitude that Captain Winterbottom shows towards his African charges in Things Fall Apart.

The larger society depicted in this novel is one caught in the crossroad between their traditional roots and an imposed alien culture. The crisis created by this situation is depicted in the corruption of African government functionaries. The old economic base has been eroded. A man's wealth is no longer judged by the number of yams he has in his barn. There are now new jobs as forest guards, court clerks, tax officers, Agricultural superintendents. Most of these officers are over-bearing, avaricious and corrupt; they extort money and goods from the people to enrich themselves. The new situation places so much emphasis on individualism that the communual spirit portrayed in Things Fall Apart is completely absent from Obi. Thus we find men like Marius, the District clerk, and Anna's cousin who 'always insists on collecting gifts - raw cash, not livestock or food stuff - before rendering official service. His nickname was 'Missus - And - Her - children' (OBI, P. 180). The people can now no longer see beyond their own physical comfort.

The old political structure is also ruined by the advent of the colonial power. The subdued looks of the arrested village Head, Ume, effectively evoke the transition from the old order: 'He walked dreamily and

looked sombre, wretched ... The village head was already under arrest' (OBI, P. 89).

Emenike, the dibia consulted by Joe and Anna, typifies the changing times. He is not a dibia in the same class as those in Achebe's traditional society. Emenike's power is said to be derived from Yorubaland not from the gods of the land. His fraudulence is displayed in his claims that he acquired his powers from India and in his weather beaten humourous signpost, which shows him up as a Jack of all trades, possibly master of none:

> Emenike Nwoye
> The Dokitar of Medesin
> curer of women Diziz -
> Miscarriage of pregnant
> Impregnate of pregnant
> cut-cut and gonoria
> Also India love medicine
> Try and see (OBI, P. 106).

The only aspect of African traditional life that survives the European onslaught is the extended family. The unity and strength of the extended family is set against and accentuates the disharmony in the land. The Umunna waxes stronger as the larger society breaks apart. Joe and Anna are wrapt in the warm exuberance of this group in the numerous visits, gifts and interest they show in the couple.

A mark of Munonye's style is his ability to evoke the ironic ambivalence in the extended family relationship.

The Umunna, which is shown to be the back-bone of the family, also operates as a disruptive force. We find Joe's close relationship with his wife being threatened by this unifying force. Munonye depicts Joe's and Anna's relationship as a deeply satisfying one. They are shown to be a loving, caring couple, like Ekwueme and Ihuoma in The Concubine. Their love for each other is expressed in their sharing each others' dreams and aspirations, as they talk late into the night and in minute fine details of their attention to each other.

A significant flaw in the plot of the novel is the obtuse manner in which Joes misery is shown to be precipitated by a flaw in his nature; his vile temper. The reader is not shown much of this aspect of Joes temperament until he suddenly erupts in a violent display that leads to his sister - in - law's death, this creates the situation that drives him out of Umudiobia prematurely. This incident, however, shows that the erosion of the old way of life is not complete. Joe, a Christian, has to flee his fatherland for traditional reasons, a crime against the earth. Christianity has to survive within the traditional frame-work, while modernity thrives side by side with the old way of life.

Munonye touches on a number of themes such as corruption and nationalism, but he never developes these

themes. Willie's nationalistic favour is depicted as youthful exuberance. His political treatise on liberation and independence is thrust into the middle of conversations with little effect on the people. They dismiss him as a crazy person. The people are shown to be complacently unaware. They respond to Willie's outbursts thus:

> They yelled at him. He should rule only himself. Wasn't he mad? It was better everybody ruled in his own compound if it should ever come to self-rule ...But this whiteman Willie wanted to drive away, was he not the one who brought the lorry which he rode to Anna and back, and the dress he wore? Wouldn't the whiteman have to take those things back with him if Willie and his type should vex him out of the land? (OBI, P.125).

The people see the problem of colonialism only from the material comfort it provides. They fail to see the gradual erosion of their traditional ways.

Despite these flaws in the novel, Munonye displays better craftsmanship in Obi than in The Only Son. He deftly paints the picture of a real society with convincing people caught in the winds of change. He dramatizes their various and varying responses to change with some skill. The novel is brought to life by the numerous convivial scenes where the Umunna show their joy. There are also little dramatic, but comic incidents scathered throughout the novel. At times,

though, the narrative is weighed down with heavy Christian dogmas and political jingoism. The style in presentation is relatively more refreshing than that in The Only Son.

In The Only Son and Obi John Munonye shows that a man cannot completely alienate himself from his roots without tragic consequences. Nnanna breaks away from his traditional roots in The Only Son only to be faced with the confusion of being uprooted in Obi. Christianity is used as the pivot of this crisis.

Nnanna causes unhappiness for himself and breaks own household when he, in search of a place in society, opts for an alien religion and a total rejection of his traditional way of life. Obi shows that even though converted to Christianity, the African is still in the grip of his traditional way of life.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this study to present Elechi Amadi's, Chinua Achebe's and John Munonye's views about man's tragedy.

Both Amadi and Achebe concentrate on depicting traditional African societies. Amadi's society does not exhibit any trace of outside interference. Achebe's society becomes fragmented by the influx of an alien European government and culture. While in Munonye's work the African society has undergone far-reaching changes, with the Europeans already entrenched and the Africans adopting new ways of life and abandoning their traditions.

