

The Power of the Unknown in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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ABSTRACT: *Chinua Achebe's fourth novel, Arrow of God, is a harrowing story of traumatic change in which a traditional society loses its cultural identity under pressures internal and external. Critical discussions have tended to focus on meddling by the colonialists and the character and decisions of the protagonist. The impression of facticity is strong throughout, and the result is that the text has generally been taken at that level. This paper applies the psychoanalytic concept of the unknown in exploring the text to try and uncover underlying patterns of significance. That would enable us to see the dimensions and far-reaching implications of the action of this novel and the depths of a many-sided protagonist who is probably the most fascinating of Achebe's characters.*

KEYWORDS: *change, desire, power, proverb, struggle, sympathy, the unknown, the unconscious.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Obiechina's study of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, there is a sense of an account of how things have gone wrong in a previously ordered and harmonious traditional society. He writes:

The forces working against tradition seem already entrenched in the Umuaro of *Arrow of God*. The local school and mission station, irreverent strangers like the catechist Goodcountry, and the inarticulate though palpable reality of the white man's administrative presence, all these have undermined traditional confidence and shaken the sense of common purpose and solidarity which in the past constituted the spirit of traditionalism (233).

Others have focused somewhat away from the system and explored the actions, decisions, and motivations of the protagonist, Ezeulu and their implications for the survival of the cultural ways of Umuaro. For instance, Mahood calls it 'a story of frustration and of the suicidal defiance which is an individual way of escape from that frustration' and 'also a story of resilience' (1978: 204), while in Masagbor and Akhukemokhan (2005), it is through the fall of Ezeulu who is at the beginning 'indisputably the thriving priest of an equally thriving culture' that Achebe presents the demise of the culture of Umuaro (67-69). In this paper, we bring the psychoanalytic concept of 'the unknown' to bear on *Arrow of God* to see to what extent it provides new insights into the character and action and enhances the analysis of metaphors and certain linguistic usages like proverbs so as to enable the text 'to spring back into life' (Ricoeur 2003: 223).

'The unknown' is probably what Jacques Derrida would call a non-concept, since it is not definable using positive terms. In general, its field of signification embraces everything not known. In psychoanalysis, it has a hinge function; yet psychoanalysis says very little directly about it. This function in shaping the individual mental life was recognized from the very beginning, and the term is present in Freud, but it is in the work of Jacques Lacan that we have a fairly clear sense of its role in that realm. As Lacan puts it,

Finally, on the level of objectification or of the object, the known and the unknown are in opposition. It is because that which is known can only be known in words that that which is unknown offers itself as having a linguistic structure. This allows us to ask again the question of what is involved at the level of the subject (1981: 33).

The unknown is pertinent to the study of literature for exactly the same reasons that it is of concern in psychoanalysis, namely that it has a linguistic structure, has a role to play in the formation of the subject and seems to be involved in his self-understanding and identity as well as his defining traits. It also has to do with action orientations.

It remains elusive at the level of objectification; yet the inner life of the individual is quite impossible to analyze without it. At the same time, it operates as a blind spot beyond all knowing: all analysis comes back finally to it while itself remaining unanalyzable. This is what is at stake in Freud's metaphor of the navel, which arises in his study of dreams:

And even Freud, a propos of the Irma dream, suggests a depth in human beings beyond their ken. 'There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable – a navel, as it were, that is its point of

contact with the unknown' []. Lacan, commenting, describes this as a point 'ungraspable in the phenomenon, the point where there arises the relation of the subject to the symbolic. What I call Being is this last word, which is not accessible to us, certainly, in the scientific stance [position] but the direction of which is indicated in the phenomena of our experience'[]. Is it possible to think of this 'unknown,' 'ungraspable' depth, then, as the Being of the subject? If so, then the subject's *want* of signifiers in order to remain a subject may be simply its want-to-be, its being-in-want. But 'want-to-be' (*manque a etre*) is Lacan's formula for *desire* (Kristeva 72).

