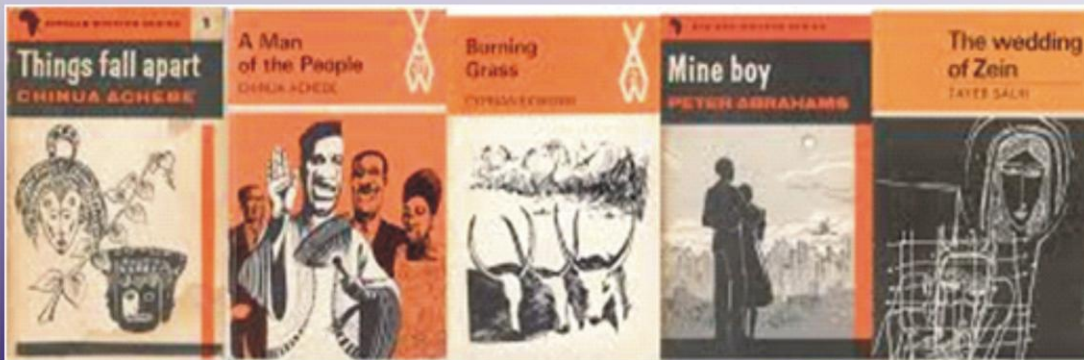


FIFTY OUTSTANDING AFRICAN NOVELISTS



A Publication of the West Africa Young Writers and Publishers Association



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Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Gikuyu pronunciation: born 5 January 1938) is a Kenyan writer, formerly working in English and now working in Gikuyu. His work includes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. He is the founder and editor of the Gikuyu-language journal *Mũtĩiri*.

In 1977, Ngũgĩ embarked upon a novel form of theatre in his native Kenya that sought to liberate the theatrical process from what he held to be "the general bourgeois education system", by encouraging spontaneity and audience participation in the performances. His project sought to "demystify" the theatrical process, and to avoid the "process of alienation [that] produces a gallery of active stars and an undifferentiated mass of grateful admirers" which, according to Ngũgĩ, encourages passivity in "ordinary people". Although *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was a commercial success, it was shut down by the authoritarian Kenyan regime six weeks after its

opening. Ngũgĩ was subsequently imprisoned for over a year.

Adopted as an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, the artist was released from prison, and fled Kenya. In the United States, he taught at Yale University for some years, and has since also taught at New York University, with a dual professorship in Comparative Literature and Performance Studies, and the University of California, Irvine. Ngũgĩ has frequently been regarded as a likely candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His son is the author *Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ*.

Biography

Ngũgĩ was born in Kamiriithu, near Limuru in Kiambu district, Kenya, of Kikuyu descent, and baptised **James Ngugi**. His family was caught up in the Mau Mau War; his half-brother Mwangi was actively involved in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, and his mother was tortured at Kamiriithu homeguard post.¹ He received a B.A. in English from Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, in 1963; during his education, a play

of his, *The Black Hermit*, was produced in Kampala in 1962.

Ngũgĩ published his first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, in 1964, which he wrote while attending the University of Leeds in England. It was the first novel in English to be published by a writer from East Africa. His second novel, *The River Between* (1965), has as its background the Mau Mau rebellion, and described an unhappy romance between Christians and non-Christians. *The River Between* is currently on Kenya's national secondary school syllabus.

His novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) marked his embrace of Fanonist Marxism. He subsequently renounced English, Christianity, and the name James Ngugi as colonialist; he changed his name back to **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**, and began to write in his native Gikuyu and Swahili.

In 1976 he helped set up The Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre which, among other things, organised African Theatre in the area. The

uncensored political message of his 1977 play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* provoked the then Kenyan Vice-President Daniel arap Moi to order his arrest. While detained in the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, Ngũgĩ wrote the first modern novel in Gikuyu, *Caitani mũtharaba-Inĩ (Devil on the Cross)*, on prison-issued toilet paper.

After his release, he was not reinstated to his job as professor at Nairobi University, and his family was harassed. Due to his writing about the injustices of the dictatorial government at the time, Ngugi and his family were forced to live in exile. Only after Arap Moi was voted out of office, 22 years later, was it safe for them to return.

His later works include *Detained*, his prison diary (1981), *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), an essay arguing for African writers' expression in their native languages rather than European languages, in order to renounce lingering colonial ties and to build an authentic African

literature, and *Matigari* (1987), one of his most famous works, a satire based on a Gikuyu folktale.

In 1992, Ngũgĩ became a professor of Comparative Literature and Performance Studies at New York University, where he held the Erich Maria Remarque Chair. He is currently a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature as well as the Director of the International Center for Writing and Translation at the University of California, Irvine.

On 8 August 2004, Ngũgĩ returned to Kenya as part of a month-long tour of East Africa. On 11 August, robbers broke into his high-security apartment: they assaulted Ngũgĩ, sexually assaulted his wife and stole various items of value. Since then, Ngũgĩ has returned to America, and in the summer 2006 the American publishing firm Random House published his first new novel in nearly two decades, *Wizard of the Crow*, translated to English from Gikuyu by the author.

On 10 November 2006, while in San Francisco at Hotel Vitale at the Embarcadero, Ngũgĩ was harassed and

ordered to leave the hotel by an employee. The event led to a public outcry and angered the African-American community and the Africans living in America, prompting an apology by the hotel.

