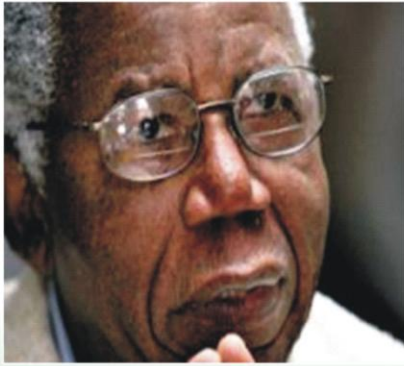


FIFTEEN OUTSTANDING NIGERIAN NOVELISTS



A Publication of the Society of Young Nigerian Writers

**Compiled and Edited by
Wole Adedoyin**

Wole Soyinka



Akinwande Oluwole "Wole" Soyinka (Yoruba: *Oluwoḽé Ṣóyinká*, pronounced "Shoyinka") (born 13 July 1934) is a Nigerian writer, notable especially as a playwright and poet; he was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first person in Africa to be so honoured.

Soyinka was born into a Yoruba family in Abeokuta. After study in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London. He went on to write plays that were produced in both countries, in theatres and on radio. He took an active role in Nigeria's political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. In 1965, he seized the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio and broadcast a demand for the cancellation of the Western Nigeria Regional Elections. In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, he was arrested by the federal government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for two years.^[2]

Soyinka has strongly criticised many Nigerian military dictators, especially late General Sanni Abacha, as well as other political tyrannies, including the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. Much of his writing has been concerned with "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the colour of the foot that wears it". During the regime of General Sani Abacha (1993–98), Soyinka escaped from Nigeria via the "Nadeco Route" on a motorcycle. Living abroad, mainly in the United States, he was a professor

first at Cornell University and then at Emory University in Atlanta, where in 1996 he was appointed Robert W. Woodruff Professor of the Arts. Abacha proclaimed a death sentence against him "in absentia". With civilian rule restored to Nigeria in 1999, Soyinka returned to his nation. He has also taught at the universities of Oxford, Harvard and Yale.

From 1975 to 1999, he was a Professor of Comparative Literature at the Obafemi Awolowo University, then called the University of Ife. With civilian rule restored in 1999, he was made professor emeritus. Soyinka has been a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In the fall of 2007 he was appointed Professor in Residence at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, US.

Life and work

Early life and education

A descendant of a Remo family of Isara-Remo, Soyinka was born the second of six children, in the city of

Abẹokuta, Ogun State in Nigeria, at that time a British dominion. His father, Samuel Ayodele Soyinka (whom he called S.A. or "Essay"), was an Anglican minister and the headmaster of St. Peters School in Abẹokuta. Soyinka's mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka (whom he dubbed the "Wild Christian"), owned a shop in the nearby market. She was a political activist within the women's movement in the local community. She was also Anglican. As much of the community followed indigenous Yorùbá religious tradition, Soyinka grew up in an atmosphere of religious syncretism, with influences from both cultures. While he was raised in a religious family; attending church services and singing in the choir from an early age; Soyinka himself became an atheist. His father's position enabled him to get electricity and radio at home.

His mother was one of the most prominent members of the influential Ransome-Kuti family: she was the daughter of Rev. Canon J. J. Ransome-Kuti, and sister to Olusegun Azariah Ransome-Kuti, Oludotun Ransome-Kuti and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Among Soyinka's

cousins were the musician Fela Kuti, the human rights activist Beko Ransome-Kuti, politician Olikoye Ransome-Kuti and activist Yemisi Ransome-Kuti.

In 1940, after attending St. Peters Primary School in Abeokuta, Soyinka went to Abeokuta Grammar School, where he won several prizes for literary composition. In 1946 he was accepted by Government College in Ibadan, at that time one of Nigeria's elite secondary schools.

After finishing his course at Government College in 1952, he began studies at University College in Ibadan (1952–54), affiliated with the University of London. He studied English literature, Greek, and Western history. In the year 1953–54, his second and last at University College, Ibadan, Soyinka began work on "Keffi's Birthday Threat," a short radio play for Nigerian Broadcasting Service. It was broadcast in July 1954. While at university, Soyinka and six others founded the Pyrates Confraternity, an anti-corruption and justice-seeking student organisation, the first confraternity in

Nigeria. Soyinka gives a detailed account of his early life in his memoir *Aké: The Years of Childhood*.

Later in 1954, Soyinka relocated to England, where he continued his studies in English literature, under the supervision of his mentor Wilson Knight at the University of Leeds (1954–57). He met numerous young, gifted British writers. Before defending his B.A., Soyinka began publishing and worked as an editor for the satirical magazine *The Eagle*. He wrote a column on academic life, often criticising his university peers.

Early career

After graduating, he remained in Leeds with the intention of earning an M.A. Soyinka intended to write new work combining European theatrical traditions with those of his Yorùbá cultural heritage. His first major play, *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958), was followed a year later by *The Lion and the Jewel*, a comedy that attracted interest from several members of London's Royal Court Theatre. Encouraged, Soyinka moved to London, where he worked as a play reader for the Royal Court Theatre.

During the same period, both of his plays were performed in Ibadan. They dealt with the uneasy relationship between progress and tradition in Nigeria.

In 1957 his play *The Invention* was the first of his works to be produced at the Royal Court Theatre. At that time his only published works were poems such as "The Immigrant" and "My Next Door Neighbour", which were published in the Nigerian magazine *Black Orpheus*. This was founded in 1957 by the German scholar Ulli Beier, who had been teaching at the University of Ibadan since 1950.

Soyinka received a Rockefeller Research Fellowship from University College in Ibadan, his alma mater, for research on African theatre, and he returned to Nigeria. He produced his new satire, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. His work *A Dance of The Forest* (1960), a biting criticism of Nigeria's political elites, won a contest that year as the official play for Nigerian Independence Day. On 1 October 1960, it premiered in Lagos as Nigeria celebrated its sovereignty. The play satirizes the

fledgling nation by showing that the present is no more a golden age than was the past. Also in 1960, Soyinka established the "Nineteen-Sixty Masks", an amateur acting ensemble to which he devoted considerable time over the next few years.

Soyinka wrote the first full-length play produced on Nigerian television. The Play, titled *My Father's Burden*, directed by Segun Olusola was featured on the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) on 6 August 1960. Soyinka published works satirising the "Emergency" in the Western Region of Nigeria, as his Yorùbá homeland was increasingly occupied and controlled by the federal government. The political tensions arising from recent post-colonial independence eventually led to a military coup and civil war (1967–70).

With the Rockefeller grant, Soyinka bought a Land Rover. He began travelling throughout the country as a researcher with the Department of English Language of the University College in Ibadan. In an essay of the time, he criticised Leopold Senghor's Négritude movement as

a nostalgic and indiscriminate glorification of the black African past that ignores the potential benefits of modernisation. "A tiger does not shout its tigritude," he declared, "it acts." In *In Death and the King Horsemen* he states: "The elephant trails no tethering-rope; that king is not yet crowned who will peg an elephant."

In December 1962, his essay "Towards a True Theater" was published. He began teaching with the Department of English Language at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife. Soyinka discussed current affairs with "négrophiles," and on several occasions openly condemned government censorship. At the end of 1963, his first feature-length movie, *Culture in Transition*, was released. In April 1964 *The Interpreters*, "a complex but also vividly documentary novel", was published in London.

That December, together with scientists and men of theatre, Soyinka founded the Drama Association of Nigeria. In 1964 he also resigned his university post, as a protest against imposed pro-government behaviour by authorities. A few months later, he was arrested for the

first time, accused of underlying tapes during reproduction of recorded speech of the winner of Nigerian elections.¹ He was released after a few months of confinement, as a result of protests by the international community of writers. This same year he wrote two more dramatic pieces: *Before the Blackout* and the comedy *Kongi's Harvest*. He also wrote *The Detainee*, a radio play for the BBC in London. His play *The Road* premiered in London at the Commonwealth Arts Festival, opening on 14 September 1965 at the Theatre Royal. At the end of the year, he was promoted to headmaster and senior lecturer in the Department of English Language at University of Lagos.

Soyinka's political speeches at that time criticised the cult of personality and government corruption in African dictatorships. In April 1966 his play *Kongi's Harvest* was produced in revival at the World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. *The Road* was awarded the Grand Prix. In June 1965, Soyinka produced his play *The Lion and The Jewel* for Hampstead Theatre Club in London.

Civil war and imprisonment

After becoming chief of the Cathedral of Drama at the University of Ibadan, Soyinka became more politically active. Following the military coup of January 1966, he secretly and unofficially met with the military governor Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in the Southeastern town of Enugu (August 1967), to try to avert civil war. As a result, he had to go into hiding.

He was imprisoned for 22 months as civil war ensued between the federal government and the Biafrans. Though refused materials such as books, pens, and paper, he still wrote a significant body of poems and notes criticising the Nigerian government.

Despite his imprisonment, in September 1967, his play *The Lion and The Jewel* was produced in Accra. In November *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Strong Breed* were produced in the Greenwich Mews Theatre in New York. He also published a collection of his poetry, *Idanre and Other Poems*. It was inspired by Soyinka's visit to the sanctuary of the Yorùbá deity Ogun, whom

he regards as his "companion" deity, kindred spirit, and protector.

In 1968, the Negro Ensemble Company in New York produced *Kongi's Harvest*. While still imprisoned, Soyinka translated from Yoruba a fantastical novel by his compatriot D. O. Fagunwa, called *The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga*.

Release and literary production

In October 1969, when the civil war came to an end, amnesty was proclaimed, and Soyinka and other political prisoners were freed. For the first few months after his release, Soyinka stayed at a friend's farm in southern France, where he sought solitude. He wrote *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1969), a reworking of the Pentheus myth. He soon published in London a book of poetry, *Poems from Prison*. At the end of the year, he returned to his office as Headmaster of Cathedral of Drama in Ibadan, and cooperated in the founding of the literary periodical *Black Orpheus* (likely named after the 1959 film directed

by Marcel Camus and set in the favela of Rio de Janeiro.)

In 1970 he produced the play *Kongi's Harvest*, while simultaneously adapting it as a film by the same title. In June 1970, he finished another play, called *Madman and Specialists*. Together with the group of fifteen actors of Ibadan University Theatre Art Company, he went on a trip to the United States, to the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut, where his latest play premiered. It gave them all experience with theatrical production in another English-speaking country.

In 1971, his poetry collection *A Shuttle in the Crypt* was published. *Madmen and Specialists* was produced in Ibadan that year. Soyinka travelled to Paris to take the lead role as Patrice Lumumba, the murdered first Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo, in the production of his *Murderous Angels*. His powerful autobiographical work *The Man Died* (1971), a collection of notes from prison, was also published.

In April 1971, concerned about the political situation in Nigeria, Soyinka resigned from his duties at the University in Ibadan, and began years of voluntary exile. In July in Paris, excerpts from his well-known play *The Dance of The Forests* were performed.

In 1972, he was awarded an Honoris Causa doctorate by the University of Leeds. Soon thereafter, his novel *Season of Anomy* (1972) and his *Collected Plays* (1972) were both published by Oxford University Press. In 1973 the National Theatre, London, commissioned and premiered the play *The Bacchae of Euripides*. In 1973 his plays *Camwood on the Leaves* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* were first published. From 1973 to 1975, Soyinka spent time on scientific studies.¹ He spent a year as a visiting fellow at Churchill College Cambridge University¹1973-74 and wrote *Death and the King's Horseman*, which had its first reading at Churchill College (which Dapo Ladimeji and Skip Gates attended), and gave a series of lectures at a number of European universities.

In 1974 his *Collected Plays, Volume II* was issued by Oxford University Press. In 1975 Soyinka was promoted to the position of editor for *Transition*, a magazine based in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, where he moved for some time. He used his columns in *Transition* to criticise the "negrophiles" (for instance, his article "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition") and military regimes. He protested against the military junta of Idi Amin in Uganda. After the political turnover in Nigeria and the subversion of Gowon's military regime in 1975, Soyinka returned to his homeland and resumed his position at the Cathedral of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife.

In 1976 he published his poetry collection *Ogun Abibiman*, as well as a collection of essays entitled *Myth, Literature and the African World*. In these, Soyinka explores the genesis of mysticism in African theatre and, using examples from both European and African literature, compares and contrasts the cultures. He delivered a series of guest lectures at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana in Legon. In

October, the French version of *The Dance of The Forests* was performed in Dakar, while in Ife, his *Death and The King's Horseman* premiered.

In 1977 *Opera Wonyosi*, his adaptation of Bertold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, was staged in Ibadan. In 1979 he both directed and acted in Jon Blair and Norman Fenton's drama *The Biko Inquest*, a work based on the life of Steve Biko, a South African student and human rights activist who was beaten to death by apartheid police forces. In 1981 Soyinka published his autobiographical work *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, which won a 1983 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award.

Soyinka founded another theatrical group called the Guerrilla Unit. Its goal was to work with local communities in analyzing their problems and to express some of their grievances in dramatic sketches. In 1983 his play *Requiem for a Futurologist* had its first performance at the University of Ife. In July, one of Soyinka's musical projects, the Unlimited Liability Company, issued a long-playing record entitled *I Love*

My Country, on which several prominent Nigerian musicians played songs composed by Soyinka. In 1984, he directed the film *Blues for a Prodigal*; his new play *A Play of Giants* was produced the same year.

During the years 1975–84, Soyinka was also more politically active. At the University of Ife, his administrative duties included the security of public roads. He criticized the corruption in the government of the democratically elected President Shehu Shagari. When he was replaced by the general Muhammadu Buhari, Soyinka was often at odds with the military. In 1984, a Nigerian court banned his 1971 book *The Man Died*. In 1985, his play *Requiem for a Futurologist* was published in London.

Since 1986

Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, becoming the first African laureate. He was described as one "who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence". Reed Way Dasenbrock writes that the award of the

Nobel Prize in Literature to Soyinka is "likely to prove quite controversial and thoroughly deserved." He also notes that "it is the first Nobel Prize awarded to an African writer or to any writer from the 'new literatures' in English that have emerged in the former colonies of the British Empire." His Nobel acceptance speech, "This Past Must Address Its Present", was devoted to South African freedom-fighter Nelson Mandela. Soyinka's speech was an outspoken criticism of apartheid and the politics of racial segregation imposed on the majority by the Nationalist South African government. In 1986, he received the Agip Prize for Literature.

In 1988, his collection of poems *Mandela's Earth, and Other Poems* was published, while in Nigeria another collection of essays entitled *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* appeared. In the same year, Soyinka accepted the position of Professor of African Studies and Theatre at Cornell University. In 1990, the second portion of his memoir *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay* appeared. In July 1991 the BBC African Service transmitted his radio play *A Scourge of*

Hyacinths, and the next year (1992) in Sienna (Italy), his play *From Zia with Love* had its premiere. Both works are very bitter political parodies, based on events that took place in Nigeria in the 1980s. In 1993 Soyinka was awarded an honorary doctorate from Harvard University. The next year another part of his autobiography appeared: *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years (A Memoir: 1946–1965)*. The following year his play *The Beatification of Area Boy* was published. In October 1994, he was appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the Promotion of African culture, human rights, freedom of expression, media and communication.