In *Arrow of God* Ezeulu is the character whose decisions influence the action in its main outlines. It is in these decisions that the unknown mainly functions; and the key to its functioning lies in what that character wants to be of which he is unconscious. His dreams and fantasies, his slips of the tongue can all give us access to his unconscious, which 'is simply another name for symbolicknowledge insofar as it is an 'unknown knowledge', a knowledge which the subject doesnot know he knows' (Evans 1996: 96); similarly, his proverbs and figures of speech, in which, according to Paul Ricoeur, 'all has already been said in enigma' (1974: 288). This study, however, will be incomplete without exploring the dimension of the unknown which Fredric Jameson associates with the text itself in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). In this account, what the text 'wants to be' is an input in 'the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity' (19). We shall then see that what *Arrow of God* wants is in fundamental opposition to that of the protagonist, who is moved at a mystic moment to refer to himself as an 'arrow' in the bow of his deity; in other words, we really are dealing with anarrative of which the fundamental values are mutually opposed.

II. WHAT EZEULU WANTS TO BE

Umuofia of *Things Fall Apart* and Umuaro of *Arrow of God* are both traditional societies, but they function in profoundly different ways. In Umuofia, there is no single individual with power to make decisions capable of affecting the whole community. Instead there is an invisible senate which makes the decisions, for instance, about war and peace. It is alluded to in the opening scenes where an outrage has been committed against a citizen of Umuaro by someone in Mbaino and the elders meet to discuss the matter. But instead of an open discussion by the elders, we read that 'Ogbuefi Ezeugo was a powerful orator and was always chosen to speak on such occasions' (*Things Fall Apart* 3). We do not see who has chosen him to speak, since the narrator's passive form seems to connive at the implied rule of silence over the identity and constitution of this senate. But Ogbuefi Ezeugo's speech shows that the matter had been discussed elsewhere and a decision made as to what to do. His task is to guide the congress of elders to accept and take responsibility for this decision. A select senate of men of high title does make an appearance in *Arrow of God*, who have the privilege of being called 'Umuaro' (208), the rareness of this event suggesting that Umuaro has 'reached the very end of things'. Here however they seem to carry no more than a moral authority which can be set aside as circumstances may demand. The forum of political decisions is the congress of elders which, however, is polarized and fractious. In this power vacuum, some of Ezeulu's choices and decisions on issues of public interest, though made for private and personal reasons, are having far-reaching consequences for the entire clan. The essential role of his deity in the founding and continuation of the town may have something to do with this. The institution of the deity is narrated as follows:

soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became Nkwo market and the other half thrown into the stream which became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy.

Ezeulu, therefore, has a high profile as a public figure and cultural leader. He is also influential in the congress of elders because of his formidable oratorical skills. In this forum, however, decision appears to be by consensus. But Umuaro is divided, as he notes in his ruminations in the opening scenes, and he is not able to forge a consensus around any of the issues he espouses.

In this narrative, there is a certain ebb and flow of allegiances by reason of the priest's choices and decisions, corresponding to turns and twists and shifts in narrative focus, with repositioning of protagonists and complications in the action. These decisions are firstly, his refusal to back the war against Okperi (chapter 2) and giving a true account of the events, according to Captain Winterbottom (chapter 3) or according to his antagonist, Ogbuefi Nwaka, serving as 'the white man's witness that year we fought for our land – and lost' (chapter 13). The second is his decision to send his son to the white man's school – to be *his eyes* in the white man's camp (chapter 16) or according to the rest of Umuaro, including his closest friend, 'to join in desecrating the land' (chapter 12). The third is his refusal of the warrant chieftaincy offered him by the colonial

administration – for according to him, ‘Ezeulu will not be anybody’s chief, except Ulu’ (chapter 14). In disbelief, his enemies ask, ‘How could he refuse the very thing he had been planning and scheming for all these years?’ But Nwaka turns the amazing story to his own end: ‘The man is as proud as a lunatic,’ he said. ‘This proves what I have always told people, that he inherited his mother’s madness’ (chapter 15). To the white man, however, the refusal is tantamount to ‘making a fool of the British Administration in public’ (chapter 14). The fourth decision is the refusal to call the New Yam festival in which ‘the white man was, without knowing it, his ally’ (chapter 15). Apart from this one ally, he is now utterly alone as he is abandoned by both friend and foe: all feel that he has betrayed them (chapter 12). In this decision, he himself serves the interests of the white man’s religion newly introduced in Umuaro in a way no one would have thought, least of all himself:

The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika’s death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many an Umuaro man had sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam that was harvested in the man’s fields was harvested in the name of the son (230).