His most recent books are *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, a collection of essays published in 2009 making the argument the crucial role of African languages in "the resurrection of African memory, and two autobiographical works: *Dreams in a Time of War: a Childhood Memoir* (2010) and *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (2012).

Awards and honours

- 1973 Lotus Prize for Literature
- Nominated for the Man Booker International Prize
- 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award (finalist Autobiography) for *In the House of the Interpreter*

Honorary degrees

- University of Dar es Salaam, Honorary doctorate in Literature, November 2013

List of works

- *The Black Hermit*, 1963 (play)
- *Weep Not, Child*, 1964, Heinemann, 1987, Macmillan 2005, ISBN 1-4050-7331-4
- *The River Between*, Heinemann 1965, Heinemann 1989, ISBN 0-435-90548-1
- *A Grain of Wheat*, 1967 (1992), ISBN 0-14-118699-2
- *This Time Tomorrow* (three plays, including the title play, "The Reels", and "The Wound in the Heart"), c. 1970
- *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics*, Heinemann, 1972, ISBN 0-435-18580-2
- *A Meeting in the Dark* (1974)
- *Secret Lives, and Other Stories*, 1976, Heinemann, 1992, ISBN 0-435-90975-4

- *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (play), 1976, ISBN 0-435-90191-5, African Publishing Group, ISBN 0-949932-45-0 (with Micere Githae Mugo and Njaka)
- *Ngaahika Ndeenda: Ithaako ria ngerekano (I Will Marry When I Want)*, 1977 (play; with Ngugi wa Mirii), Heinemann Educational Books (1980)
- *Petals of Blood* (1977) Penguin 2002, ISBN 0-14-118702-6
- *Caitani mutharaba-Ini (Devil on the Cross)*, 1980
- *Writers in Politics: Essays*, 1981, ISBN 978-0-85255-541-5 (UK), ISBN 978-0-435-08985-6 (US)
- *Education for a National Culture*, 1981
- *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, 1981
- *Devil on the Cross* (English translation of *Caitani mutharaba-Ini*), Heinemann, 1982, ISBN 0-435-90200-8
- *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*, 1983

- *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, 1986, ISBN 978-0-85255-501-9 (UK), ISBN 978-0-435-08016-7 (US)
- *Mother, Sing For Me*, 1986
- *Writing against Neo-Colonialism*, 1986
- *Njamba Nene and the Flying Bus (Njamba Nene na Mbaathi i Mathagu)*, 1986 (children's book)
- *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, 1986
- *Njamba Nene and the Cruel Chief (Njamba Nene na Chibu King'ang'i)*, 1988 (children's book)
- *Matigari* (translated into English by Wangui wa Goro), Heinemann 1989, Africa World Press 1994, ISBN 0-435-90546-5
- *Njamba Nene's Pistol (Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene)*, (children's book), 1990, Africa World Press, ISBN 0-86543-081-0
- *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, Heinemann, 1993, ISBN 978-0-435-08079-2 (US) ISBN 978-0-85255-530-9 (UK)
- *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: The Performance of Literature and Power in Post-Colonial Africa* (The Clarendon Lectures in

English Literature 1996), Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-19-818390-9

- *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (Wizard of the Crow), 2004, East African Educational Publishers, ISBN 9966-25-162-6
- *Wizard of the Crow*, 2006, Secker, ISBN 1-84655-034-3
- *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, Basic Civitas Books, 2009, ISBN 978-0-465-00946-6
- *Dreams in a Time of War: a Childhood Memoir*, Harvill Secker, 2010, ISBN 978-1-84655-377-6
- *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir*, Pantheon, 2012, ISBN 978-0-30790-769-1

Binyavanga Wainaina

Binyavanga Wainaina (born 18 January 1971) is a Kenyan author, journalist and winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing. In April 2014, *Time* magazine included Wainaina in its annual TIME 100 as one of the "Most Influential People in the World."

Early life and education

Binyavanga Wainaina was born in Nakuru in Rift Valley province. He attended Moi Primary School in Nakuru, Mangu High School in Thika, and Lenana School in Nairobi. He later studied commerce at the University of Transkei in South Africa.

His debut book, a memoir entitled *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, was published in 2011. In January 2014, in response to a wave of anti-gay laws passed in Africa, Wainaina publicly announced that he was gay, first writing a short story that he described as a "lost chapter" of his 2011 memoir entitled "I am a

Homosexual, Mum", and then tweeting, "I am, for anybody confused or in doubt, Gay, and quite happy."

Career

Following his education, Wainaina worked in Cape Town for some years as a freelance food and travel writer.

In July 2002 he won the Caine Prize for his short story "Discovering Home". He is the founding editor of *Kwani?*, the first literary magazine in East Africa since *Transition Magazine*. Since its founding, *Kwani?* has since become an important source of new writing from Africa; several writers for the magazine have been nominated for the Caine Prize and have subsequently won it.

Wainaina's satirical essay "How to Write About Africa" attracted wide attention. In 2003, he was given an award by the Kenya Publisher's Association, in recognition of his services to Kenyan literature. He has written for *The EastAfrican*, *National Geographic*, *The Sunday Times*

(South Africa), *Granta*, the *New York Times*, *Chimurenga magazine* and *The Guardian* (UK).

In 2007, Wainaina was a writer in residence at Union College in Schenectady, NY (USA). In the fall of 2008, he was in residence at Williams College, where he was teaching, lecturing and working on a novel. He is currently a Bard Fellow and the director of the Chinua Achebe Center for African Literature and Languages at Bard College.