In November 1994, Soyinka fled from Nigeria through the border with Benin and then to the United States. In 1996 his book *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* was first published. In 1997 he was charged with treason by the government of General Sani Abacha. The International Parliament of Writers (IPW) was established in 1993 to provide support for writers victimized by persecution. Soyinka

became the organization's second president from 1997 to 2000. In 1999 a new volume of poems by Soyinka, entitled *Outsiders*, was released. His play *King Baabu*, premiered in Lagos in 2001, a political satire on the theme of African dictatorship. In 2002 a collection of his poems, *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*, was published by Methuen. In April 2006, his memoir *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* was published by Random House. In 2006 he cancelled his keynote speech for the annual S.E.A. Write Awards Ceremony in Bangkok to protest the Thai military's successful coup against the government.

In April 2007 Soyinka called for the cancellation of the Nigerian presidential elections held two weeks earlier, beset by widespread fraud and violence. In the wake of the Christmas Day (2009) bombing attempt on a flight to the US by a Nigerian student who had become radicalised in Britain, Soyinka questioned the United Kingdom's social logic that allows every religion to openly proselytise their faith, asserting that it is being abused by religious fundamentalists thereby turning

England into a cesspit for the breeding of extremism. He supported the freedom of worship but warned against the consequence of the illogic of allowing religions to preach apocalyptic violence.

Legacy and honours

- In 2011, the African Heritage Research Library and Cultural Centre built a writers' enclave in his honour. It is located in Adeyipo Village, Lagelu Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The enclave includes a Writer-in-Residence Programme that enables writers to stay for a period of two, three or six months, engaging in serious creative writing.
- 1973: Honorary PhD, University of Leeds
- 1973–74: Overseas Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge
- 1983: Elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature
- 1983: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, United States.

- 1986: Nobel Prize for Literature
- 1986 Agip Prize for Literature
- 1986 Commander of the Federal Republic, CFR.
- 1990: Benson Medal from Royal Society of Literature
- 1993: Honorary doctorate, Harvard University
- 2005: Honorary doctorate degree, Princeton University.
- 2005: Conferred with the chieftaincy title of the Akinlatun of Egbaland by the Oba Alake of the Egba clan of Yorubaland. He was made a tribal aristocrat with the right to use the Yoruba title **Oloye**.
- 2009: Academy of Achievement Golden Plate Award
- 2013, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Lifetime Achievement, United States.

Works

Plays

- *The Invention* (1957)

- *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958)
- *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959)
- *The Trials of Brother Jero*
- *A Dance of the Forests* (1960)
- *My Father's Burden* (1960)
- *The Strong Breed* (1964)
- *Before the Blackout* (1964)
- *Kongi's Harvest* (1964)
- *The Road* (1965)
- *Madmen and Specialists* (1970)
- *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973)
- *Camwood on the Leaves* (1973)
- *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973)
- *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975)
- *Opera Wonyosi* (1977)
- *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1983)
- *Sixty Six* (short piece) (1984)
- *A Play of Giants* (1984)
- *From Zia with Love* (1992)
- *The Detainee* (radio play)
- *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (radio play)
- *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996)

- *King Baabu* (2001)
- *Etiki Revu Wetin*

Novels

- *The Interpreters (novel)* (1964)
- *Season of Anomy* (1972)

Short stories

- *A Tale of Two* (1958)
- *Egbe's Sworn enemy* (1960)
- *Madame Etienne's Establishment* (1960)

Memoirs

- *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1971)
- *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981)
- *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: a memoir 1946-65* (1989)
- *Isara: A Voyage around Essay* (1990)
- *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006)

Poetry collections

- *Idanre and other poems* (1967)
- *A Big Airplane Crashed Into The Earth* (original title *Poems from Prison*) (1969)
- *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1971)
- *Ogun Abibiman* (1976)
- *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976)
- *Mandela's Earth and other poems* (1988)
- *Early Poems* (1997)
- *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002)

Essays

- *Towards a True Theater* (1962)
- *Culture in Transition* (1963)
- *Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition*
- *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (1988)
- *From Drama and the African World View* (1976)
- *The Credo of Being and Nothingness* (1991)

- *The Burden of Memory – The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999)
- *A Climate of Fear* (originally held as the BBC Reid Lectures 2004, audio and transcripts)

Movies

- *Kongi's Harvest*
- *Culture in Transition*
- *Blues for a Prodigal*

Translations

- *Forest of a Thousand Daemons. [a translation of D O Fagunwa's OGBOJU ODE NINU IGBO IRUNMALE]*
- *In the Forest of Olodumare. [a translation of D O Fagunwa's IGBO OLODUMARE]*

Chinua Achebe



Chinua Achebe (/ˈtʃɪnwɑː əˈtʃɛbɛ/, born **Albert Chinualumogu Achebe**; 16 November 1930 – 21 March 2013) was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic. He was best known for his first novel and magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is the most widely read book in modern African literature.

Raised by his parents in the Igbo town of Ogidi in southeastern Nigeria, Achebe excelled at school and won a scholarship for undergraduate studies. He became fascinated with world religions and traditional African cultures, and began writing stories as a university

student. After graduation, he worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) and soon moved to the metropolis of Lagos. He gained worldwide attention for *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s; his later novels include *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Achebe wrote his novels in English and defended the use of English, a "language of colonisers", in African literature. In 1975, his lecture *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* featured a famous criticism of Joseph Conrad as "a thoroughgoing racist"; it was later published in *The Massachusetts Review* amid some controversy.

When the region of Biafra broke away from Nigeria in 1967, Achebe became a supporter of Biafran independence and acted as ambassador for the people of the new nation. The war ravaged the populace, and as starvation and violence took its toll, he appealed to the people of Europe and the Americas for aid. When the Nigerian government retook the region in 1970, he involved himself in political parties but soon resigned

due to frustration over the corruption and elitism he witnessed. He lived in the United States for several years in the 1970s, and returned to the U.S. in 1990 after a car accident left him partially disabled.

A titled Igbo chieftain himself, Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. From 2009 until his death, he served as a professor at Brown University in the United States.

Biography

Achebe's parents, Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria. The elder Achebe stopped practising the religion of his ancestors, but he respected its traditions. Achebe's unabbreviated

name, Chinualumogu ("May God fight on my behalf"), was a prayer for divine protection and stability. The Achebe family had five other surviving children, named in a similar fusion of traditional words relating to their new religion: Frank Okwuofu, John Chukwuemeka Ifeanyichukwu, Zinobia Uzoma, Augustine Nduka, and Grace Nwanneka.

Early life

Chinua was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in the Igbo village of Ogidi on 16 November 1930. Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam Achebe stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence; this made a significant impact on the children, especially Chinualumogu. After the youngest daughter was born, the family moved to Isaiah Achebe's ancestral town of Ogidi, in what is now the state of Anambra.

Storytelling was a mainstay of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community. Chinua's mother and sister Zinobia Uzoma told him many stories as a child, which he repeatedly requested. His education was

furthered by the collages his father hung on the walls of their home, as well as almanacs and numerous books – including a prose adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1590) and an Igbo version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Chinua also eagerly anticipated traditional village events, like the frequent masquerade ceremonies, which he recreated later in his novels and stories.

Education

In 1936, Achebe entered St Philips' Central School. Despite his protests, he spent a week in the religious class for young children, but was quickly moved to a higher class when the school's chaplain took note of his intelligence. One teacher described him as the student with the best handwriting in class, and the best reading skills. He also attended Sunday school every week and the special evangelical services held monthly, often carrying his father's bag. A controversy erupted at one such session, when apostates from the new church challenged the catechist about the tenets of Christianity.

Achebe later included a scene from this incident in *Things Fall Apart*.

At the age of twelve, Achebe moved away from his family to the village of Nekede, four kilometres from Owerri. He enrolled as a student at the Central School, where his older brother John taught. In Nekede, Achebe gained an appreciation for Mbari, a traditional art form which seeks to invoke the gods' protection through symbolic sacrifices in the form of sculpture and collage. When the time came to change to secondary school, in 1944, Achebe sat entrance examinations for and was accepted at both the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School in Onitsha and the even more prestigious Government College in Umuahia.

Modelled on the British public school, and funded by the colonial administration, Government College had been established in 1929 to educate Nigeria's future elite. It had rigorous academic standards and was vigorously elitist, accepting boys purely on the basis of ability. The language of the school was English, not only to develop

proficiency but also to provide a common tongue for pupils from different Nigerian language groups. Achebe described this later as being ordered to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the language of their colonisers". The rule was strictly enforced and Achebe recalls that his first punishment was for asking another boy to pass the soap in Igbo.

Once there, Achebe was double-promoted in his first year, completing the first two years' studies in one, and spending only four years in secondary school, instead of the standard five. Achebe was unsuited to the school's sports regimen and belonged instead to a group of six exceedingly studious pupils. So intense were their study habits that the headmaster banned the reading of textbooks from five to six o'clock in the afternoon (though other activities and other books were allowed).

Achebe started to explore the school's "wonderful library". There he discovered Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901), the autobiography of an American former slave; Achebe "found it sad, but it

showed him another dimension of reality". He also read classic novels, such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Treasure Island* (1883) together with tales of colonial derring-do such as H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887) and John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910). Achebe later recalled that, as a reader, he "took sides with the white characters against the savages" and even developed a dislike for Africans. "The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts."

University

In 1948, in preparation for independence, Nigeria's first university opened. Known as University College (now the University of Ibadan), it was an associate college of the University of London. Achebe obtained such high marks in the entrance examination that he was admitted as a Major Scholar in the university's first intake and given a bursary to study medicine. After a year, he

changed to English, history, and theology. Because he switched his field, however, he lost his scholarship and had to pay tuition fees. He received a government bursary, and his family also donated money – his older brother Augustine gave up money for a trip home from his job as a civil servant so Chinua could continue his studies. From its inception, the university had a strong English faculty; it includes many famous writers amongst its alumni. These include Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, novelist Elechi Amadi, poet and playwright John Pepper Clark, and poet Christopher Okigbo.

In 1950 Achebe wrote a piece for the *University Herald* entitled "Polar Undergraduate", his debut as an author. It used irony and humour to celebrate the intellectual vigour of his classmates. He followed this with other essays and letters about philosophy and freedom in academia, some of which were published in another campus magazine, *The Bug*. He served as the *Herald's* editor during the 1951–52 school year.

While at the university, Achebe wrote his first short story, "In a Village Church", which combines details of life in rural Nigeria with Christian institutions and icons, a style which appears in many of his later works. Other short stories he wrote during his time at Ibadan (including "The Old Order in Conflict with the New" and "Dead Men's Path") examine conflicts between tradition and modernity, with an eye toward dialogue and understanding on both sides. When a professor named Geoffrey Parrinder arrived at the university to teach comparative religion, Achebe began to explore the fields of Christian history and African traditional religions.

It was during his studies at Ibadan that Achebe began to become critical of European literature about Africa. He read Irish novelist Joyce Cary's 1939 book *Mister Johnson*, about a cheerful Nigerian man who (among other things) works for an abusive British storeowner. Achebe recognised his dislike for the African protagonist as a sign of the author's cultural ignorance. One of his classmates announced to the professor that the only enjoyable moment in the book is when Johnson is shot.

After the final examinations at Ibadan in 1953, Achebe was awarded a second-class degree. Rattled by not receiving the highest level, he was uncertain how to proceed after graduation. He returned to his hometown of Ogidi to sort through his options.

Teaching and producing

While he meditated on his possible career paths, Achebe was visited by a friend from the university, who convinced him to apply for an English teaching position at the Merchants of Light school at Oba. It was a ramshackle institution with a crumbling infrastructure and a meagre library; the school was built on what the residents called "bad bush" – a section of land thought to be tainted by unfriendly spirits. Later, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe describes a similar area called the "evil forest", where the Christian missionaries are given a place to build their church.

As a teacher he urged his students to read extensively and be original in their work. The students did not have access to the newspapers he had read as a student, so

Achebe made his own available in the classroom. He taught in Oba for four months, but when an opportunity arose in 1954 to work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), he left the school and moved to Lagos.

The NBS, a radio network started in 1933 by the colonial government, assigned Achebe to the Talks Department, preparing scripts for oral delivery. This helped him master the subtle nuances between written and spoken language, a skill that helped him later to write realistic dialogue.

The city of Lagos also made a significant impression on him. A huge conurbation, the city teemed with recent migrants from the rural villages. Achebe revelled in the social and political activity around him and later drew upon his experiences when describing the city in his 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease*.

While in Lagos, Achebe started work on a novel. This was challenging, since very little African fiction had been written in English, although Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of*

the City (1954) were notable exceptions. While appreciating Ekwensi's work, Achebe worked hard to develop his own style, even as he pioneered the creation of the Nigerian novel itself. A visit to Nigeria by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956 brought issues of colonialism and politics to the surface, and was a significant moment for Achebe.

Also in 1956 he was selected at the Staff School run by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). His first trip outside Nigeria was an opportunity to advance his technical production skills, and to solicit feedback on his novel (which was later split into two books). In London, he met a novelist named Gilbert Phelps, to whom he offered the manuscript. Phelps responded with great enthusiasm, asking Achebe if he could show it to his editor and publishers. Achebe declined, insisting that it needed more work.

Things Fall Apart

Back in Nigeria, Achebe set to work revising and editing his novel (now titled *Things Fall Apart*, after a line in the

poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats). He cut away the second and third sections of the book, leaving only the story of a yam farmer named Okonkwo who lives during the colonization of Nigeria. He added sections, improved various chapters, and restructured the prose. By 1957, he had sculpted it to his liking, and took advantage of an advertisement offering a typing service. He sent his only copy of his handwritten manuscript (along with the £22 fee) to the London company. After he waited several months without receiving any communication from the typing service, Achebe began to worry. His boss at the NBS, Angela Beattie, was going to London for her annual leave; he asked her to visit the company. She did, and angrily demanded to know why it was lying ignored in the corner of the office. The company quickly sent a typed copy to Achebe. Beattie's intervention was crucial for his ability to continue as a writer. Had the novel been lost, he later said, "I would have been so discouraged that I would probably have given up altogether."

In 1958, Achebe sent his novel to the agent recommended by Gilbert Phelps in London. It was sent to several publishing houses; some rejected it immediately, claiming that fiction from African writers had no market potential. Finally it reached the office of Heinemann, where executives hesitated until an educational adviser, Donald MacRae – just back in England after a trip through west Africa read the book and forced the company's hand with his succinct report: "This is the best novel I have read since the war".