Ezeulu’s decisions are taken note of by everyone else involved in the action, but he himself displays no sense of public opinion in making them. To him ‘being alone’ causes no anxiety: it is ‘as familiar to me now as are dead bodies to the earth’ (chapter 12). But contrary to this certainty, he does come to a point when at last he is *alone*; and that is when he feels abandoned by his deity:

Think of a man who, unlike lesser men, always goes to battle without a shield because he knows that bullets and matchet strokes will glance off his medicine boiled skin; think of him discovering in the thick of battle that the power has suddenly, without warning, deserted him. What next time can there be? Will he say to the guns and the arrows and the matchets: *Hold! I want to return quickly to my medicine hut and stir the pot and find out what has gone wrong; perhaps someone in my household – a child, maybe – has unwittingly violated my medicine’s taboo?* No.

Ezeulu sank to the ground in utter amazement (230; italics original). Ezeulu’s self-assurance had been founded on a sense of a close relationship to his deity to the extent that his awareness of their separate identities sometimes becomes blurred. It is this sense, rather than any specific ‘Thing’ that ‘beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances’ (chapter 12). The blurring of identities is a serious gap in knowledge and probably leads to self-delusion.

What Ezeulu knows is one thing, in short, the reality quite another. That is equally true of the participants who are watching him. The people think that he has been scheming all along to be king in Umuaro. The District Officer basically has the same idea, having arrived at it from a separate route. But he is so convinced of it, or at any rate that this would suit Ezeulu’s purposes to perfection, that when he proposes the chieftaincy to him, he does so with an ‘I-know-this-will-knock-you-over feeling’ (chapter 14).

At the conscious level, Ezeulu is contented to be Ulu’s priest and wants to exercise that priesthood in such a way that he can ‘tell Umuaro: come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it’ (chapter 12). This is going far indeed – and by that token, since he wants to be nothing but Ulu’s priest, taking that deity into unknown territory. Ulu is first of all a functional deity, having been created and installed for the purpose of protecting the town in time of war. In due course, he is to acquire a *personality* – although apparently still constrained to the world of Umuaro. Ezeulu is now in the process of recreating him, endowing him with properties of omniscience and paternal providence. If Ulu’s deity should be enhanced in this way, Ezeulu’s stature, as the spokesman who announces his will and decisions and the guidelines providentially vouchsafed for profit and prosperity, would be unmatched throughout Umuaro and throughout its history. This is probably what he understands by being Ulu’s chief and his enemies as his wanting to be king. Ezidemili, on the other hand, is probably nearer the mark in thinking of him as an envious man, exercised by the desire to acquire for himself power and influence, privilege and dignity to the highest degree possible (42). He himself does not know in clear terms that this is what he wants; but it is part of the unknown that drives him and shapes his conduct in public affairs, his cocksureness and all.

Ezeulu’s proverbs are always *ad rem*, and yet richly suggestive. In ‘Who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree?’ – which is represented thought, and also spontaneous – he articulates to himself his current understanding of the crisis that has just come to a head. It is Ulu’s struggle with the people of Umuaro; he, utterly docile to the deity, is Ulu’s instrument in the struggle, but ends up being seized upon and cut him down in the midst of the fight. It also captures his understanding of his relationship to the deity. It is one of a shared nature.

‘I prefer to deal with a man who throws up a stone and puts his head to receive it not one who shouts for a fight but when it comes he trembles and passes premature shit’ is applied by Ezeulu to the white district officer who over the warrant chieftaincy affair proves to have less fight in him than he had made out. But it is even more about himself and signifies another way of understanding this work, namely as a sequence of the knowledge seeker. As such it connects to another of his proverbs that ‘The inquisitive monkey gets a bullet in the face’ (44). For this narrative could be read as the fulfillment of the unconscious wish to find out the content of the power he is supposed to have. The following is a key passage in which Ezeulu who lacks the Hegelian wisdom ‘that he who knows about a limitation is already free of it’ (Cassirer 1961: 75), is brought up short by the existence of limitations in the power he is said to have. This is someone who not only wants power, but wants total certainty of its reality in his firm grip:

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was. 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 (3).