Wainaina has collected over 13,000 recipes from around Africa and is an expert on traditional and modern African cuisines.

Young Global Leader

In January 2007, Wainaina was nominated by the World Economic Forum as a "Young Global Leader" - an award given to people for "their potential to contribute to shaping the future of the world." He subsequently declined the award. In a letter to Klaus Schwab and Queen Rania of Jordan, he wrote:

I assume that most, like me, are tempted to go anyway because we will get to be 'validated' and glow with the kind of self-congratulation that can only be bestowed by very globally visible and significant people, and we are also tempted to go and talk to spectacularly bright and accomplished people – our 'peers'. We will achieve Global Institutional Credibility for our work, as we have been anointed by an institution that many countries and presidents bow down to.

The problem here is that I am a writer. And although, like many, I go to sleep at night fantasizing about fame, fortune and credibility, the thing that is most valuable in my trade is to try, all the time, to keep myself loose, independent and creative... it would be an act of great fraudulence for me to accept the trite idea that I am 'going to significantly impact world affairs'.

Publications

- "Discovering Home" (short story, G21Net, 2001)
- "An Affair to Dismember" (short story)

- "Beyond the River Yei: Life in the Land Where Sleeping is a Disease" (photographic essay, Kwani Trust), with Sven Torfinn
- "How To Write About Africa" (article, satire, Granta 92 2005)
- "In Gikuyu, for Gikuyu, of Gikuyu" (article, satire, Granta 103, 2008)
- *One Day I Will Write About This Place: A Memoir* (autobiography, Graywolf Press, 2011)
- "Viewpoint: Binyavanga on why Africa's international image is unfair", BBC News Africa, 24 April 2012.
- "How to Write About Africa II: The Revenge", *Bidoun*, #21 Bazaar II.

David Rubadiri

James David Rubadiri (born 19 July 1930 in Liuli) is a Malawian diplomat, academic and poet, playwright and novelist. Rubadiri is ranked as one of Africa's most widely anthologized and celebrated poets to emerge after independence.

Education and career

Rubadiri attended King's College, Budo in Uganda from 1941-1950 then Makerere University in Kampala from 1952-1956, where he graduated from with a bachelor's degree in English literature and History. He later studied Literature at King's College, Cambridge. He went on to receive a Diploma in Education from the University of Bristol.

At Malawi's independence in 1964, Rubadiri was appointed Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. When he presented his credentials to President Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House on 18 August 1964, he expressed the hope that his

newly independent country would get more aid from the USA; he said that Malawi needed help to build its democratic institutions and noted that Malawi was already receiving US economic and technical help. That same year Rubadiri appeared on the National Educational Television (New York City) series *African Writers of Today*.

Rubadiri left the Malawian government in 1965 when he broke with President Hastings Banda. As an exile, he taught at Makerere University (1968–75), but he was again exiled during the Idi Amin years. Rubadiri subsequently taught at the University of Nairobi, Kenya (1976–84), and was also briefly, along with Okot p'Bitek, at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, at the invitation of Wole Soyinka. Between 1975 and 1980 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Theater of Kenya. From 1984 to 1997 he taught at the University of Botswana (1984–97), where he was dean of the Language and Social Sciences Education Department.

In 1997, after Banda's death, Rubadiri was reappointed Malawi's ambassador to the United Nations, and he was named vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi in 2000. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Strathclyde in 2005.

Writings

Rubadiri's poetry has been praised as being among "the richest of contemporary Africa". His work was published in the 1963 anthology *Modern Poetry of Africa* (East African Publishers, 1996), and appeared in international publications including *Transition*, *Black Orpheus* and *Présence Africaine*.

His only novel, *No Bride Price*, was published in 1967. It criticized the Banda regime and was, along with Legson Kayira's *The Looming Shadow*, among the earliest published fiction by Malawians.

Selected works

- *Growing Up With Poetry: An Anthology for Secondary Schools*, 1989
- *Poems from East Africa* (ed., with David Cook), 1971
- *No Bride Price* (novel), 1967
- *Come To Tea* (play), 1965

Meja Mwangi

Meja Mwangi (born 27 December 1948) is one of Kenya's leading novelists. Mwangi has worked in the film industry, including screenwriting, assistant directing, casting and location management.

Biography

He was born David Dominic Mwangi in Nanyuki, and was educated at Nanyuki Secondary School, Kenyatta College and the University of Leeds. He then worked on odd-jobs for foreign broadcasters before he turned to full-time writing. He was Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa (1975-6).

Prizes and awards

- Jomo Kenyatta Prize, for *Kill Me Quick* (1974)
- Jomo Kenyatta Prize, for *Going Down River Road* (1977)
- Lotus Award (Afro-Asian Writers' Association) (1978)

- Noma Award (honourable mention), for *Bread of Sorrow* (1989)
- Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (German Youth Literature Prize), for *Little White Man* (1992)
- Le Prix Lire au College, for *Kariuki* (1992)
- Jomo Kenyatta Prize for *The Last Plague* (2001)
- National Book Week Award (Kenya) for *The Last Plague*
- Nominated for International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, for *The Last Plague* (2002)
- Society of School Librarians International Honor Book Award (USA), for *The Mzungu Boy* (2005)
- American Library Association National Book for Children Award, for *The Mzungu Boy* (2006)
- Children's Africana Book Award (best book for older readers), for *The Mzungu Boy* (2006)
- Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature, Adult Fiction third place, *Big Chief* (2009)