Heinemann published 2,000 hardcover copies of *Things Fall Apart* on 17 June 1958. According to Alan Hill, employed by the publisher at the time, the company did not "touch a word of it" in preparation for release. The book was received well by the British press, and received positive reviews from critic Walter Allen and novelist Angus Wilson. Three days after publication, *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote that the book "genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside". *The Observer* called it "an excellent novel", and

the literary magazine *Time and Tide* said that "Mr. Achebe's style is a model for aspirants".

Initial reception in Nigeria was mixed. When Hill tried to promote the book in West Africa, he was met with scepticism and ridicule. The faculty at the University of Ibadan was amused at the thought of a worthwhile novel being written by an alumnus. Others were more supportive; one review in the magazine *Black Orpheus* said: "The book as a whole creates for the reader such a vivid picture of Ibo life that the plot and characters are little more than symbols representing a way of life lost irrevocably within living memory."

In the book *Okonkwo* struggles with the legacy of his father – a shiftless debtor fond of playing the flute – as well as the complications and contradictions that arise when white missionaries arrive in his village of Umuofia. Exploring the terrain of cultural conflict, particularly the encounter between Igbo tradition and Christian doctrine, Achebe returns to the themes of his earlier stories, which grew from his own background.

Things Fall Apart went on to become one of the most important books in African literature. Selling over 8 million copies around the world, it was translated into 50 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time.

Marriage and family

In the same year *Things Fall Apart* was published, Achebe was promoted at the NBS and put in charge of the network's eastern region coverage. He moved to Enugu and began to work on his administrative duties. There he met a woman named Christie Okoli, who had grown up in the area and joined the NBS staff when he arrived. They first conversed when she brought to his attention a pay discrepancy; a friend of hers found that, although they had been hired simultaneously, Christie had been rated lower and offered a lower wage. Sent to the hospital for an appendectomy soon after, she was pleasantly surprised when Achebe visited her with gifts and magazines.

Achebe and Okoli grew closer in the following years, and on 10 September 1961 they were married in the Chapel of Resurrection on the campus of the University of Ibadan. Christie Achebe has described their marriage as one of trust and mutual understanding; some tension arose early in their union, due to conflicts about attention and communication. However, as their relationship matured, husband and wife made efforts to adapt to one another.

Their first child, a daughter named Chinelo, was born on 11 July 1962. They had a son, Ikechukwu, on 3 December 1964, and another boy named Chidi, on 24 May 1967. When the children began attending school in Lagos, their parents became worried about the world view – especially with regard to race – expressed at the school, especially through the mostly white teachers and books that presented a prejudiced view of African life. In 1966, Achebe published his first children's book, *Chike and the River*, to address some of these concerns. After the Biafran War, the Achebes had another daughter on 7 March 1970, named Nwando. When asked about his

family Achebe stated: "There are few things more important than my family." They have six grandchildren: Chochi, Chino, Chidera, C.J. (Chinua Jr.), Nnamdi and Zeal.

***No Longer at Ease* and fellowship travels**

In 1960, while they were still dating, Achebe dedicated to Christie Okoli his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, about a civil servant who is embroiled in the corruption of Lagos. The protagonist is Obi, grandson of *Things Fall Apart's* main character, Okonkwo. Drawing on his time in the city, Achebe writes about Obi's experiences in Lagos to reflect the challenges facing a new generation on the threshold of Nigerian independence. Obi is trapped between the expectations of his family, its clan, his home village, and larger society. He is crushed by these forces (like his grandfather before him) and finds himself imprisoned for bribery. Having shown his acumen for portraying traditional Igbo culture, Achebe demonstrated in his second novel an ability to depict modern Nigerian life.

Later that year, Achebe was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for six months of travel, which he called "the first important perk of my writing career"; Achebe set out for a tour of East Africa. One month after Nigeria achieved its independence, he travelled to Kenya, where he was required to complete an immigration form by checking a box indicating his ethnicity: European, Asiatic, Arab, or Other. Shocked and dismayed at being forced into an "Other" identity, he found the situation "almost funny" and took an extra form as a souvenir. Continuing to Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now united in Tanzania), he was frustrated by the paternalistic attitude he observed among non-African hotel clerks and social elites.

Achebe also found in his travels that Swahili was gaining prominence as a major African language. Radio programs were broadcast in Swahili, and its use was widespread in the countries he visited. Nevertheless, he also found an "apathy" among the people toward literature written in Swahili. He met the poet Sheikh

Shaaban Robert, who complained of the difficulty he had faced in trying to publish his Swahili-language work.

In Northern Rhodesia (now called Zambia), Achebe found himself sitting in a whites-only section of a bus to Victoria Falls. Interrogated by the ticket taker as to why he was sitting in the front, he replied, "if you must know I come from Nigeria, and there we sit where we like in the bus." Upon reaching the waterfall, he was cheered by the black travellers from the bus, but he was saddened by their being unable to resist the policy of segregation at the time.

Two years later, Achebe again left Nigeria, this time as part of a Fellowship for Creative Artists awarded by UNESCO. He travelled to the United States and Brazil. He met with a number of writers from the US, including novelists Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller. In Brazil, he met with several other authors, with whom he discussed the complications of writing in Portuguese. Achebe worried that the vibrant literature of the nation would be

lost if left untranslated into a more widely spoken language.

Voice of Nigeria and African Writers Series

Once he returned to Nigeria, Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting. One of his first duties was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Year's Day 1962, and worked to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. This objectivity was put to the test when Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, responding to a series of conflicts between officials of varying parties. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

In 1962 he attended an executive conference of African writers in English at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. He met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world,

including Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet Wole Soyinka, and US poet-author Langston Hughes. Among the topics of discussion was an attempt to determine whether the term African literature ought to include work from the diaspora, or solely that writing composed by people living within the continent itself. Achebe indicated that it was not "a very significant question", and that scholars would do well to wait until a body of work were large enough to judge. Writing about the conference in several journals, Achebe hailed it as a milestone for the literature of Africa, and highlighted the importance of community among isolated voices on the continent and beyond.

While at Makerere, Achebe was asked to read a novel written by a student (James Ngugi, later known as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) called *Weep Not, Child*. Impressed, he sent it to Alan Hill at Heinemann, which published it two years later to coincide with its paperback line of books from African writers. Hill indicated this was to remedy a situation where British publishers "regarded West Africa only as a place where you sold books." Achebe was

chosen to be General Editor of the African Writers Series, which became a significant force in bringing postcolonial literature from Africa to the rest of the world, and he continued in that role until 1972.

As these works became more widely available, reviews and essays about African literature – especially from Europe – began to flourish. Bristling against the commentary flooding his home country, Achebe published an essay entitled "Where Angels Fear to Tread" in the December 1962 issue of *Nigeria Magazine*. In it, he distinguished between the hostile critic (entirely negative), the amazed critic (entirely positive), and the conscious critic (who seeks a balance). He lashed out at those who critiqued African writers from the outside, saying: "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world view)."

Arrow of God

Achebe's third book, *Arrow of God*, was published in 1964. Like its predecessors, it explores the intersections

of Igbo tradition and European Christianity. Set in the village of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century, the novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a Chief Priest of Ulu. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigners' secret. As with Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu is consumed by the resulting tragedy.

The idea for the novel came in 1959, when Achebe heard the story of a Chief Priest being imprisoned by a District Officer. He drew further inspiration a year later when he viewed a collection of Igbo objects excavated from the area by archaeologist Thurstan Shaw; Achebe was startled by the cultural sophistication of the artefacts. When an acquaintance showed him a series of papers from colonial officers (not unlike the fictional *Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* referenced at the end of *Things Fall Apart*), Achebe combined these strands of history and began work on *Arrow of God* in earnest. Like Achebe's previous works, *Arrow* was roundly praised by critics. A revised edition

was published in 1974 to correct what Achebe called "certain structural weaknesses".

In a letter to Achebe, the US writer John Updike expressed his surprised admiration for the sudden downfall of *Arrow of God's* protagonist. He praised the author's courage to write "an ending few Western novelists would have contrived". Achebe responded by suggesting that the individualistic hero was rare in African literature, given its roots in communal living and the degree to which characters are "subject to non-human forces in the universe".

A Man of the People

A Man of the People was published in 1966. A bleak satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat. Upon reading an advance copy of the novel, Achebe's friend John Pepper Clark declared:

"Chinua, I *know* you are a prophet. Everything in this book has happened except a military coup!"

Soon afterward, Nigerian Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu seized control of the northern region of the country as part of a larger coup attempt. Commanders in other areas failed, and the plot was answered by a military crackdown. A massacre of three thousand people from the eastern region living in the north occurred soon afterwards, and stories of other attacks on Igbo Nigerians began to filter into Lagos.

The ending of his novel had brought Achebe to the attention of military personnel, who suspected him of having foreknowledge of the coup. When he received word of the pursuit, he sent his wife (who was pregnant) and children on a squalid boat through a series of unseen creeks to the Igbo stronghold of Port Harcourt. They arrived safely, but Christie suffered a miscarriage at the journey's end. Chinua rejoined them soon afterwards in Ogidi. These cities were safe from military incursion

because they were in the southeast, part of the region which would later secede.

Once the family had resettled in Enugu, Achebe and his friend Christopher Okigbo started a publishing house called Citadel Press, to improve the quality and increase the quantity of literature available to younger readers. One of its first submissions was a story called *How the Dog was Domesticated*, which Achebe revised and rewrote, turning it into a complex allegory for the country's political tumult. Its final title was *How the Leopard Got His Claws*. Years later a Nigerian intelligence officer told Achebe, "of all the things that came out of Biafra, that book was the most important."

Nigeria-Biafra War

In May 1967, the southeastern region of Nigeria broke away to form the Republic of Biafra; in July the Nigerian military attacked to suppress what it considered an unlawful rebellion. Achebe's partner, Christopher Okigbo, who had become a close friend of the family (especially of Achebe's son, young Ikechukwu),

volunteered to join the secessionist army while simultaneously working at the press. Achebe's house was bombed one afternoon; Christie had taken the children to visit her sick mother, so the only victims were his books and papers. The Achebe family narrowly escaped disaster several times during the war. Five days later, Christopher Okigbo was killed on the war's front line. Achebe was shaken considerably by the loss; in 1971 he wrote "Dirge for Okigbo", originally in the Igbo language but later translated to English.

As the war intensified, the Achebe family was forced to leave Enugu for the Biafran capital of Aba. As the turmoil closed in, he continued to write, but most of his creative work during the war took the form of poetry. The shorter format was a consequence of living in a war zone. "I can write poetry," he said, "something short, intense more in keeping with my mood ... All this is creating in the context of our struggle." Many of these poems were collected in his 1971 book *Beware, Soul Brother*. One of his most famous, "Refugee Mother and Child", spoke to the suffering and loss that surrounded

him. Dedicated to the promise of Biafra, he accepted a request to serve as foreign ambassador, refusing an invitation from the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University in the US. Achebe traveled to many cities in Europe, including London, where he continued his work with the African Writers Series project at Heinemann.

During the war, relations between writers in Nigeria and Biafra were strained. Achebe and John Pepper Clark had a tense confrontation in London over their respective support for opposing sides of the conflict. Achebe demanded that the publisher withdraw the dedication of *A Man of the People* he had given to Clark. Years later, their friendship healed and the dedication was restored. Meanwhile, their contemporary Wole Soyinka was imprisoned for meeting with Biafran officials, and spent many years in jail. Speaking in 1968, Achebe said: "I find the Nigerian situation untenable. If I had been a Nigerian, I think I would have been in the same situation as Wole Soyinka is – in prison."

The Nigerian government, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, was backed by the British government; the two nations enjoyed a vigorous trade partnership. Addressing the causes of the war in 1968, Achebe lashed out at the Nigerian political and military forces that had forced Biafra to secede. He framed the conflict in terms of the country's colonial past. The writer in Nigeria, he said, "found that the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content ... The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission."

Conditions in Biafra worsened as the war continued. In September 1968, the city of Aba fell to the Nigerian military and Achebe once again moved his family, this time to Umuahia, where the Biafran government had also relocated. He was chosen to chair the newly formed National Guidance Committee, charged with the task of drafting principles and ideas for the post-war era. In 1969, the group completed a document entitled *The*

Principles of the Biafran Revolution, later released as *The Ahiara Declaration*.

In October of the same year, Achebe joined writers Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara for a tour of the United States to raise awareness about the dire situation in Biafra. They visited thirty college campuses and conducted countless interviews. While in the southern US, Achebe learned for the first time of the Igbo Landing, a true story of a group of Igbo captives who drowned themselves in 1803 – rather than endure the brutality of slavery – after surviving through the Middle Passage. Although the group was well received by students and faculty, Achebe was "shocked" by the harsh racist attitude toward Africa he saw in the US. At the end of the tour, he said that "world policy is absolutely ruthless and unfeeling".

The beginning of 1970 saw the end of the state of Biafra. On 12 January, the military surrendered to Nigeria, and Achebe returned with his family to Ogidi, where their home had been destroyed. He took a job at the

University of Nigeria in Nsukka and immersed himself once again in academia. He was unable to accept invitations to other countries, however, because the Nigerian government revoked his passport due to his support for Biafra.

Postwar academia

After the war, Achebe helped start two magazines: the literary journal *Okike*, a forum for African art, fiction, and poetry; and *Nsukkascopes*, an internal publication of the University (motto: "Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True"). Achebe and the *Okike* committee later established another cultural magazine, *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, to showcase the indigenous stories and oral traditions of the Igbo community. In February 1972 he released *Girls at War*, a collection of short stories ranging in time from his undergraduate days to the recent bloodshed. It was the 100th book in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst offered Achebe a professorship later that year, and the family moved to the United States. Their youngest daughter was

displeased with her nursery school, and the family soon learned that her frustration involved language. Achebe helped her face the "alien experience" (as he called it) by telling her stories during the car trips to and from school.

As he presented his lessons to a wide variety of students (he taught only one class, to a large audience), he began to study the perceptions of Africa in Western scholarship: "Africa is not like anywhere else they know ... there are no real people in the Dark Continent, only *forces* operating; and people don't speak any language you can understand, they just grunt, too busy jumping up and down in a frenzy".

Criticism of Conrad

Achebe expanded this criticism when he presented a Chancellor's Lecture at Amherst on 18 February 1975, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*. Decrying Joseph Conrad as "a bloody racist", Achebe asserted that Conrad's famous novel dehumanises Africans, rendering Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable

humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril."

Achebe also discussed a quotation from Albert Schweitzer, a 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: 'The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother.' And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being." Some were surprised that Achebe would challenge a man honoured in the West for his "reverence for life", and recognised as a paragon of Western liberalism.