Achebe and Amadi see their protagonists as predominantly responsible for the tragedies that occur in their lives. They see the weaknesses in a character's temperament as the handicap which prevents him from fulfilling his goals in life and from being able to curb his excessive passions and ambition thus leading to ruin. The people are thus more actors in their destiny than objects that are acted upon by the gods or supernatural forces. While in Munonye's work Christianity is shown to be the agent of destruction in the people's lives, but here too, the people make

it so. They voluntarily embrace the new religion without thoughts of the effect it may have on their traditional life. They are more concerned with the material gains they hope to get from the new religion.

In Amadi and Achebe's novels the gods are generally portrayed as the people's psychical illusions, created for the specific purpose of maintaining peace and concord in the land. Amadi presents the picture of a universe pervaded by a paralysing fear of the gods. The people believe that their lives are controlled by the gods and they do all they can to propitiate these gods. Despite the people's fear, the gods turn out, apart from the situation depicted in The Concubine, weak and powerless hardly doing much to effect the people's ruin or control their lives. The people therefore make their lives what they are. This is in consonance with the views expressed in Achebe's novels about the gods. The main difference between Achebe and Amadi's portrayal of the gods is that in Achebe's novels the gods are shown to be subsidiary to the people. The gods are hardly feared by the people, neither are they always respected. At times much derision is poured on them, particularly when the people also believe the gods are not serving their wish. The people also believe strongly that a person's success or failure depends on his abilities. When a public issue is at

stake the people adhere rigidly to the wishes of the gods, but when the matter affects an individual personally, the gods are seen as a hinderance to man's endeavours and they are consequently cast aside or disregarded as ineffective and irrelevant. The gods are shown to be so weak that they are manipulated by the people to serve their will and purpose. Munonye concentrates on the Christian God and doctrine to the neglect of traditional gods. The local gods are almost non - existent in his novels and only serve as a counterpoise to the Christian God.

Achebe and Munonye portray the effects of Africa's contact with Europe and the encroachment of European culture and religion upon African customs and traditions. They both agree that the European religion caused tremendous damage to African traditions and culture. Achebe views the damage as communual. He sees the European presence as accentuating latent weaknesses in African society, resulting in phenomenal castastrophy. He shows that Africans affected by some of the negative norms in society, which they had hither - to accepted as a way of life, see the church as an avenue of escape from the effects of these traditions on themselves. Once they embrace the new religion, they form the vehicle through which the new culture seeps into and over-rides African traditions. Munonye, on the other hand, views the damage done to the African from the level

of the individual. He highlights the ruin Christianity has caused the African Psyche. He shows that the African's idea of himself and his way of life suffers a traumatic assault, culminating in self - hate and loss of dignity. Both authors point out that the African is drawn to Christianity by the socio-economic advantages it offers and the result of such a choice is tragic. The individuals are so concerned about their personal gains that they fail to see their collective ruin.

Tragedy is generated in The Concubine when Ihuoma tries to pit her will against that of her spirit husband, the Sea-king. She and her lovers get destroyed in her attempt. The people in this novel thus force the god to exercise his power over them. The god, Ogbunabali, in The Great Ponds is weak and havoc is wreaked on the people of Aliakoro and Chiolu by themselves. Their avarice and bestiality are their ruin. Olumati in The Slave is forced to abandon his paternal home and consequently fails to achieve his goals, not because the god Ali wishes it that way. Instead, the protagonist's stay at the shrine of Amadioha leaves him ill-prepared and guileless, and thus unable to survive in the highly competitive world of Aliji where he has enemies ready to destroy him as they vie for power and eminence.

Okonkwo, the hero of Things Fall Apart, falls to ruin because of his rigid and singular pursuit of private and personal goals with which he hopes to prove and maintain his manliness and position in his village. Ezeulu, another of Achebe's heroes in Arrow of God ends up tragically, when he, as Philip Sidney will say it, 'in despight of himself, withdrewe himself from harkening to that which might mollifie his hardened heart'.[1] His temperance is his undoing; he lacks the ability to control himself.

Munonye's heroes, Nnanna in The Only Son and Joseph in Obi, in pursuit of personal aggrandizement, wilfully sacrifice themselves, their gods and their society to an alien one.

The medium through which these authors express their ideas about mankind and his relationship with the universe in which he lives lifts these ideas from mere treatise to literary creation; 'for literature', as Cardinal Newman points out 'is the personal use or exercise of language'.[2] The poise and graceful simplicity in both Amadi and Achebe's style is remarkable. They couch their ideas in highly imaginative and colourful language. Most of their characters come alive, real and genuine. Contrary to Uka's assertion about The Concubine in which he says that 'It would appear that

English was infact the native language of the characters except for occasional tinges of Phraseology'; a mark of both Amadi's and Achebe's style is that they give an African flavour to the English language.[3] They are able to do this, Achebe in particular, by the way they manipulate and incorporate distinctly African idioms, proverbs, words, phrases, imagery and syntactic structures in the English language, thus giving their dialogue colour, verve and an African character. Despite this special usuage of English, their style does not suffer, instead it is 'stately', 'leisurely' and lucid.[4]

Munonye does not exhibit such skill as Amadi and Achebe in the Africanness of the speech of his characters nor is his style as graceful. At times his language is stilted and bogged down with weighty words that are out of character. Munonye's achievement, however, lies in the sensitivity with which he depicts human relationship, filial, connubial and that between members of the African extended family. He is able to evoke convincingly the joys and pains in such relationships.

The work of these writers entertains, teaches and reproduces a consistently convincing picture of the African, his world view and reaction to the changing situation in which he finds himself, his culture and his religion.

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