Literary works

- *Kill Me Quick* (1973) ISBN 0-435-90143-5

- *Going Down River Road* (1976) ISBN 0-435-90176-1
- *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) ISBN 0-582-64276-0
- *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) ISBN 0-435-90145-1
- *Taste of Death* (1975)
- *The Bushtrackers* (1979) ISBN 0-582-78525-1
- *Bread of Sorrow* (1987)
- *The Return of Shaka* (1989)
- *Weapon of Hunger* (1989) ISBN 9966-49-813-3
- *Striving for the Wind* (1990) ISBN 0-435-90979-7
- *The Last Plague* (2000) ISBN 9966-25-064-6
- *Mountain of Bones* (2001)
- *The Boy Gift* (2006) ISBN 978-1-84728-471-6
- *Mama Dudu, the Insect Woman* (2007) ISBN 978-1-84728-468-6
- *Baba Pesa* (2007) ISBN 978-0-9796476-1-1
- *The Big Chiefs* (2007) ISBN 978-0-9796476-3-5
- *Gun Runner* (2007) ISBN 978-0-9796476-0-4
- *Power* (2009) ISBN 978-0-9796476-9-7
- *Blood Brothers* (2009) ISBN 978-0-9820126-0-4

Filmography

- *Out of Africa* (1985), assistant director
- *White Mischief* (1987, second assistant director
- *The Kitchen Toto*, casting director
- *Gorillas in the Mist* (1985), assistant director
- *Shadow On The Sun* (1988), location manager

Abioseh Nicol

Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol or **Abioseh Nicol** (14 September 1924 – 20 September 1994) was a Sierra Leonean academic, diplomat, physician, writer and poet. He has been considered as one of Sierra Leone's most educated citizens of recent times¹, as he was able to secure degrees in the arts, science and commercial disciplines.

Early life

Nicol was born as Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol in 1924 in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. His family belonged to the Creole minority who were an educated and elite ex-slave community. He attended primary school in Nigeria and, in 1946, graduated with first class honours from Christ's College, Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. He earned his Ph.D. in 1958 and then proceeded to study for a medical degree at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary, University of London's medical school. Following the completion of

his studies, Nicol lectured at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria.

Academia

Beginning in 1960, Nicol was the first native principal of the prestigious Fourah Bay College in Freetown (left in 1966) as well as a member of the Public Service Commission (left in 1968). Nicol continued his administrative career at the university level in Sierra Leone as first the chairman (1964–69) then as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sierra Leone (1966–69).

Diplomacy

Nicol left academia in 1969 to become the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, which he served as until 1971. In that year, Nicol became the High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, which ended in 1972. In 1972, Nicol became the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations under Austrian Kurt Waldheim, which he served as until 1982. While serving as Under-Secretary General, Nicol also served as

head of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Return to academia and retirement

He maintained a home for many years in Thornton Road, Cambridge, England, frequently visiting Christ's College, of which he had been made a distinguished Honorary Fellow, meanwhile serving from 1987 until retiring in 1991 as a visiting professor of International Studies at the University of California (1987–88) and University of South Carolina (1990–91). Nicol retired in 1991 at the age of 67 to Cambridge, where he died three years later at the age of 70.

Nicol's writings

Beginning in 1965 with *Two African Tales*, Nicol was a published author of short stories, as well as poetry, music, academic literature and a biography of Africanus Horton, an early Sierra Leonean author and one of the founders of African Nationalism. His last piece of published work was *Creative Women* in 1982.

Selected bibliography

- *Africa, A Subjective View*, 1964
- *Two African Tales*, 1965
- *The Truly Married Woman, and Other Stories*,
1965
- *Creative Women*, 1982

Grace Ogot

Grace Ogot (born 1934) is a Kenyan author, nurse, journalist, politician and diplomat. Together with Charity Waciuma she is the first Anglophone female Kenyan writer to be published.

Contents

Biography

Ogot was born Grace Emily Akinyi to a Christian family on May 15, 1930 in Asembo, in the district of Nyanza, Kenya - a village highly populated by the predominately Christian Luo ethnic group. Her father, Joseph Nyanduga, was one of the first men in the village of Asembo to obtain a Western education. He converted early on to the Anglican Church, and taught at the Church Missionary Society's Ng'iya Girls' School. From her father, Ogot learned the stories of the Old Testament and it was from her grandmother that Ogot learned the traditional folk tales of the area from which she would later draw inspiration.

Ogot attended the Ng'iya Girls' School and Butere High School throughout her youth. From 1949 to 1953, Grace Ogot trained as a nurse at the Nursing Training Hospital in Uganda. She later worked in London, England, at the St. Thomas Hospital for Mothers and Babies. She returned to the African nursing profession in 1958, working at the Maseno Hospital, run by the Church Missionary Society in Kisumu County in Kenya. Following this, Ogot worked at Makerere University College in Student Health Services.

In addition to her experience in healthcare, Ogot gained experience in multiple different areas, working for the BBC Overseas Service as a script-writer and announcer on the program "London Calling East and Central Africa", operating a prominent radio program in the Luo language, working as an officer of community development in Kisumu County and as a public relations officer for the Air India Corporation of East Africa.

In 1975, Ogot worked as a Kenyan delegate to the general assembly of the United Nations. Subsequently,

in 1976, she became a member of the Kenyan delegation to UNESCO. That year, she chaired and helped found the Writers' Association of Kenya. In 1983 she became one of only a handful of women to serve as a Member of Parliament and the only woman assistant minister in the cabinet of then President Daniel arap Moi.