The lecture caused a storm of controversy, even at the reception immediately following his talk. Many English

professors in attendance were upset by his remarks; one elderly professor reportedly approached him, said: "How dare you!", and stormed away. Another suggested that Achebe had "no sense of humour", but several days later Achebe was approached by a third professor, who told him: "I now realize that I had never really read *Heart of Darkness* although I have taught it for years." Although the lecture angered many of his colleagues, he was nevertheless presented later in 1975 with an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling and the Lotus Prize for Afro-Asian Writers.

The first comprehensive rebuttal of Achebe's critique was published in 1983 by British critic Cedric Watts. His essay "A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad" defends *Heart of Darkness* as an anti-imperialist novel, suggesting that "part of its greatness lies in the power of its criticisms of racial prejudice." Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said agreed in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that Conrad criticised imperialism, but added: "As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite

his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them".

Achebe's criticism has become a mainstream perspective on Conrad's work. The essay was included in the 1988 Norton critical edition of Conrad's novel. Editor Robert Kimbrough called it one of "the three most important events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism since the second edition of his book ..." Critic Nicolas Tredell divides Conrad criticism "into two epochal phases: before and after Achebe." Asked frequently about his essay, Achebe once explained that he never meant for the work to be abandoned: "It's not in my nature to talk about banning books. I am saying, read it – with the kind of understanding and with the knowledge I talk about. And read it beside African works." Interviewed on National Public Radio with Robert Siegel, in October 2009, Achebe remains consistent, although tempering this criticism in a discussion entitled "'Heart of Darkness' is inappropriate": "Conrad was a seductive writer. He could pull his reader into the fray. And if it were not for what

he said about me and my people, I would probably be thinking only of that seduction."

Retirement and politics

When he returned to the University of Kenya in 1976, he hoped to accomplish three goals: finish the novel he had been writing, renew the native publication of *Okike*, and further his study of Igbo culture. He also showed that he would not restrict his criticism to European targets. In an August 1976 interview, he lashed out at the archetypal Nigerian intellectual, who is divorced from the intellect "but for two things: status and stomach. And if there's any danger that he might suffer official displeasure or lose his job, he would prefer to turn a blind eye to what is happening around him." In October 1979, Achebe was awarded the first-ever Nigerian National Merit Award.

In 1980 he met James Baldwin at a conference held by the African Literature Association in Gainesville, Florida, USA. The writers – with similar political perspectives, beliefs about language, and faith in the liberating potential of literature – were eager to meet one

another. Baldwin said: "It's very important that we should meet each other, finally, if I must say so, after something like 400 years."

In 1982, Achebe retired from the University of Nigeria. He devoted more time to editing *Okike* and became active with the left-leaning People's Redemption Party (PRP). In 1983, he became the party's deputy national vice-president. He published a book called *The Trouble with Nigeria* to coincide with the upcoming elections. On the first page, Achebe says bluntly: "the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."

The elections that followed were marked by violence and charges of fraud. Asked whether he thought Nigerian politics had changed since *A Man of the People*, Achebe replied: "I think, if anything, the Nigerian politician has deteriorated." After the elections, he engaged in a heated argument – which almost became a fistfight – with Bakin Zuwo, the newly elected governor of Kano State.

He left the PRP and afterwards kept his distance from political parties, expressing his sadness at the dishonesty and weakness of the people involved.

He spent most of the 1980s delivering speeches, attending conferences, and working on his sixth novel. He also continued winning awards and collecting honorary degrees. In 1986 he was elected president-general of the Ogidi Town Union; he reluctantly accepted and began a three-year term. In the same year, he stepped down as editor of *Okike*.

Anthills and paralysis

In 1987 Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, about a military coup in the fictional West African nation of Kangan. A finalist for the Booker Prize, the novel was hailed in the *Financial Times*: "in a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles, Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from 'overseas' who see nothing ever new out of Africa." An opinion piece in the magazine *West*

Africa said the book deserved to win the Booker Prize, and that Achebe was "a writer who has long deserved the recognition that has already been accorded him by his sales figures." The prize went instead to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger*.

On 22 March 1990, Achebe was riding in a car to Lagos when an axle collapsed and the car flipped. His son Ikechukwu and the driver suffered minor injuries, but the weight of the vehicle fell on Achebe and his spine was severely damaged. He was flown to the Paddocks Hospital in Buckinghamshire, England, and treated for his injuries. In July doctors announced that although he was recuperating well, he was paralyzed from the waist down and would require the use of a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Soon afterwards, Achebe became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; he held the position for more than fifteen years. In the autumn of 2009 he joined the Brown University faculty as the

David and Marianna Fisher University Professor of Africana Studies.

Later life and death

In October 2005, the London *Financial Times* reported that Achebe was planning to write a novella for the *Canongate Myth Series*, a series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are reimaged and rewritten by contemporary authors. Achebe's novella has not yet been scheduled for publication.

In June 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize. The judging panel included US critic Elaine Showalter, who said he "illuminated the path for writers around the world seeking new words and forms for new realities and societies"; and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, who said Achebe has achieved "what one of his characters brilliantly defines as the writer's purpose: 'a new-found utterance' for the capture of life's complexity". In 2010, Achebe was awarded The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for \$300,000, one of the richest prizes for the arts.

In October 2012, Achebe's publishers, Penguin Books, released *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Publication immediately caused a stir and reopened the discussion about the Nigerian Civil War. It would prove to be the last publication during his lifetime.^[139]

Fondly called the "grandfather of Nigerian literature", Achebe died after a short illness on 21 March 2013 in Boston, United States. An unidentified source close to the family said that he was ill for a while and had been hospitalised in the city. Penguin publishing director Simon Winder said: "...we are all desolate to hear of his death." *The New York Times* described him in his obituary as "one of Africa's most widely read novelists and one of the continent's towering men of letters". The BBC wrote that he was "revered throughout the world for his depiction of life in Africa".

Style

Oral tradition

The style of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories, illuminating community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo's dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beatings from his father by pretending to dislike such "women's stories".

Another hallmark of Achebe's style is the use of proverbs, which often illustrate the values of the rural Igbo tradition. He sprinkles them throughout the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *Arrow of God* "serves to create through an echo effect the judgement of a community upon an individual violation." The use of such repetition in Achebe's urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, is less pronounced.

For Achebe, however, proverbs and folk stories are not the sum total of the oral Igbo tradition. In combining philosophical thought and public performance into the use of oratory ("Okwu Oka" – "speech artistry" – in the Igbo phrase), his characters exhibit what he called "a matter of individual excellence ... part of Igbo culture." In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's friend Obierika voices the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village. Nwaka in *Arrow of God* also exhibits a mastery of oratory, albeit for malicious ends.

Achebe frequently includes folk songs and descriptions of dancing in his work. Obi, the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, is at one point met by women singing a "Song of the Heart", which Achebe gives in both Igbo and English: "Is everyone here? / (Hele ee he ee he)" In *Things Fall Apart*, ceremonial dancing and the singing of folk songs reflect the realities of Igbo tradition. The elderly Uchendu, attempting to shake Okonkwo out of his self-pity, refers to a song sung after the death of a woman: "For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There

is no one for whom it is well." This song contrasts with the "gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism" sung later by the white missionaries.

Achebe's short stories are not as widely studied as his novels, and Achebe himself did not consider them a major part of his work. In the preface for *Girls at War and Other Stories*, he writes: "A dozen pieces in twenty years must be accounted a pretty lean harvest by any reckoning." Like his novels, the short stories are heavily influenced by the oral tradition. And like the folktales they follow, the stories often have morals emphasising the importance of cultural traditions.

Use of English

As the decolonization process unfolded in the 1950s, a debate about choice of language erupted and pursued authors around the world; Achebe was no exception. Indeed, because of his subject matter and insistence on a non-colonial narrative, he found his novels and decisions interrogated with extreme scrutiny – particularly with regard to his use of English. One school of thought,

championed by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, urged the use of indigenous African languages. English and other European languages, he said in 1986, were "part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas".

Achebe chose to write in English. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language", he discusses how the process of colonialism – for all its ills – provided colonised people from varying linguistic backgrounds "a language with which to talk to one another". As his purpose is to communicate with readers across Nigeria, he uses "the one central language enjoying nationwide currency". Using English also allowed his books to be read in the colonial ruling nations.

Still, Achebe recognises the shortcomings of what Audre Lorde called "the master's tools". In another essay he notes:

For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing

situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas ... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence.

In another essay, he refers to James Baldwin's struggle to use the English language to accurately represent his experience, and his realisation that he needed to take control of the language and expand it. The Nigerian poet and novelist Gabriel Okara likens the process of language-expansion to the evolution of jazz music in the United States.

Achebe's novels laid a formidable groundwork for this process. By altering syntax, usage, and idiom, he transforms the language into a distinctly African style. In

some spots this takes the form of repetition of an Igbo idea in standard English parlance; elsewhere it appears as narrative asides integrated into descriptive sentences.

Themes

Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yousaf highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a precolonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Eurocentrically constructed imperial 'reality' ". Certain elements of Achebe's depiction of Igbo life in *Things Fall Apart* match those in Oludah Equiano's autobiographical *Narrative*. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Igbo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Nigeria".

Culture and colonialism

A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition (particularly Igbo varieties) and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, is violently shaken with internal divisions when the white Christian missionaries arrive. Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Achebe later embodied this tension between African tradition and Western influence in the figure of Sam Okoli, the president of Kangan in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Distanced from the myths and tales of the community by his Westernised education, he does not have the capacity for reconnection shown by the character Beatrice.

The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often effected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in *No Longer at Ease*

succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city; the temptations of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courts and the position of District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* likewise clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structures of decision-making.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, by synecdoche, the downfall of the community. Odili's descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in *A Man of the People*, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere. Even with the emphasis on colonialism, however, Achebe's tragic endings embody the traditional confluence of fate, individual and society, as represented by Sophocles and Shakespeare.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability. In 1972, he said: "I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Ibo world view. No single

man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct." His perspective is reflected in the words of Ikem, a character in *Anthills of the Savannah*: "whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism." And in a 1996 interview, Achebe said: "Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy is too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness on the other hand is often tainted with selfishness."

Masculinity and femininity

The gender roles of men and women, as well as societies' conceptions of the associated concepts, are frequent themes in Achebe's writing. He has been criticised as a sexist author, in response to what many call the uncritical depiction of traditionally patriarchal Igbo society, where the most masculine men take numerous wives, and women are beaten regularly. Others suggest that Achebe is merely representing the limited gendered

vision of the characters, and they note that in his later works, he tries to demonstrate the inherent dangers of excluding women from society.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's furious manhood overpowers everything "feminine" in his life, including his own conscience. For example, when he feels bad after being forced to kill his adopted son, he asks himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?"^[179] He views all things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his father's laziness and cowardice. The women in the novel, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of authority – despite the fact that Igbo women were traditionally involved in village leadership. Nevertheless, the need for feminine balance is highlighted by Ani, the earth goddess, and the extended discussion of "Nneka" ("Mother is supreme") in chapter fourteen. Okonkwo's defeat is seen by some as a vindication of the need for a balancing feminine ethos. Achebe has expressed frustration at frequently being misunderstood on this point, saying that "I want to sort of scream that *Things*

Fall Apart is on the side of women ... And that Okonkwo is paying the penalty for his treatment of women; that all his problems, all the things he did wrong, can be seen as offenses against the feminine."

Achebe's first central female character in a novel is Beatrice Nwanyibuife in *Anthills of the Savannah*. As an independent woman in the city, Beatrice strives for the balance that Okonkwo lacked so severely. She refutes the notion that she needs a man, and slowly learns about Idemili, a goddess balancing the aggression of male power. Although the final stages of the novel show her functioning in a nurturing mother-type role, Beatrice remains firm in her conviction that women should not be limited to such capacities.

Legacy

Achebe has been called "the father of modern African writing", and many books and essays have been written about his work over the past fifty years. In 1992 he became the first living writer to be represented in the Everyman's Library collection published by Alfred A.

Knopf. His 60th birthday was celebrated at the University of Nigeria by "an international Who's Who in African Literature". One observer noted: "Nothing like it had ever happened before in African literature anywhere on the continent."

Many writers of succeeding generations¹ view his work as having paved the way for their efforts. In 1982 Achebe was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Kent. At the ceremony, professor Robert Gibson said that the Nigerian writer "is now revered as Master by the younger generation of African writers and it is to him they regularly turn for counsel and inspiration." Even outside of Africa, his impact resonates strongly in literary circles. Novelist Margaret Atwood called him "a magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century". Poet Maya Angelou lauded *Things Fall Apart* as a book wherein "all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends and themselves along Nigerian roads". Nelson Mandela, recalling his time as a political prisoner, once referred to Achebe as a writer "in whose company the prison walls fell down."

Achebe was the recipient of over 30 honorary degrees from universities in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard, and Brown University. He was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, an Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1982), a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2002), the Nigerian National Order of Merit (Nigeria's highest honour for academic work), the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. The Man Booker International Prize 2007 and the 2010 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize. are two of the more recent accolades Achebe received.

He twice refused the Nigerian honour *Commander of the Federal Republic*, in 2004 and 2011, saying:

"I have watched particularly the chaos in my own state of Anambra where a small clique of renegades, openly boasting its connections in high places, seems determined to turn my homeland into a bankrupt and lawless fiefdom. I am appalled by the brazenness of this

clique and the silence, if not connivance, of the Presidency."

Some scholars¹ have suggested that Achebe was shunned by intellectual society for criticising Conrad and traditions of racism in the West. Despite his scholarly achievements and the global importance of his work, Achebe never received a Nobel Prize, which some observers viewed as unjust. When Wole Soyinka was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, Achebe joined the rest of Nigeria in celebrating the first African ever to win the prize. He lauded Soyinka's "stupendous display of energy and vitality", and said he was "most eminently deserving of any prize". In 1988 Achebe was asked by a reporter for *Quality Weekly* how he felt about never winning a Nobel Prize; he replied: "My position is that the Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It's not an African prize ... Literature is not a heavyweight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been knocked out. It's nothing to do with that."

List of works

Novels

- *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
- *No Longer at Ease* (1960)
- *Arrow of God* (1964)
- *A Man of the People* (1966)
- *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)

Short stories

- *Marriage Is A Private Affair* (1952)
- *Dead Men's Path* (1953)
- *The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories* (1953)
- *Civil Peace* (1971)
- *Girls at War and Other Stories* (including "Vengeful Creditor") (1973)
- *African Short Stories* (editor, with C.L. Innes) (1985)
- *The Heinemann Book of Contemporary African Short Stories* (editor, with C. L. Innes) (1992)
- *The Voter*

Poetry

- *Beware, Soul-Brother, and Other Poems* (1971)
(published in the US as *Christmas at Biafra, and Other Poems*, 1973)
- *Don't Let Him Die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo* (editor, with Dubem Okafor) (1978)
- *Another Africa* (1998)
- *Collected Poems* Carcanet Press (2005)
- *Refugee Mother And Child*
- *Vultures*

Essays, criticism, non-fiction and political commentary

- *The Novelist as Teacher* (1965) - also in *Hopes and Impediments*
- *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* (1975) - also in *Hopes and Impediments*
- *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975)
- *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1984)
- *Hopes and Impediments* (1988)

- *Home and Exile* (2000)
- *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (6 October 2009)
- *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (11 October 2012)

Children's books

- *Chike and the River* (1966)
- *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with John Iroaganachi) (1972)
- *The Flute* (1975)
- *The Drum* (1978)

Cyprian Ekwensi

Cyprian Ekwensi MFR (26 September 1921 – 4 November 2007) was a Nigerian short story writer and author of children's books.