For Ezeulu, power consists of what is possible to him, whereby he would exert control over the people. This exercise of control is the ultimate meaning and content of power. He is obliged under the ceremonial of Ulu to eat one sacred yam at the beginning of each lunar month and call the New Yam Feast when he exhausts his store. As long as things follow their normal course, he would never find out whether he had power to choose to call or not to call the feast. What exercises his mind here is therefore a knowledge which he could only gain from experience: it is as good as forbidden knowledge since he has no legitimate way of putting the matter to a test. He does not seem to have renounced, in the face of this prohibition, the idea of finding out. At this point, his reaction is to round on the invisible enemy who had introduced the word dare in his ruminations:

‘Take away that word dare,’ he replied to this enemy. ‘Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not yet been born.’

However, detention for thirty-two days in Okperi affords an opportunity – quite unsought – to follow the old question through. He now has opportunity to find out, and he dares. He continues to picture to himself that the ensuing struggle is between Ulu and Umuaro. But it rather appears to be a question of throwing up a stone and taking the chance of being hit on the head. The proverb about sending a son up a tree and felling that tree under him, which is part of a string of proverbial sayings making up his lament, as in the traditional *kommos* of Greek tragedy, seems to be rather a conceit.

Ezeulu is aware, at least at another level or another stage in the unfolding of this history, that the fight is between him and Umuaro. He spells this out as he receives John Nwodika’s congratulations for confounding the white man. His attention is homeward, wondering what the people who had said that he betrayed them to the whiteman would now think. But he knows they would never change their tune:

‘You should not give too much thought to that,’ said John Nwodika. ‘How many of those who deride you at home can wrestle with the white man as you have done and press his back to the ground?’

Ezeulu laughed. ‘You call this wrestling? No, my clansman. We have not wrestled; we have merely studied each other’s hand. I shall come again, but before that I want to wrestle with my own people whose hand I know and who know my hand. I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklet’ (179).

Ezeulu is aware of his enemies as people ‘poking their fingers into [his] face’. As far as we know, these are people whose views are opposed to his, but of course in the case of Ogbuefi Nwaka, we have a naysayer with malice in his heart. Ezeulu does not in this passage give indication of an offence they may have committed against Ulu. But at home in Umuaro, his story is that it is a fight between Ulu and Umuaro, suggesting that he is only a ‘whip’ being used by the God to beat Umuaro.

The reference to a whip may be a wrong choice of words or a slip of the tongue, but all the more important for that reason, as it offers access into his unconscious. It does raise a question immediately which he is saved from having to answer by an elder trying to prevent a dire situation being antagonized any further:

‘Do not say that I am over fond of questions,’ said Ofoka. ‘But I should like to know on whose side you are, Ezeulu. I think you have just said that you have become the whip with which Ulu flogs Umuaro.....’

‘If you will listen to me, Ofoka, let us not quarrel about that,’ said Ezekwesili (209).

Whose side he is on is a question that strikes at the very ground of Ezeulu’s consciousness and would have led the leaders of Umuaro or Umuaro for short to see whether they have an interlocutor or some remorseless enemy taking revenge against them from behind the mask of Ulu, and who has mistaken himself for the mask.

At the opening of the story, Ezeulu has two well-known and powerful enemies, Ogbuefi Nwaka and his mentor, Ezidemili. Unconsciously he has generalized the conflict to include all of Umuaro, forgetting his proverb used elsewhere that ‘When two brothers fight a stranger reaps their harvest’. He is fixated on this fight and this mode of stating the case because he has not succeeded by force of argument to win to his side the supporters of Ogbuefi Nwaka’s position on the war with Okperi, but stubbornly reject his very interpretation of the outcome as proof of Ulu’s opposition to the war. The ‘unconscious knowledge’ driving his actions and view of the events is that Umuaro has not reacted like one man in absolute obedience to his directive: ‘come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it’. Although he knows from his friend Akeubue that he had not been alone in his position on the war (134), he still has a grouse that there are some on the other side. It is for him a question of *who* tells Umuaro what it believes, a question he raises pointedly to Akuebue:

‘What troubles me is what the whole clan is saying.’