Writing career

In 1962, Grace Ogot read her story “A Year of Sacrifice” at a conference on African Literature at Makerere University in Uganda. After discovering that there was no other work presented or displayed from East African writers, Ogot became motivated to publish her works. Subsequently, she began to publish short stories both in the Luo language and in English. “The Year of Sacrifice” (later retitled “The Rain Came”) was published in the African journal *Black Orpheus* in 1963 and in 1964, the short story “Ward Nine” was published in the journal *Transition*. Grace Ogot's first novel *The Promised Land* was published in 1966 and focused on Luo emigration and the problems that arise through

migration. Set in the 1930s, her main protagonists emigrate from Nyanza to northern Tanzania, in search of fertile land and wealth. It also focused on themes of tribal hatred, materialism, and traditional notions of femininity and wifely duties. 1968 saw the publishing of *Land Without Thunder*, a collection of short stories set in ancient Luoland. Ogot's descriptions, literary tools, and storylines in *Land Without Thunder* offer a valuable insight into Luo culture in pre-colonial East Africa. Her other works include *The Strange Bride*, *The Graduate*, *The Other Woman* and *The Island of Tears*.

Many of her stories are set against the scenic background of Lake Victoria and the traditions of the Luo people. One theme that features prominently within Ogot's work is the importance of traditional Luo folklore, mythologies, and oral traditions. This theme is at the forefront in "The Rain Came", a tale which was related to Ogot in her youth by her grandmother, whereby a chief's daughter must be sacrificed in order to bring rain. Furthermore, much of Ogot's short stories juxtapose traditional and modern themes and notions,

demonstrating the conflicts and convergences that exist between the old ways of thought and the new. In *The Promised Land*, the main character, Ochola, falls under a mysterious illness which cannot be cured through medical intervention. Eventually, he turns to a medicine man in order to be healed. Ogot explains such thought processes as exemplary of the blending of traditional and modern understandings, “Many of the stories I have told are based on day-to-day life... And in the final analysis, when the Church fails and the hospital fails, these people will always slip into something they trust, something within their own cultural background. It may appear to us mere superstition, but those who do believe in it do get healed. In day-to-day life in some communities in Kenya, both the modern and the traditional cures coexist.”

Another theme that often appears throughout Ogot’s works is that of womanhood and the female role. Throughout her stories, Ogot demonstrates an interest in family matters, revealing both traditional and modern female gender roles followed by women, especially

within the context of marriage and Christian traditions. Such an emphasis can be seen in *The Promised Land*, in which the notions both of mothers as the ultimate protectors of their children and of dominant patriarchal husband-wife relationships feature heavily. Critics such as Maryse Conde have suggested that Ogot's emphasis on the importance of the female marital role, as well as her portrayal of women in traditional roles, creates an overwhelmingly patriarchal tone in her stories. However, others have suggested that women in Ogot's works also demonstrate strength and integrity, as in "The Empty Basket", where the bravery of the main female character, Aloo, is contrasted by the failings of the male characters. Though her wits and self-assertion, Aloo overcomes a perilous situation with a snake, whilst the men are stricken by panic. It is only after she rebukes and shames the men that they are roused to destroy the snake. In Ogot's short stories, the women portrayed often have a strong sense of duty, as demonstrated in "The Rain Came", and her works regularly emphasize the need for understanding in relationships between men and women.

Prior to Kenyan Independence, while Kenya was still under a Colonial regime, Ogot experienced difficulties in her initial attempts to have her stories published, stating, “I remember taking some of my short stories to the manager [of the East African Literature Bureau], including the one which was later published in *Black Orpheus*. They really couldn’t understand how a Christian woman could write such stories, involved with sacrifices, traditional medicines and all, instead of writing about Salvation and Christianity. Thus, quite a few writers received no encouragement from colonial publishers who were perhaps afraid of turning out radical writers critical of the colonial regime.”

She was interviewed in 1974 by Lee Nichols for a Voice of America radio broadcast that was aired between 1975-1979 (Voice of America radio series *Conversations with African writers*, no. 23). The Library of Congress has a copy of the broadcast tape and the unedited original interview. The broadcast transcript appears in the book *Conversations with African Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Voice of America, 1981), p. 207-216.

Publications

From the collection of the Library of Congress,
Washington, DC: Empty BaSeSt

- *Aloo kod Apul-Apul* (1981) in Luo.
- *Ber wat* (1981) in Luo.
- *The Graduate*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980.
- *The Island of Tears* (short stories), Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980.
- *Land Without Thunder; short stories*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968.
- *Miaha* (in Luo), 1983; translated as *The Strange Bride* by Okoth Okombo (1989)
- *The Other Woman: selected short stories*, Nairobi: Transafrica, 1976.
- *The Promised Land: a novel*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966.
- *The Strange Bride* translated from Dholuo (originally published as *Miaha*, 1983) by Okoth Okombo, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1989. ISBN 9966-46-865-X

Jaramogi Oginga Odinga

Jaramogi Ajuma Oginga Odinga (October 1911 – 20 January 1994) was a Luo chieftain who became a prominent figure in Kenya's struggle for independence. He later served as Kenya's first Vice-President, and thereafter as opposition leader. Odinga's son Raila Odinga is the former Prime Minister,^[3] and another son, Oburu Odinga, is a former Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

Early years and career

Oginga Odinga was born in Bondo, Nyanza Province. In his autobiography, *Not Yet Uhuru*, Odinga estimates the date of his birth to be October 1911. Christened Obadiah Adonijah, he later renounced his Christian names and became known as Oginga Odinga. He was a student of Maseno School and Alliance High School. He went to Makerere University in 1940, and returned to Maseno High School as a teacher. In 1948 he joined the political party Kenya African Union (KAU).