Biography

Early life, education and family

Ekwensi, an Igbo, was born in Minna, Niger State. His father was David Anadumaka, a story-teller and elephant hunter.

Ekwensi attended Government College in Ibadan, Oyo State, Achimota College in Ghana, and the School of Forestry, Ibadan, after which he worked for two years as a forestry officer. He also studied pharmacy at Yaba Technical Institute, Lagos School of Pharmacy, and the Chelsea School of Pharmacy of the University of London. He taught at Igbobi College.

Ekwensi married Eunice Anyiwo, and they had five children.

He has many grandchildren, including his son Cyprian Ikechi Ekwensi, who is named after his grandfather, and his oldest grandchild Adrienne Tobechei Ekwensi.

Governmental career

Ekwensi was employed as Head of Features at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and by the Ministry of Information during the First Republic; he eventually became Director of the latter. He resigned his position in 1966, before the Civil War, and moved to Enugu with his family. He later served as chair of the Bureau for External Publicity of Biafra, prior to its reabsorption by Nigeria.

Literary career

Ekwensi wrote hundreds of short stories, radio and television scripts, and several dozen novels, including children's books. His 1954 *People of the City* was the first book by a Nigerian to garner international attention. His novel *Drummer Boy* (1960), based on the life of Benjamin 'Kokoro' Aderounmu was a perceptive and

powerful description of the wandering, homeless and poverty-stricken life of a street artist. His most successful novel was *Jagua Nana* (1961), about a Pidgin-speaking Nigerian woman who leaves her husband to work as a prostitute in a city and falls in love with a teacher. He also wrote a sequel to this, *Jagua Nana's Daughter*.

In 1968, he received the Dag Hammarskjöld International Prize in Literature. In 2006, he became a fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters.

Death

Ekwensi died on 4 November 2007 at the Niger Foundation in Enugu, where he underwent an operation for an undisclosed ailment.

Selected works

- *When Love Whispers* (1948)
- *An African Night's Entertainment* (1948)
- *The Boa Suitor* (1949)

- *The Leopard's Claw* (1950)
- *People of the City* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1954)
- *The Drummer Boy* (1960)
- *The Passport of Mallam Iliya* (written 1948, published 1960)
- *Jagua Nana* (1961)
- *Burning Grass* (1961)
- *An African Nights Entertainment* (1962)
- *Beautiful Feathers* (novel; London: Hutchinson, 1963)
- *Rainmaker* (collection of short stories; 1965)
- *Iska* (London: Hutchinson, 1966)
- *Lokotown* (collection of short stories; 1966)
- *Restless City and Christmas Gold* (1975)
- *Divided We Stand: a Novel of the Nigerian Civil War* (1980)
- *Motherless Baby* (Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1980)
- *Jagua Nana's Daughter* (1987)
- *Behind the Convent Wall* (1987)
- *The Great Elephant Bird* (Evans Brothers, 1990)

- *Gone to Mecca* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1991)
- *Jagua Nana's Daughter* (1993)
- *Masquerade Time* (children's book; London: Chelsea House Publishing; Jaws Maui, 1994)
- *Cash on Delivery* (2007, collection of short stories)

Mabel Segun

Mabel Segun (born 1930) is a Nigerian poet and writer.

Born in Ondo, Nigeria, she attended the University of Ibadan, graduating in 1953 with a BA in English, Latin and History. She taught these subjects in Nigerian schools, and later became Head of the Department of English and Social Studies and Vice-Principal at the National Technical Teachers' College, Yaba. As a broadcaster, she won the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation 1977 Artiste of the Year award.

Segun has championed children's literature in Nigeria through the Children's Literature Association of Nigeria, which she founded in 1978, and the Children's Documentation and Research Centre, which she set up in 1990 in Ibadan. She is also a fellow of the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany.

In 2010 Mabel Segun received the Nigerian National Merit Award for her lifetime achievements.

Works

- *Conflict and Other Poems* (1986)
- *My Father's Daughter* (1965)
- *Under the Mango Tree* (1979)
- *Olu and the Broken Statue* (1985)
- *The Twins and the Tree Spirits* (1990)
- *Sorry, No Vacancy* (1985)

Amos Tutuola

Early history

Tutuola was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, in 1920, where his parents Charles and Esther were Yoruba Christian cocoa farmers. When about seven years old, he became a servant for F. O. Monu, an Igbo man, who sent Tutuola to the Salvation Army primary school in lieu of wages. At age 12 he attended the Anglican Central School in Abeokuta. His brief education was limited to six years (from 1934 to 1939). When his father died in 1939, Tutuola left school to train as a blacksmith, which trade he practised from 1942 to 1945 for the Royal Air Force in Nigeria. He subsequently tried a number of other vocations, including selling bread and acting as messenger for the Nigerian Department of Labor. In 1946, Tutuola completed his first full-length book, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, within a few days. In 1947 he married Victoria Alake, with whom he had four sons and four daughters.

Writing

Despite his short formal education, Tutuola wrote his novels in English. After he had written his first three books and become internationally famous, he joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1956 as a storekeeper in Ibadan, Western Nigeria. Tutuola became also one of the founders of Mbari Club, the writers' and publishers' organization. In 1979, he held a visiting research fellowship at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) at Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and in 1983 he was an associate of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In retirement he divided his time between residences at Ibadan and Ago-Odo.

Tutuola died at the age of 77 on 8 June 1997 from hypertension and diabetes.

Many of his papers, letters, and holographic manuscripts have been collected at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin.

The Palm Wine Drinkard

Tutuola's most famous novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*, was written in 1946, first published in 1952 in London by Faber and Faber, then translated and published in Paris as *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* by Raymond Queneau in 1953. The noted poet Dylan Thomas brought it to wide attention, calling it "brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching". Although the book was praised in England and the United States, it faced severe criticism in Tutuola's native Nigeria. Part of this criticism was due to his use of "broken English" and primitive style, which supposedly promoted the Western stereotype of "African backwardness". This line of criticism has, however, lost steam. In the opinion of Taban Lo Liyong:

Now, in all that he has done, Amos Tutuola is not sui generis. Is he ungrammatical? Yes. But James Joyce is more ungrammatical than Tutuola. Ezekiel Mphahlele has often said and written that African writers are doing violence to English. Violence? Has Joyce not done more violence to the English Language? Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is written in seven dialects, he tells us.

It is acknowledged a classic. We accept it, forget that it has no “grammar”, and go ahead to learn his "grammar" and what he has to tell us. Let Tutuola write “no grammar” and the hyenas and jackals whine and growl. Let Gabriel Okara write a “no grammar” Okolo. They are mum. Why? Education drives out of the mind superstition, daydreaming, building of castles in the air, cultivation of yarns, and replaces them with a rational practical mind, almost devoid of imagination. Some of these minds having failed to write imaginative stories, turn to that aristocratic type of criticism which magnifies trivialities beyond their real size. They fail to touch other virtues in a work because they do not have the imagination to perceive these mysteries. Art is arbitrary. Anybody can begin his own style. Having begun it arbitrarily, if he persists to produce in that particular mode, he can enlarge and elevate it to something permanent, to something other artists will come to learn and copy, to something the critics will catch up with and appreciate.

Professor Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie in her own reassessment wrote in *The Journal of Commonwealth Studies*:

What commands acclaim is Tutuola's use of his materials, chosen from all and sundry, and minted to make something beautiful, new and undeniably his own. He has handled his material with all of the skill of the good story teller and he has been able to endow it with the qualities of a "well-told-tale". His denigrators who think it devastating to name him a mere folktale-teller must realize that not all folktale-tellers are necessarily good. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola has infused the life of his hybrid with the energies of a well-wrought tale. There is the urgency in the telling, the rapidity, indispensable to the Quest-motif, with which life unrolls itself; the fertility of incidents; the successful maintenance of our interest through the varying scenes. And the good-story teller is ever present in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, speaking to us in warm human tones, genial, good-natured and unpretentious.

O. R. Dathorne additionally said:

Tutuola deserves to be considered seriously because his work represents an intentional attempt to fuse folklore with modern life. In this way he is unique, not only in Africa, where the sophisticated African writer is incapable of this tenuous and yet controlled connection, but in Europe as well, where this kind of writing is impossible.

J. P. Sartre, contrasting poetry in French by Frenchmen and Africans, had this to say:

It is almost impossible for our poets to realign themselves with popular tradition. Ten centuries of erudite poetry separate them from it. And, further, the folkloric inspiration is dried up: at most we could merely contrive a sterile facsimile.

The more Westernized African is placed in the same position. When he does introduce folklore into his writing it is more in the nature of a gloss; in Tutuola it is intrinsic.

Professor Wole Soyinka wrote in 1963:

Of all his novels, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* remains his best and the least impeachable. This book, apart from the work of D. O. Fagunwa, who writes in Yoruba, is the earliest instance of the new Nigerian writer gathering multifarious experience under, if you like, the two cultures, and exploiting them in one extravagant, confident whole.^[4]

The Palm-Wine Drinkard was followed up by *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* in 1954 and then several other books in which Tutuola continued to explore Yoruba traditions and folklore. Strangely, the narrative of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* refers back to *The Bush of Ghosts* several times, even though the latter was written and published later. However, none of the subsequent works managed to match the success of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*.

Selected bibliography

- *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1946, published 1952)
- *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954)

- *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955)
- *The Brave African Huntress* (1958)
- *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962)
- *Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty* (1967)
- *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* (1981)
- *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts* (1982)
- *Yoruba Folktales* (1986)
- *Pauper, Brawler and Slanderer* (1987)
- *The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories* (1990)

Tributes

The name of a detective on the television show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* is Odafin Tutuola. In the first pages of the introduction of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, Michael Thelwell writes that the author's grandfather was an odafin, a spiritual leader, and Tutuola was the given name of Amos Tutuola's father.

Brian Eno and David Byrne took the title of the novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* for their 1981 album.

One of the characters of the gamebook *The Race Forever*, from the *Choose Your Own Adventure* collection, is named after Amos Tutuola.

Ben Okri

Ben Okri OBE FRSL (born 15 March 1959) is a Nigerian poet and novelist. Okri is considered one of the foremost African authors in the post-modern and post-colonial traditions and has been compared favourably to authors such as Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez.

Biography

Ben Okri is a member of the Urhobo people; his father was Urhobo, and his mother has half-Igbo. He was born in Minna in west central Nigeria to Grace and Silver Okri in 1959. His father Silver moved his family to London when Okri was less than two years old so that Silver could study law. Okri thus spent his earliest years in London, and attended primary school in Peckham. In 1968 Silver moved his family back to Nigeria where he practiced law in Lagos, providing free or discounted services for those who could not afford it. His exposure to the Nigerian civil war and a culture in which his peers

saw visions of spirits at this time later provided inspiration for Okri's fiction.

At the age of 14, after being rejected for admission to a university program in physics because of his youth, Okri claimed to have had a revelation that poetry was his chosen calling. He began writing articles on social and political issues, but these never found a publisher. He then wrote short stories based on those articles, and some were published in women's journals and evening papers. Okri claimed that his criticism of the government in some of this early work led to his name being placed on a death list, and necessitated his departure from the country. In the late 1970s, Okri moved back to England to study comparative literature at Essex University with a grant from the Nigerian government. But when funding for his scholarship fell through, Okri found himself homeless, sometimes living in parks and sometimes with friends. He describes this period as "very, very important" to his work: "I wrote and wrote in that period... If anything [the desire to write] actually intensified."

Okri's success as a writer began when he published his first novel *Flowers and Shadows*, at the age of 21. Okri then served *West Africa* magazine as poetry editor from 1983 to 1986, and was a regular contributor to the BBC World Service between 1983 and 1985, continuing to publish throughout this period. His reputation as an author was secured when he won the Booker Prize for Fiction for his novel *The Famished Road* in 1991.

Literary career

Since he published his first novel, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), Okri has risen to an international acclaim, and he is often described as one of Africa's leading writers. His best known work, *The Famished Road*, which was awarded the 1991 Booker Prize, along with *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches* make up a trilogy that follows the life of Azaro, a spirit-child narrator, through the social and political turmoil of an African nation reminiscent of Okri's remembrance of war-torn Nigeria.

Okri's work is particularly difficult to categorize. Although it has been widely categorized as post-modern,

some scholars have noted that the seeming realism with which he depicts the spirit-world challenges this categorization. If Okri does attribute reality to a spiritual world, it is claimed, then his "allegiances are not postmodern [because] he still believes that there is something ahistorical or transcendental conferring legitimacy on some, and not other, truth-claims." Alternative characterizations of Okri's work suggest an allegiance to Yoruba folklore, New Ageism, spiritual realism, magical realism, visionary materialism, and existentialism.

Against these analyses, Okri has always rejected the categorization of his work as magical realism, claiming that this categorization is the result of laziness on the part of critics and likening this categorization to the observation that "a horse ... has four legs and a tail. That doesn't describe it." He has instead described his fiction as obeying a kind of "dream logic," and stated that his fiction is often preoccupied with the "philosophical conundrum ... what is reality?" insisting that:

"I grew up in a tradition where there are simply more dimensions to reality: legends and myths and ancestors and spirits and death ... Which brings the question: what is reality? Everyone's reality is different. For different perceptions of reality we need a different language. We like to think that the world is rational and precise and exactly how we see it, but something erupts in our reality which makes us sense that there's more to the fabric of life. I'm fascinated by the mysterious element that runs through our lives. Everyone is looking out of the world through their emotion and history. Nobody has an absolute reality."

Okri's short fiction has been described as more realistic and less fantastic than his novels, but these stories also depict Africans in communion with spirits, while his poetry and nonfiction have a more overt political tone, focusing on the potential of Africa and the world to overcome the problems of modernity.

Okri was made an honorary Vice-President of the English Centre for the International PEN and a member of the board of the Royal National Theatre. On 26 April 2012 Okri was appointed the new vice-president of the Caine Prize for African Writing, having been on the advisory committee and associated with the prize since it was established 13 years previously.