‘Who tells the clan what it says? What does the clan know? Sometimes, Akuebue, you make me laugh’ (131).‘

Who tells the clan what it says’ is something Ezeulu would contest at all costs. It is a struggle for power, for absolute power, and one that exhausts Umuaro quite fatally – because they have been stamped and trampled to shreds by ‘two elephants’ fighting. Its culture and system collapse; the bonds holding it together as a society are undone, and the people with action orientation towards the pragmatical, turn to the Christian church and the Christian God with their tribute of yams in exchange for ‘protection from the anger of Ulu’ who they now desert (216). Ezeulu does not blame the disaster on his own rashness, but on others; for example, Oduche his son who he had sent to the Christian school to serve as his *eye* there is denounced as ‘lizard that ruined his mother’s funeral’ (221), for failing to bring intelligence that the missionary had promised those who patronized his harvest thanksgiving immunity from retaliation by Ulu.

Ezeulu’s proverb here introduces a funeral, though as a figure of speech. However, it will become reality in the end. The real funeral that will take place is that of Obika; but since in his death it is as if Ezeulu himself had died (228), the funeral is Ezeulu’s too, and at the symbolic level, that of the gods and the cultural tradition of Umuaro. These funerals, beginning with Obika’s come about because of the crisis Ezeulu has helped to trigger off; for though Obika has been having a fever and therefore in no condition to run the *Ogbazulobodo*, he nevertheless agrees to do it, because ‘If I say no,’ [he] told himself, ‘they will say that Ezeulu and his family have sworn to wreck the second burial of their village man who did no harm to them’ (224). But there is also a psychological operation taking place, namely ‘the transference’, which occurs by reason of ‘the synchronic intersection of the diachronic fantasy’ (Boyko-Head 2002). As if he already has a sense of what is afoot, Ezeulu unconsciously transfers to his son Oduche responsibility for the impending catastrophe. By a similar operation, he had transferred from Nwaka to Umuaro the provocation to a fight and to Ulu the violence that he unleashes upon Umuaro, just as in dreamwork at Okperi, his grandfather had become the receiver of the assault and degradation he unconsciously anticipates from Nwaka and his enemies. None of this, however, affects his standing as a ‘good man’ (Aristotle chapter 13), with full entitlement as a tragic hero.

The role of the yam crop in unravelling the Umuaro system has a trace of cruel irony in it; for it features in early school-child ditty in a context interpreted by Ezeulu as boding the worst for Umuaro and its way of life:

Nwafo came back to the obi and asked his father whether he knew what the bell was saying. Ezeulu shook his head.

‘It is saying: Leave your yam, leave your cocoyam and come to church. That is what Oduche says.’

‘Yes,’ said Ezeulu thoughtfully. ‘It tells them to leave their yam and their cocoyam, does it? Then it is singing the song of extermination’ (42-43)

This song of extermination is heard again by Ezeulu clearly articulated in the Idemili Python's lamentation in a nightmare which visits him just at the moment his son Obika's *Ogbazulobodo* is passing his compound in his flight to the square where he drops dead. Unlike the dream, horrible enough, which he has while in detention at Okperi, in the present one, the hero is not 'his majesty the ego', as Freud would say. In the former, his grandfather is the Ezeulu being denounced, manhandled, and cast out by Nwaka and the people of Umuaro. This follows the pattern of 'dream work as Freud describes it (overdetermination, condensation, and displacement)' (Bishop and Philips 2009). He himself is displaced so that the ego does not directly suffer humiliation in his own dream. In the nightmare marking Obika's disaster, other people are playing the key parts, trespassing and mindlessly invading his privacy, while he is powerless to stop them, just as if he didn't exist. His sense of his own futility, with the attendant terror and despair, is sealed when he finds that in his extremity, there is utterly no one to answer his call for help. In tragic terms, this is a moment of discovery (*anagnôrisis*): he already has *unconscious knowledge* of the import of his desire to know. The desire at the heart of *Arrow of God* for status as the divine son, for the absolute power of the divine son, the power to recreate Ulu in his own image and Umuaro to be compliant to his every wish is what is hollowed out in the dream: that is the meaning of the nightmare for a man who had been so sure of himself as to snap out at his older son Edogo's report on the flogging of Obika by the white road maker:

'Were you there?' asked his father. 'Or would you swear before a deity on the strength of what a drunken man tells you? If I was sure of my son do you think I would sit here now, talking to you while a man who pokes his finger into my eyes goes home to his bed? If I did nothing else I would pronounce a few words on him and he would know the power in my mouth' (98-99).

