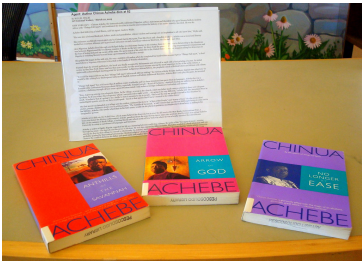


Chinua Achebe

Arrow of God

United Kingdom (1964)

TAGS: [African Mythologies](#) [African Traditions](#)



"Chinua Achebe Display" by [Pesky Librarians](#) ("Arrow of God", published in 1989 by Anchor Books, is in the middle). Retrieved from [flickr.com](#), licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#) (accessed: 4 July 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	Arrow of God
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1964
First Edition Details	Chinua Achebe, <i>Arrow of God</i> . London: Heinemann, 1964, 287 pp.
ISBN	100435905309
Genre	Fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au



Creators



Chinua Achebe , 1930 - 2013
(Author)

Chinua Achebe by Dave Pape. Retrieved from [Wikipedia Commons](#), licensed under Creative Commons [Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](#) (accessed: December 8, 2021).

Chinua Ache is one of the most popular African writers of fiction. His works are translated into many languages and studied in universities across the world. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has sold more than 12 million copies in recent years, and translated into more than 50 languages. The novel is a household book in every literate community in Africa, and probably beyond. Achebe was born to a peasant family in Igbo land in Nigeria where story telling was the custom. This probably explains why he took on the habit of writing stories, and did so very successfully. He was educated in Ibadan and taught in many universities in the USA in the later part of his life. He won several awards for contribution to the understanding of African culture in his life time. The major themes that cut across his writings are the clash of cultures (African and the West), society, the political situation of Nigeria/Africa etc. Some of his famous novels include: *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *A Man of the People* (1966), *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Chinua Achebe also wrote essays such as *Civil Peace* (1971), *Vengeful Creditor* (1972), including his famous children's storybook *Chike and the River* (1966).

Source:

[Biography](#) at the biography.com (accessed: July 9, 2018).

Bio prepared by Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1,
nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

Additional information

Summary

Arrow of God is a classic tragedy which depicts the fall of a tragic hero caused by both his hubris and outside forces beyond his understanding. The title comes from an Igbo proverb in which a person or event is said to represent the Will of God

Ezeulu, the chief priest of the Umuaru clan, wields enormous power over the six federated villages that make up the clan. Part of his role is to store up twelve healthy yams in his barn which he roasts and eats without salt or palm oil immediately he sees a new moon. Until he has eaten the last one, no one can venture to their farm to harvest yams. However, his authority has always been challenged by smaller gods of other villages especially Idemili, who accuses Ezeulu of overstepping his bounds. The greatest threat, however, comes from the arrival of the white missionaries and colonial government. In order to fully understand the source of the white man's strength and to be aware of his activities, Ezeulu sends one of his sons, Oduche, to the missionary school – further deepening the rift between him and his rivals who see this is an act of betrayal and vaulting ambition.

The colonial administration decides to designate a local chief to help administer the six villages. By virtue of his legendary honesty, Ezeulu is chosen by Captain Winterbottom, the head of the colonial administration; but he rejects the position. Enraged and humiliated, Winterbottom orders his detention. Consequently, for the two months he is detained, he is unable to perform the yam ritual. When he is eventually released, the elders plead with him to consume the two remaining yams so that people can go and harvest their yams, but he stubbornly refuses. Ezeulu uses this incident as a means of punishing his people for not rising against the white man on his behalf. The people finish their yam reserves and begin to starve yet Ezeulu refuses to compromise. In the meantime, the missionaries preach against the traditional ritual and present Jesus Christ as the only one who can bless their crops. People are encouraged to harvest their crops. As the people harvest their crops, Ezeulu's favourite son Obika dies unexpectedly. This is too hard for Ezeulu's already fragile mind. He goes mad, marking the defeat of his god and perhaps the triumph of the Christian God.



Analysis

Arrow of God dramatizes what happens when people deviate from their traditional ways of life and embrace a foreign culture. It introduces us to the theme of cultural conflict and its aftermath. Besides the conflict between Western and African traditions, the novel brings into the limelight Umuaru religious ritual practices related to the worship of gods and the practice of agriculture. Ezeulu, as the novel indicates, presides over the feast that paves the way to the harvest period. Similar rituals are recorded in many agricultural societies and thus mentioned in various mythologies worldwide.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

[African Mythologies](#) [African Traditions](#)

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

[Conflict](#) [Religious beliefs](#) [Society](#) [Values](#)

Further Reading

Aguoru, Doyin, "African Proverbial Sayings: A Paremiologically Reading of Achebe's *Arrow of God*", *Ife Psychologia* (2012): 192-204.

Frank, Kevin, "Censuring the Praise of Alienation: Interstices of Ante-Alienation in *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*", *Baltimore* 34.4 (2011): 1088-1101.

Håland, Evy Johanne, "The Ritual Year of Athena: The Agricultural Cycle of the Olive, Girls' Rites of Passage, and Official Ideology", *Journal of Religious History* 36.2 (2012), doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9809.2011.01169.x.

Kortenaar, Neil Ten, "[Arrow of God and the Word on Paper](#)", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42.3 (2009): 467-473 (accessed: July 4, 2022).

Mathuray, Mark, "Realising the Sacred: Power and Meaning in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*", *Research in African Literatures* 34.3 (2003): 46-65.



Smith, Daniel Jordan, "The Arrow of God: Pentecostalism, inequality, and the Supernatural in South-Eastern Nigeria", *Africa* 71.4 (2001): 587–613.

Quayson, Ato, "Self-Writing and Existential Alienation in African Literature: Achebe's *Arrow of God*", *Research in African Literature* 42.2 (2011): 30–45.

Osa, Osaynmwense, "From Spiritual Comfort to Spiritual Combat: Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Pranesharcharya in Anantha Murty's *Samskara*", *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 37 (2014): 33–48.