Influences

Okri has described his work as influenced as much by the philosophical texts in his father's book shelves as it was by literature, and Okri cites the influence of both Francis Bacon and Michel de Montaigne on his *A Time for New Dreams*. His literary influences include *Aesop's Fables*, *Arabian Nights*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."^[8] Okri's 1999 epic poem, *Mental Fight*, is also named for a quote from the poet William Blake's "And did those feet ...," and critics have noted the close relationship between Blake and Okri's poetry.

Okri was also influenced by the oral tradition of his people, and particularly his mother's storytelling: "If my mother wanted to make a point, she wouldn't correct me, she'd tell me a story." His first-hand experiences of civil war in Nigeria are said to have inspired many of his works.

Awards and honours

- 1987 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Africa Region, Best Book) - *Incidents at the Shrine*
- 1987 Aga Khan Prize for Fiction - *The Dream Vendor's August*
- 1988 Guardian Fiction Prize - *Stars of the New Curfew* (shortlisted)
- 1991 to 1993 Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts Trinity College, Cambridge
- 1991 Booker Prize - *The Famished Road*
- 1993 Chianti Ruffino-Antico Fattore International Literary Prize - *The Famished Road*
- 1994 Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy) - *The Famished Road*

- 1995 Crystal Award (World Economic Forum)
- 1997 Honorary Doctorate of Literature, awarded by University of Westminster
- 2000 Premio Palmi (Italy) - *Dangerous Love*
- 2001 Order of the British Empire (OBE)
- 2002 Honorary Doctorate of Literature, awarded by University of Essex
- 2004 Honorary Doctor of Literature, awarded by University of Exeter
- 2008 International Literary Award Novi Sad (International Novi Sad Literature Festival, Serbia).
- 2009 Honorary Doctorate of Utopia, awarded by University voor het Algemeen Belang, Belgium
- 2010 Honorary Doctorate, awarded by School of Oriental and African Studies
- 2010 Honorary Doctorate of Arts, awarded by the University of Bedfordshire
- 2014 Honorary Fellow, Mansfield College, Oxford

Bibliography

Novels

- *Flowers and Shadows* (1980)
- *The Landscapes Within* (1981)
- *The Famished Road* (1991)
- *Songs of Enchantment* (1993)
- *Astonishing the Gods* (1995)
- *Dangerous Love* (1996)
- *Infinite Riches* (1998)
- *In Arcadia* (2002)
- *Starbook* (2007)

Poetry, essays and short story collections

- *Incidents at the Shrine* (short stories, 1986)
- *Stars of the New Curfew* (short stories, 1988)
- *An African Elegy* (poetry, 1992)
- *Birds of Heaven* (essays, 1996)
- *A Way of Being Free* (essays, 1997)
- *Mental Fight* (poetry, 1999)
- *Tales of Freedom* (short stories, 2009)
- *A Time for New Dreams* (essays, 2011)
- *Wild* (poetry, 2012)

Buchi Emecheta

Buchi Emecheta (born 21 July 1944, in Lagos) is a Nigerian novelist who has published over 20 books, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Her themes of child slavery, motherhood, female independence and freedom through education have won her considerable critical acclaim and honours, including an Order of the British Empire in 2005. Emecheta once described her stories as "stories of the world...[where]... women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical."

Early life

(Florence Onye) Buchi Emecheta was born on 21 July 1944, in Lagos to Igbo parents. Both parents are from ibusa delta state Nigeria Alice (Okwuekwuhe) Emecheta and Jeremy Nwabudinke. Her father was a railway worker in the 1940s. Due to the gender bias of the time,

the young Buchi Emecheta was initially kept at home while her younger brother was sent to school; but after persuading her parents to consider the benefits of her education, she spent her early childhood at an all-girl's missionary school. Her father died when she was nine years old. A year later, Emecheta received a full scholarship to the Methodist Girls School, where she remained until the age of sixteen when she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old.

Onwordi immediately moved to London to attend university and Emecheta joined him in 1962. She gave birth to five children in six years. It was an unhappy and sometimes violent marriage (as chronicled in her autobiographical writings such as *Second-Class Citizen*). To keep her sanity, Emecheta wrote in her spare time; however, her husband was deeply suspicious of her writing, and he ultimately burned her first manuscript. At the age of 22, Emecheta left her husband. While working to support her five children alone, she earned a BSc degree in Sociology at the University of London.

She began writing about her experiences of Black British life in a regular column in the *New Statesman*, and a collection of these pieces became her first published book in 1972, *In the Ditch*. The semi-autobiographical book chronicled the struggles of a main character named Adah, who is forced to live in a housing estate while working as a librarian to support her five children. Her second novel published two years later, *Second-Class Citizen*, also drew on Emecheta's own experiences, and both books were eventually published in one volume as *Adah's Story*.

Early career

From 1965 to 1969, Emecheta worked as a library officer for the British Museum in London. From 1969 to 1976 she was a youth worker and sociologist for the Inner London Education Authority, and from 1976 to 1978 she was a community worker.

Following her success as an author, Buchi Emecheta has travelled widely as a visiting professor and lecturer. From 1972 to 1979 she visited several American

universities, including Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

From 1980 to 1981, she was senior resident fellow and visiting professor of English, University of Calabar, Nigeria. In 1982 she lectured at Yale University, and the University of London, as well as holding a fellowship at the University of London in 1986.

From 1982 to 1983 Buchi Emecheta, together with her journalist son Sylvester, ran the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company.

Awards

- B.Sc. (Honours), University of London, 1972.
- *New Statesman* Jock Campbell Award for *The Slave Girl*, 1979.
- British Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race, 1979.
- Arts Council of Great Britain - 1982-3.

- One of Granta's "Best of the Young British Novelists", 1983.
- PhD, University of London, 1991.
- Who's Who in Anjoma, 2011
- Who's Who in Ibusa, 2011

Works

Novels

- *In the Ditch* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972).
- *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Allison & Busby, 1974).
- *The Bride Price* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).
- *The Slave Girl* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977); winner of 1979 Jock Campbell Award.
- *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979; Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 65, 1980).
- *The Moonlight Bride* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

- *Our Own Freedom* (photographs by Maggie Murray; London: Sheba, 1981).
- *Destination Biafra* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982).
- *Naira Power* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Adah's Story [In the Ditch/Second-Class Citizen]* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983).
- *The Rape of Shavi* (London: Ogwugwu Afor, 1984).
- *Double Yoke* (New York: George Braziller, 1983).
- *A Kind of Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Gwendolen* (London: Collins, 1989). Published in the US as *The Family*.
- *Kehinde* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1994).
- *The New Tribe* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1999).

Autobiography

- *Head Above Water* (London: Fontana, 1986).

Children's/Young Adults

- *Titch the Cat* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979).
- *Nowhere to Play* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980).
- *The Wrestling Match* (Oxford University Press, 1980).

Plays

- *A Kind of Marriage*, BBC television.
- *Family Bargain*, BBC television, 1987.

Articles

- *The Black Scholar*, November–December 1985, p. 51.
- *Criticism and Ideology*, 1988.
- *Essence* magazine, August 1990, p. 50.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1990.
- *Publishers Weekly*, February 16, 1990, p. 73; reprinted 7 February 1994, p. 84.

- *World Literature Today*, Autumn 1994, p. 867.

Daniel O. Fagunwa

Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa MBE (1903 – 9 December 1963), popularly known as **D. O. Fagunwa**, was a Nigerian author who pioneered the Yoruba-language novel. He was born in Oke-Igbo, Ondo State. An Oloye of the Yoruba people, Fagunwa studied at St. Luke's School, Oke-Igbo, and St. Andrew's College, Oyo, before becoming a teacher himself.

In 1938, entering a literary contest of the Nigerian education ministry, Fagunwa wrote his *Ògbójú Ọdẹ̀ nínú Igbo Irúnmalẹ̀*, widely considered the first novel written in the Yoruba language and one of the first to be written in any African language. Wole Soyinka translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of A Thousand Daemons*, first published by Random House and again by City Lights in September 2013 (ISBN 9780872866300). Fagunwa's later works include *Igbo Olodumare (The Forest of God, 1949)*, *Ireke Onibudo (1949)*, *Irinkerindo ninu Igbo Elegbeje (Expedition to*

the Mount of Thought, 1954), and *Adiitu Olodumare* (1961).

Fagunwa's novels draw heavily on folktale traditions and idioms, including many supernatural elements. His heroes are usually Yoruba hunters, who interact with kings, sages, and even gods in their quests. Thematically, his novels also explore the divide between the Christian beliefs of Africa's colonizers and the continent's traditional religions. Fagunwa remains the most widely read Yorùbá-language author, and a major influence on such contemporary writers as Amos Tutuola.

D. O. Fagunwa was the first Nigerian writer to employ folk philosophy in telling his stories.

Fagunwa was awarded the Margaret Wrong Prize in 1955 and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1959. He died in a river in 1963, the ground by the bank of the river gave way under his feet and he fell into the river. He tried to swim out of the water but he sank because the canoe by the river also fell and collapsed on him (Nigerian punch newspaper August 12,

2013 edition). Fagunwa Memorial High School and Fagunwa Grammar School in Oke-Igbo, Nigeria, are named for Fagunwa. His daughter Yejide Ogundipe serves as a council chairperson for Ile Oluji/Okeigbo.

Olaudah Equiano



Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 31 March 1797) also known as **Gustavus Vassa**, was a prominent African involved in the British movement for the abolition of the slave trade. He was enslaved as a child in his home town of Essaka in what is now southern Nigeria, shipped to the West Indies, moved to England, and successfully

purchased his freedom. Throughout his life Equiano worked as an author, a seafarer, merchant, hairdresser, and explorer in South and Central America, the Caribbean, and the Arctic, the American colonies, and the United Kingdom, where he settled by 1792. His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, depicts the horrors of slavery and influenced the enactment of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.^[2]

In his account, Equiano gives details about his hometown Essaka and the laws and customs of the Igbo people (written *Eboe*), he also gave description of some of the communities he passed through as he was forced to the coast. His biography details his voyage on a slave ship, the brutality of slavery in the West Indies, Virginia, and Georgia, and the disenfranchisement of freed people of colour (including kidnap and enslavement) in these same places. Equiano was particularly attached to his Christian faith which he embraced in 1759 and is a recurring theme in his autobiography; he identified as a Protestant of the Church of England. Several events in

his life drew him to question his faith, as well as almost losing it completely after a black cook named John Annis was kidnapped from a ship in England and then tortured on the island of Saint Kitts.

As a free man, Equiano's life was still filled with stresses and even had suicidal thoughts before he became a born again Christian and found peace in his faith. Earlier in his freedom, he resolved never to visit the West Indies or the Americas again because of the brutality about, but was drawn back there because of his duties to various captains. Later in his life, Equiano married an English woman named Susannah Cullen and had two children. He died in 1797; the exact location of his gravesite is unknown, although there are plaques commemorating his life lived in buildings around London. There have been efforts in Nigeria to find about his birthplace and home town, Essaka.

Early life and enslavement

According to his own account, Olaudah Equiano was born in 1745 to the Igbo people in the region now known

as Nigeria. His name, Olaudah, means one who has a loud voice and is well spoken, and signifies vicissitude and good fortune. As the youngest son, he had five older brothers and a younger sister. His father was a titled man who he remembers bearing scarifications on his forehead which signified his father's status; Equiano expected when he was matured to receive the same scarification as males did in his community. Equiano recollects his mother teaching him self-defence and Equiano also witnessed her partaking in communal wars. His mother particularly impressed on him the religious rites of his country as he recounted the times she would carry him along to an ancestral shrine in the wild where his maternal grandmother was buried and would give offerings to the shrine and also weep by its side. His early life was filled with what his people considered good omens or mysterious signs, particularly he was on a path in his village when he accidentally stood on a large snake and was left unharmed.

Equiano remembered an incident when an attempted kidnapping of children was thwarted by adults in his

villages. Around the age of eleven, he and his sister were left alone to look after their families compound living quarters as was usually done when adults went out of the house for work. Before they could act they were both kidnapped and taken far away from their hometown, separated, and sold to slaveholders. After changing hands several times, he met his sister again, but they were separated for the last time and he was taken over what he described as a large river which he had never seen to the coast where he was held by European slave traders. He was transported with 244 other enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to Barbados in the West Indies, from where he and a few others were soon transferred to the British colony of Virginia. Literary scholar Vincent Carretta argued in a 2005 biography that Equiano may have been born in colonial South Carolina, not in Africa.

He was bought by Michael Pascal, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Pascal renamed the boy as Gustavus Vassa, after the Swedish noble who had become Gustav I of Sweden, king in the 16th century. Equiano had already

been renamed twice: he was called Michael while on the slave ship that brought him to the Americas; and Jacob, by his first owner. This time Equiano refused and told his new owner that he would prefer to be called Jacob. His refusal, he says, "gained me many a cuff" – and eventually he submitted to the new name.

Equiano wrote in his narrative that domestic slaves in Virginia were treated cruelly and suffered punishments like the "iron muzzle" (scold's bridle), which was used around the mouth to keep house slaves quiet, leaving them unable to speak or eat. He thought that the eyes of portraits followed him wherever he went, and that a clock could tell his master about anything Equiano did wrong. Shocked by this culture, Equiano tried washing his face in an attempt to change its colour.



As the slave of a naval captain, Equiano was trained in seamanship and traveled extensively with his master during the Seven Years War with France. Although Pascal's personal slave, Equiano was expected to assist the crew in times of battle; his duty was to haul gunpowder to the gun decks. Pascal favoured Equiano and sent him to his sister-in-law in Great Britain, to attend school and learn to read.

At this time, Equiano converted to Christianity. His master allowed Equiano to be baptized in St Margaret's, Westminster, on February 1759. Despite the special treatment, after the British won the war, Equiano did not receive a share of the prize money, as was awarded to the other sailors. Pascal had promised his freedom, but did not release him.¹

Pascal sold Equiano to Captain James Doran of the *Charming Sally* at Gravesend, from where he was transported to Montserrat, in the Caribbean Leeward Islands. He was sold to Robert King, a Quaker merchant from Philadelphia who traded in the Caribbean. Pascal had instructed Doran to ensure that he sold Equiano "to the best master he could, as he told him Equiano was a very deserving boy, which Captain Doran said he found to be true."

Release

King set Equiano to work on his shipping routes and in his stores. In 1765, when Equiano was about 20 years old, King promised that for his purchase price of forty

pounds, the slave could buy his freedom. King taught him to read and write more fluently, guided him along the path of religion, and allowed Equiano to engage in profitable trading on his own, as well as on his master's behalf. Equiano sold fruits, glass tumblers, and other items between Georgia and the Caribbean islands. King enabled Equiano to buy his freedom, which he achieved by his early twenties; he urged Equiano to stay on as a business partner, but Equiano found it dangerous and limiting to remain in the British colonies as a freedman; while loading a ship in Georgia, he was almost kidnapped back into slavery.