Spurred to empower his Kenyan Luo ethnic group, Odinga started the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation (registered in 1947). With time, Odinga and his group undertook to strengthen the union between Luo people in the whole of East Africa. His efforts earned him admiration and recognition among the Luo, who revered him as *Ker* – a title previously held by the fabled classical Luo king, Ramogi Ajwang, who reigned 400 years before him. Vowing to uphold the ideals of Ramogi Ajwang, Odinga became known as *Jaramogi* (man of the people of Ramogi).

Amílcar Cabral

Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral (Portuguese: 12 September 1924 – 20 January 1973) was a Guinea-Bissauan and Cape Verdean agricultural engineer, writer, and a nationalist thinker and political leader. He was also one of Africa's foremost anti-colonial leaders. Also known by his *nom de guerre* **Abel Djassi**, Cabral led the nationalist movement of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands and the ensuing war of independence in Guinea-Bissau. He was assassinated on 20 January 1973, about eight months before Guinea-Bissau's unilateral declaration of independence. While he was influenced by Marxism, he was not a Marxist.

Early years

He was born on 12 September 1924 in Bafatá, Guinea-Bissau, from Cape Verdean parents Juvenal Antònio Lopes da Costa Cabral and Iva Pinhel Évora. Cabral was educated at Liceu (Secondary School) Gil Eanes in the town of Mindelo, Cape Verde, and later at the Instituto Superior de Agronomia, in Lisbon (the capital of

Portugal, which was then the colonial power ruling over Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde). While an agronomy student in Lisbon, he founded student movements dedicated to opposing the ruling dictatorship of Portugal and promoting the cause of liberation of the Portuguese colonies in Africa.

He returned to Africa in the 1950s, and was instrumental in promoting the independence causes of the then Portuguese colonies. He was the founder (in 1956) of the PAIGC or *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (Portuguese for *African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde*) and one of the founders of Movimento Popular Libertação de Angola (MPLA) (later in the same year), together with Agostinho Neto, whom he met in Portugal, and other Angolan nationalists.

War for independence

From 1963 to his assassination in 1973, Cabral led the PAIGC's guerrilla movement (in Portuguese Guinea) against the Portuguese government, which evolved into

one of the most successful wars of independence in modern African history. The goal of the conflict was to attain independence for both Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde. Over the course of the conflict, as the movement captured territory from the Portuguese, Cabral became the de facto leader of a large portion of what became Guinea-Bissau.

In preparation for the independence war, Cabral set up training camps in neighboring Ghana with the permission of Kwame Nkrumah. Cabral trained his lieutenants through various techniques, including mock conversations to provide them with effective communication skills that would aid their efforts to mobilize Guinean tribal chiefs to support the PAIGC.

Amílcar Cabral soon realized that the war effort could be sustained only if his troops could be fed and taught to live off the land alongside the larger populace. Being an agronomist, he taught his troops to teach local crop growers better farming techniques, so that they could increase productivity and be able to feed their own

family and tribe, as well as the soldiers enlisted in the PAIGC's military wing. When not fighting, PAIGC soldiers would till and plow the fields alongside the local population.

Cabral and the PAIGC also set up a trade-and-barter bazaar system that moved around the country and made staple goods available to the countryside at prices lower than that of colonial store owners. During the war, Cabral also set up a roving hospital and triage station to give medical care to wounded PAIGC's soldiers and quality-of-life care to the larger populace, relying on medical supplies garnered from the USSR and Sweden. The bazaars and triage stations were at first stationary until they came under frequent attack from Portuguese regime forces.

In 1972, Cabral began to form a People's Assembly in preparation for the independence of Guinea-Bissau, but disgruntled former PAIGC rival Inocêncio Kani, with the help of Portuguese agents operating within the PAIGC, shot and killed him. The Portuguese government's plan,

which eventually went awry, was to enjoin the help of this former rival to arrest Amílcar Cabral and place him under the custody of Portuguese authorities. The assassination took place on 20 January 1973 in Conakry, Guinea. His half-brother, Luís Cabral, became the leader of the Guinea-Bissau branch of the party and would eventually become President of Guinea-Bissau.

Other than being a guerrilla leader, Cabral was highly regarded internationally as one of the most prominent African thinkers of the 20th century and for his intellectual contributions aimed at formulating a coherent cultural, philosophical and historical theoretical framework to justify and explain independence movements. This is reflected in his various writings and public interventions.

Camara Laye

Camara Laye (January 1, 1928—February 4, 1980) was an African writer from Guinea. He was the author of *The African Child* (*L'Enfant noir*), a novel based loosely on his own childhood, and *The Radiance of the King* (*Le Regard du roi*). Both novels are among the earliest major works in Francophone African literature. Camara Laye later worked for the government of newly independent Guinea, but went into voluntary exile over political issues.

Early life

Camara Laye was born in Kouroussa, a town in what was then the colony of French Guinea. His family were Malinke (a Mandé speaking ethnicity), and he was born into a caste that traditionally worked as blacksmiths and goldsmiths. His mother was from the village of Tindican, and his immediate childhood surroundings were not predominantly influenced by French culture.