III. REALM OF FREEDOM AND REALM OF NECESSITY

For Roland Barthes, struggle in literature is realization of one of the 'major articulations of praxis' (1977:107); and representation of these is understood in criticism deriving from Aristotle to be a self-sufficient activity. Marxist criticism, however, behaves quite differently. Here the analysis of the relationships of struggle is only to enable 'the detection of a host of distinct generic messages – some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory, but all together projecting a formal conjuncture through which the "conjuncture" of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be detected and allegorically articulated' (Jameson 99). The rule of thumb for 'detection of [the] host of distinct generic messages' is the superstructure/substructure dyad, with what might be 'the passionate immediacy of struggles between historical individuals' (77) at the political level reflecting deep-level struggles either within the forces of production or the relations of production. A second model which is not very commonly used is that of Lukács, where the struggle for power may take place within the same class, giving rise to 'quantitative' change (1976: 434).

The main lines of struggle in *Arrow of God* are between Ezeulu and Ogbuefi Nwaka, surrogate of Ezidemili, between Ulu and Idemili, between Ezeulu and the colonial administration, and between Ezeulu or Ulu and Umuaro, which metamorphoses to a struggle between Ulu's cult – tradition – and the Christian church – modernity. There are other patterns, of course, which have lesser scope than any of the above, but intersect and help to account for the text's dense tissue. The one with the highest profile appears to be that between Ezeulu and Umuaro, but it is a struggle which is changing and transforming in unexpected ways. In Nwaka's diatribe early on, he appears to be challenging Ulu on behalf of Umuaro to a fight. But the story also features a mystic moment in which Ezeulu is sure that he has heard the deity speaking to him and clearly setting forth the issues:

'Ta! Nwanu!' barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. 'Who told you that this was your own fight?' Ezeulu trembled and said nothing.

'I say who told you that this was your own fight which you could arrange to suit you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he-he!' laughed the deity the way spirits do – a dry, skeletal laugh. 'Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you not know what happens when two elephants fight? Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, who wants to destroy me so that his python may come to power. Now you tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for me and Idemili we shall fight to the finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet' (191-192)

In the light of this experience, Nwaka would have hurled the challenge on behalf of Idemili, not Umuaro. But Ezeulu seems ultimately to disregard this mystic insight he has received and acts as if he is the protagonist in the fight, instead of merely 'an arrow in the bow of his god' (192). Indeed in the concluding

movement of the narrative, the people are certain that their struggle has been with Ezeulu, with the god taking their side against the priest.

The people's struggle may legitimately be called a struggle for freedom since Ezeulu would force them into an agricultural calendar unhinged from the solar calendar and running several months behind the natural cycle. There seems to be no other way to explain a struggle waged to enforce such an irrational order except as an affect of madness –that of the high priest. As a struggle between the two deities, however, there would only have been quantitative change. One deity in overpowering the other would have created room to impose his own ritual and laws. In the event, the struggle has proved to be suicidal for the culture itself. Even the traumatic death of Ezeulu's favourite son at this critical moment has an ominous ring to it, for we read that,

Obika's death shook Umuaro to the roots; a man like him did not come into the world too often. As for Ezeulu it was as though he had died (228).

The reference to 'a man like him' recalls the immense energy, strength, and promise marking his brief career. He seems to have carried for Umuaro the sense of self-confidence in its own future; and he has carried it to a premature grave. With his demise the field is thrown open; and there is no one to challenge an opportunist taking advantage of Umuaro in this moment of weakness and confusion. The Christian mission hard by simply moves in and seizes the spoils, as it were. Still the outcome fall short of the specifications of a qualitative change. In taking possession, Mr Goodcountry has adapted his language so that it reflects the old relationships in which fear of a vengeful god is maintained as motivation for action. Here the leaders of the Christian church plan their strategy for widening participation in their harvest thanksgiving with a view to maximizing their profit:

'I understand but I was thinking how we could tell them to bring more than one yam. You see, our custom, or rather their custom, is to take just one yam to Ulu.'

Moses Unachukwu, who had come into full favour with Goodcountry, saved the day. 'If Ulu who is a false god can eat one yam the living God who owns the whole world should be entitled to eat more than one.'