Pioneer of the abolitionist cause

Equiano travelled to London and became involved in the abolitionist movement, which had been particularly strong amongst Quakers, but was by 1787 non-denominational. As early as 1783 he had been passing information about the slave trade to abolitionists such as Granville Sharp, and the publicisation of the *Zong* massacre (a *cause célèbre* for the abolitionist movement)

can ultimately be attributed to Equiano. Equiano was a Methodist, having been influenced by George Whitefield's evangelism in the New World.

THE
INTERESTING NARRATIVE
OF
THE LIFE
OF
OLAUDAH EQUIANO,
OR
GUSTAVUS VASSA,
THE AFRICAN.
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.
VOL. I.

*Fitell, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my fort; his eye is toward my salvation.
And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people. Isaiah xli. 23, 4.*

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Front page of Equiano's autobiography

Equiano was befriended and supported by abolitionists, many of whom encouraged him to write and publish his

life story. Equiano was supported financially by philanthropic abolitionists and religious benefactors; his lectures and preparation for the book were promoted by, among others, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon.

His account surprised many with the quality of its imagery, description, and literary style. Some who had not yet joined the abolitionist cause felt shame at learning of his suffering. Entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, it was first published in 1789 and rapidly went through several editions. It is one of the earliest known examples of published writing by an African writer to be widely read in England. It was the first influential slave autobiography. Equiano's personal account of slavery and of his experiences as a black immigrant caused a sensation on publication. The book fueled a growing anti-slavery movement in Great Britain.

The autobiography goes on to describe how Equiano's adventures brought him to London, where he married

into English society and became a leading abolitionist. Equiano's book became his most lasting contribution to the abolitionist movement, as it vividly demonstrated the humanity of Africans as much as the inhumanity of slavery.

Equiano records his and Granville Sharp's central roles in the movement. As a major voice in this movement, Equiano petitioned the King in 1788. He was appointed to an expedition to resettle London's poor Blacks in Sierra Leone, a British colony on the west coast of Africa. He was dismissed after protesting against financial mismanagement.

The book was not only an exemplary work of English literature by a new, African author, but it also increased Equiano's personal revenue. He traveled extensively throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland promoting the book. The returns gave him independence from benefactors and enabled him to fully chart his own purpose. He worked to improve economic, social and

educational conditions in Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone.

Related to the abolitionist cause, Equiano was also a leader of the Poor Black community in London. Because of his connections, he was a prominent figure in the political realm, and he often served as a voice for his people. Equiano's reactions and remarks were frequently published in newspapers like the *Public Advertiser* and the *Morning Chronicle*. He had more of a voice than most Africans, and he seized various opportunities to use it.

Marriage and family

At some point, after having travelled widely, Equiano decided to settle in Britain and raise a family. On 7 April 1792, he married Susannah Cullen, a local girl, in St Andrew's Church in Soham, Cambridgeshire. The original marriage register containing the entry for Equiano and Cullen is held today by the Cambridgeshire Archives and Local Studies at the County Record Office in Cambridge.

He announced his wedding in every edition of his autobiography from 1792 onwards. Critics have suggested he believed that his marriage symbolised an expected commercial union between Africa and Great Britain. The couple settled in the area and had two daughters, Anna Maria (1793–1797), and Joanna (1795–1857).

Susannah died in February 1796 aged 34, and Equiano died a year after that on 31 March 1797,^[1] aged 52 (some historians will say otherwise). Soon after, the elder daughter died, age four years old, leaving Joanna to inherit Equiano's estate, which was valued at £950: a considerable sum, worth over £80,000 today. Joanna married the Rev. Henry Bromley, and they ran a Congregational Chapel at Clavering near Saffron Walden in Essex, before moving to London in the middle of the nineteenth century. They are both buried at the Congregationalists' non-denominational Abney Park Cemetery, in Stoke Newington North London.

Last days and will

Although Equiano's death is recorded in London in 1797, the location of his burial is unsubstantiated. One of his last addresses appears to have been Plaisterer's Hall in the City of London, where he drew up his will on 28 May 1796. He then moved to John Street, Tottenham Court Road, close to Whitefield's Methodist chapel. (It was renovated for Congregationalists in the 1950s. Now the American Church in London, the church recently placed a small memorial to Equiano.) Lastly, he lived in Paddington Street, Middlesex, where he died. Equiano's death was reported in newspaper obituaries.

In the 1790s, at the time of the excesses of the French Revolution and close on the heels of the American War for Independence, British society was tense because of fears of open revolution. Reformers were considered more suspect than in other periods. Equiano had been an active member of the London Corresponding Society, which campaigned to extend the vote to working men. His close friend Thomas Hardy, the Society's Secretary, was prosecuted by the government (though without success) on the basis that such political activity

amounted to treason. In December 1797, apparently unaware that Equiano had died nine months earlier, a writer for the government-sponsored *Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* satirised Equiano as being at a fictional meeting of the "Friends of Freedom".

Equiano's will provided for projects he considered important. Had his longer-surviving daughter Joanna died before reaching the age of majority (twenty-one), half his wealth would have passed to the Sierra Leone Company for continued assistance to West Africans, and half to the London Missionary Society, which promoted education overseas. This organization had formed the previous November at the Countess of Huntingdon's Spa Fields Chapel in north London. By the early nineteenth century, The Missionary Society had become well known worldwide as non-denominational, though it was largely Congregational.

Controversy of origin

Historians have disagreed about Equiano's origins. Some believe he may have fabricated his African roots and his

survival of the Middle Passage not only to sell more copies of his book but also to help advance the movement against the slave trade. According to Vincent Carretta,

Equiano was certainly African by descent. The circumstantial evidence that Equiano was also African American by birth and African British by choice is compelling but not absolutely conclusive. Although the circumstantial evidence is not equivalent to proof, anyone dealing with Equiano's life and art must consider it.

Baptismal records and a naval muster roll appear to link Equiano to South Carolina. Records of Equiano's first voyage to the Arctic state he was from Carolina, not Africa. Equiano may have been the source for information linking him to Carolina, but it may also have been a clerk's careless record of origin. Historians continue to search for evidence to substantiate Equiano's claim of birth in Africa. Currently, no separate documentation supports this story. Carretta holds that

Equiano was born in South Carolina, based on the documents mentioned above.

For some historians, the fact that many parts of Equiano's account can be proven lends weight to accepting his story of African birth. As Adam Hochschild has written: "In the long and fascinating history of autobiographies that distort or exaggerate the truth. ...Seldom is one crucial portion of a memoir totally fabricated and the remainder scrupulously accurate; among autobiographers... both dissemblers and truth-tellers tend to be consistent."

Nigerian writer Catherine Obianuju Acholonu argues that Equiano was born in a Nigerian town known as Isseke, where there was local oral history that told of his upbringing. Before this work, however, no town bearing a name of that spelling had been recorded. Other historians, including Nigerians, have pointed out grave errors in the research.¹

Another point of contention is the detail of his account of the ocean crossing. "Historians have never discredited

the accuracy of Equiano's narrative, nor the power it had to support the abolitionist cause [...] particularly in Britain during the 1790s. However, parts of Equiano's account of the Middle Passage may have been based on already published accounts or the experiences of those he knew."

Commemoration

The Equiano Society was formed in London in November 1996. Its main objective is to publicise and celebrate the life and work of Olaudah Equiano.

Equiano lived at 13 Tottenham Street, London, in 1788; in 1789 he moved to what was then 10 Union Street and is now 73 Riding House Street, where a commemorative plaque was unveiled on 11 October 2000 in the presence of Paul Boateng MP, Professor Carretta from the University of Maryland and Burt Caesar, as part of Black History Month celebrations. Student musicians from Trinity College of Music played a fanfare specially composed for the unveiling by Professor Ian Hall.

His life and achievements were made part of the National Curriculum in 2007 but it has been reported (at the end of 2012) that these will be dropped. In January 2013 Operation Black Vote launched a petition to request Education Secretary Michael Gove not to drop both Equiano and Mary Seacole from the National Curriculum. Rev. Jesse Jackson and others wrote a letter to *The Times* protesting against the mooted removal of both figures from the National Curriculum.

In horse racing, the champion sprinter and dual winner of the King's Stand Stakes in 2008 and 2010 was named after Equiano.

A statue of Equiano, made by pupils of Edmund Waller School, was erected in Telegraph Hill Lower Park in 2008

Media portrayal

- A BBC production in 1996 *Son of Africa: The Slave Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*, directed by Alick Riley, employed dramatic reconstruction,

archival material and interviews with scholars such as Stuart Hall and Ian Duffield to provide the social and economic context of the 18th-century slave trade.

- Equiano was portrayed by the Senegalese singer and musician Youssou N'Dour in the 2006 film *Amazing Grace*.
- *African Snow*, a play by Murray Watts, takes place in John Newton's mind. It was first produced at the York Theatre Royal as a co-production with Riding Lights Theatre Company in April 2007 before transferring to the Trafalgar Studios in London's West End and a National Tour. Newton was played by Roger Alborough and Equiano by Israel Oyelumade.
- Stone Publishing House published a children's book *Equiano: The Slave with the Loud Voice* (2007). Illustrated by Cheryl Ives, it was written by Kent historian Dr. Robert Hume.
- In 2007, David and Jessica Oyelowo appeared as Olaudah and his wife in *Grace Unshackled – The Olaudah Equiano Story*, a radio adaptation of

Equiano's autobiography. This was first broadcast on BBC 7, April 2007.

- The British jazz artist Soweto Kinch's first album, *Conversations with the Unseen* (2003), contains a track entitled "Equiano's Tears".
- Equiano is portrayed by Danny Sapani in the BBC series *Garrow's Law* (2010).

Ken Saro-Wiwa



Kenule "Ken" Beeson Saro Wiwa (10 October 1941 – 10 November 1995) was a Nigerian writer, television producer, environmental activist, and winner of the Right Livelihood Award and the Goldman Environmental Prize. Saro-Wiwa was a member of the Ogoni people, an ethnic minority in Nigeria whose homeland, Ogoniland, in the Niger Delta has been

targeted for crude oil extraction since the 1950s and which has suffered extreme environmental damage from decades of indiscriminate petroleum waste dumping. Initially as spokesperson, and then as president, of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Saro-Wiwa led a nonviolent campaign against environmental degradation of the land and waters of Ogoniland by the operations of the multinational petroleum industry, especially the Royal Dutch Shell company. He was also an outspoken critic of the Nigerian government, which he viewed as reluctant to enforce environmental regulations on the foreign petroleum companies operating in the area.

At the peak of his non-violent campaign, he was tried by a special military tribunal for allegedly masterminding the gruesome murder of Ogoni chiefs at a pro-government meeting, and hanged in 1995 by the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. His execution provoked international outrage and resulted in Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations for over three years.

Biography

Early life

A son of Ogoni chieftain Jim Wiwa, Ken was born in Bori, in the Niger Delta. He spent his childhood in an Anglican home and eventually proved himself to be an excellent student; he attended secondary school at Government College Umuahia and on completion obtained a scholarship to study English at the University of Ibadan and briefly became a teaching assistant at the University of Lagos.

However, he soon took up a government post as the Civilian Administrator for the port city of Bonny in the Niger Delta, and during the Nigerian Civil War was a strong supporter of the federal cause against the Biafrans. His best known novel, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, tells the story of a naive village boy recruited to the army during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970, and intimates the political corruption and patronage in Nigeria's military regime of the time. Saro-Wiwa's war diaries, *On a Darkling Plain*, document his

experience during the war. He was also a successful businessman and television producer. His satirical television series, *Basi & Company*, was wildly popular, with an estimated audience of 30 million Nigerians.

In the early 1970s Saro-Wiwa served as the Regional Commissioner for Education in the Rivers State Cabinet, but was dismissed in 1973 because of his support for Ogoni autonomy. In the late 1970s, he established a number of successful business ventures in retail and real-estate, and during the 1980s concentrated primarily on his writing, journalism and television production. His intellectual work was interrupted in 1987 when he re-entered the political scene, appointed by the newly installed dictator Ibrahim Babangida to aid the country's transition to democracy. But Saro-Wiwa soon resigned because he felt Babangida's supposed plans for a return to democracy were disingenuous. Saro-Wiwa's sentiments were proven correct in the coming years, as Babangida failed to relinquish power. In 1993, Babangida annulled Nigeria's general elections that would have transferred power to a civilian government,

sparking mass civil unrest and eventually forcing him to step down, at least officially, that same year.

Activism

In 1990, Saro-Wiwa began devoting most of his time to human rights and environmental causes, particularly in Ogoniland. He was one of the earliest members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which advocated for the rights of the Ogoni people. The Ogoni Bill of Rights, written by MOSOP, set out the movement's demands, including increased autonomy for the Ogoni people, a fair share of the proceeds of oil extraction, and remediation of environmental damage to Ogoni lands. In particular, MOSOP struggled against the degradation of Ogoni lands by Shell oil company.

In 1992, Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned for several months, without trial, by the Nigerian military government.

Saro-Wiwa was Vice Chair of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) General Assembly

from 1993 to 1995. UNPO is an international, nonviolent, and democratic organization (of which MOSOP is a member). Its members are indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognised or occupied territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and cultural rights, to preserve their environments and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them.

In January 1993, MOSOP organized peaceful marches of around 300,000 Ogoni people – more than half of the Ogoni population – through four Ogoni centres, drawing international attention to his people's plight. The same year the Nigerian government occupied the region militarily.

Arrest and execution

Saro-Wiwa was arrested again and detained by Nigerian authorities in June 1993 but was released after a month. On 21 May 1994 four Ogoni chiefs (all on the conservative side of a schism within MOSOP over strategy) were brutally murdered. Saro-Wiwa had been

denied entry to Ogoniland on the day of the murders, but he was arrested and accused of incitement to them. He denied the charges but was imprisoned for over a year before being found guilty and sentenced to death by a specially convened tribunal. The same happened to other MOSOP leaders (Saturday Dobe, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine).^[8]

Some of the defendants' lawyers resigned in protest against the alleged rigging of the trial by the Abacha regime. The resignations left the defendants to their own means against the tribunal, which continued to bring witnesses to testify against Saro-Wiwa and his peers. Many of these supposed witnesses later admitted that they had been bribed by the Nigerian government to support the criminal allegations. At least two witnesses who testified that Saro-Wiwa was involved in the murders of the Ogoni elders later recanted, stating that they had been bribed with money and offers of jobs with Shell to give false testimony — in the presence of Shell's lawyer.

The trial was widely criticised by human rights organizations and, half a year later, Ken Saro-Wiwa received the Right Livelihood Award^[10] for his courage as well as the Goldman Environmental Prize.

On 10 November 1995, Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP leaders (the "Ogoni Nine") were killed by hanging at the hands of military personnel.

In his satirical piece *Africa Kills Her Sun* first published in 1989, Saro-Wiwa in a resigned, melancholic mood foreshadowed his own execution.