He attended both Koranic and French elementary schools in Kouroussa. At age fifteen he went to Conakry, the colonial capital, to continue his education. He attended vocational studies in motor mechanics. In 1947, he travelled to Paris to continue studying mechanics. There he worked and took further courses in engineering and worked towards the baccalauréat.

Writing career

Camara Laye published his first novel in 1953, the autobiographical *L'Enfant noir* (*The African Child*, also published under the title *The Dark Child*). It follows his own journey from childhood in Kouroussa, his education in Conakry, and eventual departure for France. The book won the Prix Charles Veillon in 1954. *L'Enfant noir* was followed the next year by *Le Regard du roi* (*The Radiance of the King*). *The Radiance of the King* was described by Kwame Anthony Appiah as "one of the greatest of the African novels of the colonial period."

In 1956 Camara Laye returned to Africa, first to Dahomey, then the Gold Coast, and finally to newly

independent Guinea, where he held several government posts. He left Guinea for Senegal in 1965 because of political issues, never returning to his home country. In 1966 Camara Laye's third novel, *Dramouss (A Dream of Africa)*, was published. In 1978 his fourth and final work, *Le Maître de la parole - Kouma Lafôlô Kouma (The Guardian of the Word)*, was published. The novel was based on a Malian epic told by the griot Babou Condé about Sundiata Keita, the thirteenth-century founder of the Mali Empire.

Authorship controversy

Camara Laye's authorship of *Le Regard du roi* was questioned by literary scholar Adele King in her book *Rereading Camara Laye*. She claimed that he had considerable help in writing *L'Enfant noir* and did not write any part of *Le Regard du roi*. Scholar F. Abiola Irele, in an article called *In Search of Camara Laye* asserts that the claims are not "sufficiently grounded" to adequately justify that Laye did not author the mentioned work.

Death

Camara Laye died in 1980 in Dakar of a kidney infection.

Williams Sassine

Williams Sassine (1944, Kankan, Guinea – February 9, 1997, Conakry, Guinea) was a Guinean novelist who wrote in French. His father was Lebanese Christian and his mother was a Guinean of Muslim heritage.

Sassine was an expatriate African writer in France after leaving Guinea when it received independence under Sékou Touré. As a novelist he wrote of marginalized characters, but he became more optimistic on Toure's death. His novel *Le jeune homme de sable* has been regarded as among the best twentieth century African novels. Few of his works have been translated into English, but *Wirriyamu* was published in an English translation in 1980. As an editor he remained critical of Toure as chief editor for the satirical *Le Lynx* paper. Some of Sassine's works have been translated into English, Spanish and Russian.

Selected works

- *Saint Monsieur Baly* (1971)

- *Wirriyamu* (1976) (in 1980, an English language translation by Clive Wake and John Reed was published)
- *Le jeune homme de sable* (1979)
- *L'Alphabête* (1982)
- *Le Zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui* (1985)
- *L'Afrique en Morceaux* (1994)
- *Mémoire d'une peau* (1998)

Critical studies of Sassine's fictional work

- Asaah, Augustine, 'L'inscription du corps dans quatre romans postcoloniaux d'Afrique'. *Présence Francophone* 66 (2006) 57-80.
- Baker, Charlotte, *Enduring Negativity: Representations of Albinism in the novels of Didier Destremau, Patrick Grainville and Williams Sassine* (Peter Lang, 2011).
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- Chevrier, Jacques and Richard Bjornson (1992), 'Williams Sassine', *Research in African Literatures*, 23.4, pp. 133-136.
- Coussy, Denise, and Jacques Chevrier, 'L'Errance chez Williams Sassine et V.S.

Naipaul', *Notre Librairie*, 155-156 (2004), 68-75.

- De Saivre, Denise 'Humour et communication: L'exemple de Williams Sassine'. *Présence Africaine* 147 (1988) 68-79.
- Giguët, Frédéric, 'La construction tragique de l'identité dans l'œuvre romanesque de Williams Sassine' in Dominique Laporte (ed.), *L'autre en mémoire*, Presses Université Laval, 2006. Unpaginated.
- Lebon, Cécile, 'Williams Sassine Mémoire d'une peau: Review'. *Notre Librairie* 136 (1998).
- Ngandu Nkashama, Pius, *Ecrire à l'infinif: la déraison de l'écriture dans les romans de Williams Sassine* (Paris : Harmattan, 2006).
- Ngandu Nkashama, Pius, 'Il était une fois, Saint Monsieur Baly...'. *Présence Africaine* 155 (1997).

- Sow, Alioune, 'Forbidden Bodies: Relocation and Empowerment in Williams Sassine's novels', *Matatu Journal for African Culture and Society*, 29 (2005), 207-220.
- Wendeler, Catherine, 'The embodiment of wrath in two postcolonial prophecies: La vie et demie by Sony Labou Tansi and Mémoire d'une peau by Williams Sassine' (*Imperium' 2 (2001)*), *Unpaginated*.

Rocha Chimera

Rocha Chimera is a Kenyan writer. He received the Noma Award in 2000 for *Ufundishaji wa Fasihi: Nadharia na Mbinu*. Chimera holds a B.Ed. and M.A. from Kenyatta University, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University. He is Professor of Swahili and former chair of the Dept. of Languages and Linguistics at Egerton University. Currently, he is the Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Pwani University college, Kilifi Kenya.