So the news spread that anyone who did not want to wait and see all his harvest ruined could take his offering to the god of the Christians who claimed to have power to protect such a person from the anger of Ulu. Such a story at other times might have been treated with laughter. But there was no more laughter left in the people (216).

Christianity, though a new and fundamentally different religious system, finds itself employing the methods of the old traditional culture. Gaining the loyalty of the people with an argument like the above means that the psychological reorientation required in switching from traditional religion has not taken place. The people, like Moses Unachukwu himself, an older convert, continue to see the world with the eyes of traditional religion. They can hardly be said to have been converted. But decidedly the Christian religion has gained in numbers.

In terms of modes of production, we have to recall the 'song of extermination' calling upon all to turn their backs on yams and cocoyams and come to school. The Idemili Python, in its own 'song of desolation' appears to have grasped the full meaning of the school bell's song. The school is a threat to the continued relevance of this totemic animal, the way of life, and the land-based mode of production associated with it. And it –

must scuttle away in haste
When children in play or in earnest cry:
Look! a Christian is on the way (222).

The school is not in itself a mode of production. It is one of the superstructural elements associated with modes of production. In a place like Umuaro, it is not just the sign of a new mode of production, but is paving the way for the new mode of production and has a foundational role in institutionalizing that new system. Literally, abandoning yam and cocoyam and opting for school is a message of extermination, but as a message addressed to school-age children, its vision is long term change. Whereas to argue by reference to the promise of education that school pertains to the realm of freedom would seem to be going beyond the limits of the text and of questionable value as literary criticism, that is precisely what Jameson calls a 'generic message' of the anticipatory order, which may legitimately be sought in the textual unconscious.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the unknown, Ezeulu's desire is unfocused, but by its motions, one can see how complex a character he is, possibly the most complex creation of Chinua Achebe. The initial question he poses to himself as to the reality of his power is what the text as if by 'emulation' (Foucault 2005: 22), exposes and follows to its ultimate reference. He who already thinks of himself as half-man, half-spirit (*Arrow of God* 192), is driven by his unknown desire to a point where the distinction between himself and Ulu is becoming blurred to him. He may have become so tensed up and psychologically conditioned for this Unknown to have *divined* for him in the mystic experience in which he hears a voice he believes to be that of his deity. But having heard the voice and interpreted its meaning, nevertheless, 'After a long period of silent preparation Ezeulu finally revealed that he intended to hit Umuaro at its most vulnerable point – the Feast of the New Yam' (201). He alone is the actor in this event or has displaced the deity and taken over the fight from him. Such is the anarchic desire that features in Greek tragedy as lack of moderation (*sophrōsinē*). For its own part, the text itself does not know what it *wants*. By contrast, notions like 'theme' in literary studies suggest that the literary text *knows* what it wants. But it would be no different from a treatise if it did. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is treated with irony from time to time, but there is no doubt that the narrative voice is fundamentally sympathetic towards him. Similarly, the report of the impact of Obika's death on Umuaro does reflect back to some extent on the narrator. But the 'textual unconscious', apparently designates a new direction opening for Umuaro, and quite unrelated to what has been hitherto.

Ezeulu's story involves significant norm breaking actions, but he makes out more as a suffering and 'hard-pressed hero' (Jauss 1974:298) than a villain; and there are several reasons for this. The narrator's sympathetic attitude and the magnitude of his catastrophe are obvious enough, but something that may be missed out even though it may be working in the background is the power of Ogbuefi Nwaka's implacable hostility, bordering on hate. The sense of this hatred may also have affected Ezeulu himself who is clearly feeling increasingly isolated, as the elders appear to enjoy the sham debates as a spectacle instead of exercising what he would consider as rational judgement. In the end, it is Ezeulu's house that tumbles down and his life and hopes destroyed, as if the invisible powers involved in human affairs had also taken sides. But it is not his catastrophe alone. Besides Ezeulu, others who lose everything are Ulu and the traditional order, including the cult of Idemili, whose Python must now scuttle away at the sight of Christians. Their system signifies for the people unfreedom. The Christians for their part have obviously gained numerically, but it is doubtful that they have had real conversions. The gain is on the side of the people of Umuaro themselves, who have been freed from fear of the traditional gods and from Ulu's presumptive supervisory authority over the agricultural cycle. Henceforth they may plant and harvest their crops subject only to the natural succession of the seasons.

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