His death provoked international outrage and the immediate suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations, as well as the calling back of many foreign diplomats for consultation. The United States and other countries considered imposing economic sanctions.

A memorial to Saro-Wiwa was unveiled in London on 10 November 2006 by London organisation Platform. It consists of a sculpture in the form of a bus and was

created by Nigerian-born artist Sokari Douglas Camp. It toured the UK the following year.

Family lawsuits against Royal Dutch Shell

Wiwa family lawsuits against Royal Dutch Shell

Beginning in 1996, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), EarthRights International (ERI), Paul Hoffman of Schonbrun, DeSimone, Seplow, Harris & Hoffman and other human rights attorneys have brought a series of cases to hold Shell accountable for alleged human rights violations in Nigeria, including summary execution, crimes against humanity, torture, inhumane treatment and arbitrary arrest and detention. The lawsuits are brought against Royal Dutch Shell and Brian Anderson, the head of its Nigerian operation.

The cases were brought under the Alien Tort Statute, a 1789 statute giving non-U.S. citizens the right to file suits in U.S. courts for international human rights violations, and the Torture Victim Protection Act, which allows individuals to seek damages in the U.S. for

torture or extrajudicial killing, regardless of where the violations take place.

The United States District Court for the Southern District of New York set a trial date of June 2009. On 9 June 2009 Shell agreed to an out-of-court settlement of \$15.5 million USD to victims' families. However, the company denied any liability for the deaths, stating that the payment was part of a reconciliation process. In a statement given after the settlement, Shell suggested that the money was being provided to the relatives of Saro-Wiwa and the eight other victims, in order to cover the legal costs of the case and also in recognition of the events that took place in the region. Some of the funding is also expected to be used to set up a development trust for the Ogoni people, who inhabit the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The settlement was made just days before the trial, which had been brought by Ken Saro-Wiwa's son, was due to begin in New York.

Biographies

A biography, *In the Shadow of a Saint: A Son's Journey to Understanding His Father's Legacy*, was written by his son, journalist Ken Wiwa. Published in September 2005, shortly before the tenth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's execution, Canadian author J. Timothy Hunt's *The Politics of Bones* documented the flight of Saro-Wiwa's brother Owens Wiwa, after his brother's execution and his own imminent arrest, to London and then on to Canada, where he is now a citizen and continues his brother's fight on behalf of the Ogoni people. Moreover, it is also the story of Owens' personal battle against the Nigerian government to locate his brother's remains after they were buried in an unmarked mass-grave. Ken Saro-Wiwa's own diary, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*, was published in January 1995, two months after his execution. A book of essays about him entitled *Before I Am Hanged: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Literature, Politics, and Dissent* was published by Africa World Press in December 1999. More information on the struggles of the Ogoni people can be found in the book *Ogoni's Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria* (ISBN 0-86543-647-9).

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In popular culture

Saro Wiwa's execution is quoted and used as an inspiration for Beverley Naidoo's 2000 novel *The Other Side of Truth*.¹ A novel, *Eclipse*, based on the events in Nigeria, was published by Richard North Patterson in 2009. The folk duo Magpie included the song "Saro-Wiwa" on their album *Give Light*, with the credit: "Words and Music by Terry Leonino and Ken Saro-Wiwa". An Igbo high-life Bongo musician hailing from Owerri in Imo State, Nigeria is currently recording under the stage name "Saro-Wiwa". King Cobb Steelie, an Indie Rock – Jazz fusion band from Guelph, Ontario, Canada, wrote a song, "Rational" in their album *Junior Relaxer*, inspired by events surrounding Ken Saro-Wiwa's death and the impact it had on those of us living in peaceful and more privileged communities. The Finnish band Ultra Bra dedicated their song "Ken Saro-Wiwa on kuollut" ("Ken Saro-Wiwa is dead") to the memory of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The Italian band Il Teatro degli Orrori dedicated their song "A sangue freddo" ("In cold blood" – also the title track of their second album) to the memory of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Amsterdam has named a street after Saro-Wiwa, the *Ken Saro-Wiwastraat*.

Flora Nwapa



Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa (13 January 1931 – 16 October 1993) was a Nigerian author best known as **Flora Nwapa**. Her novel *Efuru* (1966) is among the first English-language novels by a woman from Africa.

Biography

Nwapa, born in Oguta, was the forerunner to a generation of African women writers. While never considering herself a feminist, she is best known for recreating life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint. In 1966 her book *Efuru* became Africa's first internationally published female novel in the English language (Heinemann Educational Books). She has been called the mother of modern African literature. Later she went on to become the first African woman publisher of novels when she founded Tata Press.

She also is known for her governmental work in reconstruction after the Biafran War. In particular she worked with orphans and refugees that were displaced during the war. Further she worked as a publisher of African literature and promoted women in African society. Flora Nwapa died on 16 October 1993 in Enugu, Nigeria.

Books

Novels

- *Efuru* (1966)
- *Idu* (Heinemann African Writers Series, No.56, ISBN 0-435-90056-0; 1970)
- *Never Again* (1975)
- *One is Enough* (1981)
- *Women are Different* (1986)

Short stories/poems

- *This is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971)
- *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986)
- *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980)

Children's books

- *Emeka, Driver's Guard* (1972)
- *Mammywater* (1979)
- *Journey to Space* (1980)
- *The Miracle Kittens* (1980)
- *The Adventures of Deke* (1980)

John Munonye

John Munonye (April 1929 – 10 May 1999) is an important Igbo writer and one of the most important Nigerian writers of the 20th century. He was born in Akokwa, Nigeria, and was educated at the University of Ibadan and the Institute of Education, London. He retired as the head of the Advanced Teacher Training College, Owerri.

Criticism and style

John Munonye, unlike some of his contemporaries professed a love for optimism in the face of colonial onslaught on traditional values. To him, the dialectical environment of African and western tradition can be seen in both a positive light and outcome for the common Igbo or Nigerian man or woman. An overriding theme in his novels is the focus on the common man. Munonye sometimes view the common man as being born into a position whereby he is already at a disadvantage, both historically and presently, He sees little difference to the fate of the common man who

could be manipulated at the whims of elites and chiefs in both pre- and post-colonial Nigeria and during colonialism.

Works

- *The Only Son*: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 21), 1966
- *Obi*, Ibadan: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 45), 1969.
- *Oil Man of Obange*: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 94), 1971
- *A Wreath for the Maidens*: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 121), 1973.
- *A Dancer of Fortune*: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 153), 1974.
- *Bridge to a Wedding*: Heinemann (African Writers Series, 195), 1978.

T. M. Aluko

Timothy Mofolorunso "T. M." Aluko (14 June 1918 – 1 May 2010) was a Nigerian writer.

Biography

A Yoruba, Aluko was born in Ilesha in Nigeria and studied at Government College, Ibadan, and Higher College, Yaba in Lagos. He then studied civil engineering and town planning at the University of London. He held a number of administrative posts in his home country, including Director of Public Works in Western Nigeria. He departed from civil service in 1966 and from then until his retirement in 1978 he pursued a career as an academic, earning a doctorate in municipal engineering in 1976. He received several awards and honours including Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1963 and Officer Order of the Niger (OON) in 1964.

His novels, including *One Man, One Wife* (1959), *One Man, One Matchet* (1964), *Kinsman and Foreman*

(1966), *Chief the Honourable Minister* (1970) and *His Worshipful Majesty* (1973), are satirical in tone, and deal with the clash of new and old values in a changing Africa.

In 1994, he published his autobiography, *My Years of Service*, an account of his activities as an engineer and university teacher. His later autobiographical book, *The Story of My Life*, published in 2007, provides a more in-depth look at Aluko's life, expounding on his childhood and his work as a civil servant.

T. M. Aluko died on 1 May 2010 in Lagos, aged 91.

Sefi Atta

Sefi Atta (born 1964) is a prize-winning Nigerian author and playwright.

Biography

Sefi Atta was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1964, to a family of five children. Her father Abdul-Aziz Atta was the Secretary to Federal Government and Head of the Civil Service until his death in 1972, and she was raised by her mother Iyabo Atta.

She attended Queen's College, Lagos, and Millfield School in England. In 1985, she graduated from Birmingham University and trained as a chartered accountant. She moved from England to the United States in 1994 with her husband, Gboyega Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor, and son of Olikoye Ransome-Kuti. They have one daughter.

Sefi's Lagos-based production company Atta Girl supports Care to Read, a program she initiated to earn funds for legitimate charities through staged readings.

She currently divides her time between Nigeria, England and the United States.

Writing

Atta began to write while working as a CPA in New York, and in 2001, she graduated from the creative writing program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Mississippi Review* and *World Literature Today*. Her books have been translated to several languages.

Novels

- 2012 *A Bit of Difference*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568920
- 2010 *Swallow*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568333

- 2005 *Everything Good Will Come*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566565707

Short-story collections

- 2010 *News from Home*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568036

Stage plays

- 2012 *An Ordinary Legacy*, The MUSON Festival, MUSON Centre, Lagos
- 2012 *The Naming Ceremony*, New World Nigeria, Theatre Royal Stratford East, London
- 2011 *Hagel auf Zamfara*, Theatre Krefeld, Germany
- 2011 *The Cost of Living*, Lagos Heritage Festival, Terra Kulture, Lagos
- 2005 *The Engagement*, MUSON Centre, Lagos

Radio plays

- 2013 *The Wake*, Smooth FM, Lagos
- 2007 *A Free Day*, BBC Radio

- 2004 *Makinwa's Miracle*, BBC Radio
- 2002 *The Engagement*, BBC Radio

Screenplays

- 2009 *Leaving on Your Mind* - quarter-finalist for the American Zoetrope Screenplay Contest

Selected awards and recognition

- 2009 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa
- 2006 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa
- 2006 Caine Prize for African Literature, shortlist
- 2005 PEN International David TK Wong Prize, 1st Prize
- 2004 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2003 Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award, finalist
- 2003 Red Hen Press Short Story Award, 1st prize
- 2002 Zoetrope Short Fiction Contest, 3rd Prize
- 2002 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2002 Macmillan Writers Prize For Africa, shortlist

Visiting Writer

- 2010 Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon
- 2008 Northwestern University
- 2006 University of Southern Mississippi

Atta was on the jury for the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

⋮

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (born 15 September 1977) is a Nigerian writer. She has been called "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors [that] is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature".

Personal life and education

Born in the city of Enugu, she grew up the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in the university town of Nsukka in southeastern Nigeria, where the University of Nigeria is situated. While she was growing up, her father James Nwoye Adichie was a professor of statistics at the university, and her mother Grace Ifeoma was the university's first female registrar. Her family's ancestral village is in Abba in Anambra State.

Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria and moved to the United States for college. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University to live closer to her sister, who had a medical practice in Coventry. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2001.

In 2003, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received a Master of Arts degree in African studies from Yale University.

Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005–06 academic year. In 2008 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She has also been awarded a 2011–12 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Adichie, who is married, divides her time between Nigeria, where she teaches writing workshops, and the United States.

Writing career

Adichie published a collection of poems in 1997 (*Decisions*) and a play (*For Love of Biafra*) in 1998. She was shortlisted in 2002 for the Caine Prize for her short story "You in America".

In 2003, her story "That Harmattan Morning" was selected as joint winner of the BBC Short Story Awards, and she won the O. Henry prize for "The American Embassy". She also won the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award) and a 2007 Beyond Margins Award for her short story "Half of a Yellow Sun".

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005).

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Biafran War. It was awarded the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction. *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been adapted into a film of the same title directed by Biyi Bandele, starring Academy Award nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and BAFTA award-winner Thandie Newton, and was released in 2014.

Her third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of short stories.

In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story, "Ceiling", was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories*.

In 2013 she published her third novel, *Americanah* which was selected by the *New York Times* as one of The 10 Best Books of 2013.

In April 2014 she was named as one of 39 writers aged under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club project celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO World Book Capital 2014

Lectures

Adichie spoke on "The Danger of a Single Story" for TED in 2009. On 15 March 2012, she delivered the "Connecting Cultures" Commonwealth Lecture 2012 at the Guildhall, London. Adichie also spoke on being a

feminist for TEDxEuston in December 2012, with her speech entitled, "We should all be feminists". This speech was sampled for the 2013 song "***Flawless" by American performer Beyoncé, where it attracted further attention.

Distinctions

Awards and nominations

Year	Award	Work	Result
	Caine Prize for African Writing	"You in America"	Nominated
2002	Commonwealth Short Story Competition	"The Tree in Grandma's Garden"	Nominated
	BBC Short Story Competition	"That Harmattan Morning"	Won
2002/2003	David T. Wong International Short Story Prize (PEN)	"Half of a Yellow Sun"	Won

	American Center Award)		
2003	O. Henry Prize	"The American Embassy"	Won
	Hurston-Wright Legacy Award: Best Debut Fiction Category		Won
	Orange Prize		Nominated
2004	Booker Prize		Nominated
	Young Adult Library Services Association Best Books for Young Adults Award	<i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	Nominated
2004/2005	John Llewellyn Rhys Prize		Nominated
2005	Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best		Won

	First Book (Africa)	
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best	Won
	First Book (overall)	
2006	National Book Critics Award	Nominated
	British Book Awards: "Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year"	Nominated
	category <i>Half of a</i>	
2007	James Tait Black Memorial Prize	Nominated
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best Book (Africa)	Nominated
	Anisfield-Wolf	
	Book Award: Fiction category	Won

	PEN Beyond Margins Award	Won
	Orange Broadband Prize: Fiction category	Won
	International Impac Dublin Award	Nominated
	Reader's Digest Author of the Year Award	Won
2008	Future Award, Nigeria: Young Person of the Year Herself category	Won
	MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant (along with 24 other winners)	Won
2009	International Nonino Prize	Won

	Frank O'Connor		
	International Short		Nominated
	Story Award		
	John Llewellyn		
	Rhys Prize	<i>The Thing</i>	Nominated
	Commonwealth	<i>Around Your</i>	
	Writers' Prize: Best	<i>Neck</i>	Nominated
2010	Book (Africa)		
	Dayton Literary		Nominated
	Peace Prize		
	ThisDay Awards:		
2011	"New Champions		
	for an Enduring	Herself	Nominated
	Culture" category		
	Chicago Tribune		
	Heartland Prize:		Won
	Fiction category		
2013	National Book	<i>Americanah</i>	
	Critics Circle		Won
	Award: Fiction		

	category	
	Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction	Nominated
2014	MTV Africa Music Awards 2014: Personality of the Year	Pending

Other recognitions

- 2010 Listed among *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40"
- 2013 Listed among *New York Times'* "Ten Best Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 Listed among BBC's "Top Ten Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 *Foreign Policy* magazine "Top Global Thinkers of 2013"
- 2013 Listed among the *New African's* "100 Most Influential Africans 2013"
- 2014 Listed among Africa39 project of 39 writers aged under 40