His published works include *Kiswahili: Past, Present and Future Horizons* (ISBN 9966-846-35-2) and *Ufundishaji wa Fasihi: Nadharia na Mbinu* (ISBN 9966-22-157-3) (co-authored with Kimani Njogu) and a play *Mnara wawaka moto!: uhalifu* (ISBN 9966-846-39-5) .

Taha Hussein

Taha Hussein (November 15, 1889—October 28, 1973) was one of the most influential 20th century Egyptian writers and intellectuals, and a figurehead for the Arab Renaissance and the modernist movement in the Arab World. His sobriquet was "The Dean of Arabic Literature".

Taha Hussein was born in Izbet el Kilo, a village in the Minya Governorate in central Upper Egypt. He went to a kuttab, and thereafter was admitted to Al-Azhar University, where he studied Religion and Arabic literature. From an early age, he was reluctant to take the traditional education to his heart. Hussein was the seventh of thirteen children, born into a lower-middle-class family. He became blind at the age of three, the result of faulty treatment by an unskilled practitioner, a condition which caused him a great deal of anguish throughout his entire life.

Hussein met and married Suzanne Bresseau (1895-1989) while attending the University of Montpellier in France.

She was referred to as “sweet voice”. This name came from her ability to read to him as he was trying to improve his grasp of the French language. Suzanne became his wife, best friend and the mother of his two children and was his mentor throughout his life.

Taha Hussein’s children, his daughter Amina and her younger brother Moenis, were both important figures in Egypt. Amina, who died at the age of 70, was among the first Egyptian women to graduate from Cairo University. She and her brother, Moenis, translated his *Adib* (The Intellectual) into French. This was especially important to their father, who was an Egyptian who had moved to France and learned the language. Even more important, the character of *Adib* is that of a young man who, like Taha Hussein, has to deal with the cultural shock of an Egyptian studying and living in France.

Academic career

When the secular Cairo University was founded in 1908, he was keen to be admitted, and despite being blind and poor he won a place. In 1914, he became the first

graduate to receive a Ph.D., with a thesis on the skeptic poet and philosopher Abu-Alala' Al-Ma'ari. He went on to become a professor of Arabic literature there. In 1919, he was appointed a professor of history at Cairo University. Additionally, he was the founding Rector of the University of Alexandria. Although he wrote many novels and essays, in the West he is best known for his autobiography, *al-Ayyam* (ماي الـا, *The Days*) which was published in English as *An Egyptian Childhood* (1932) and *The Stream of Days* (1943). However, it was his book of literary criticism *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* (يف ر ال جاهلي) fo 6291 taht thguob mih emos tonrotye ال شع in the Arab world. In this book, he expressed doubt about the authenticity of much early Arabic poetry, claiming it to have been falsified during ancient times due to tribal pride and rivalry between tribes. He also hinted indirectly that the Qur'an should not be taken as an objective source of history. Consequently, the book aroused the intense anger and hostility of the religious scholars at al-Azhar and many other traditionalists, and he was accused of having insulted Islam. However, the public prosecutor stated that what Taha Hussein had said

was the opinion of an academic researcher and no legal action was taken against him, although he lost his post at Cairo University in 1931. His book was banned but was re-published the next year with slight modifications under the title *On Pre-Islamic Literature* (1927).

Taha Hussein was an intellectual of the Egyptian Renaissance and a proponent of the ideology of Egyptian nationalism along with what he called Pharaonism, believing that Egyptian civilization was diametrically opposed to Arab civilization, and that Egypt would only progress by reclaiming its ancient pre-Islamic roots.

After Hussein obtained his MA from the University of Montpellier, he continued his studies and received another Ph.D at the Sorbonne. With this accomplishment, Hussein became the first Egyptian and member of the mission to receive an MA and a doctorate (Ph.D) from France. For his doctoral dissertation, written in 1917, Hussein wrote on Ibn Khaldun, a Tunisian historian, claimed by some to be the founder of sociology. Two years later, in 1919, Hussein made his

way back to Egypt from France with his wife, Suzanne, and was appointed professor of history at Cairo University.

In 1950, Hussein was appointed Minister of Education, and was able to put into action his motto: "Education is like the air we breathe and the water we drink." Mr. Farid Shehata was his personal secretary and his eyes and ears during this period. Without Taha Hussein and his passion to promote education, millions of Egyptians would never have become literate.

Positions and tasks

In 1950, he was appointed a Minister of Knowledge (Ministry of Education nowadays) in which capacity he led a call for free education and the right of everyone to be educated. Additionally, he was an advocate against the confinement of education to the rich people only. In that respect, he said, "Education is as water and air, the right of every human being". Consequently, in his hands, education became free and Egyptians started getting free education. He also transformed many of the Quranic

schools into primary schools and converted a number of high schools into colleges such as the Graduate Schools of Medicine and Agriculture. He is also credited with establishing a number of new universities.

Taha Hussein held the position of chief editor of a number of newspapers and wrote innumerable articles. He was also a member of several scientific academies in Egypt and around the world.

Works

Complete list:

- Complete Works of Taha Hussein 1-16
- The Memory of Abu El Alaa 1915
- Selected Poetical Texts of the Greek Drama 1924
- Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy 1925
- Dramas by a Group of the Most Famous French Writers 1924
- Pioneers of Thoughts 1925
- Wednesday Talk 1925
- Pre-Islamic Poetry 1926

- In the Summer 1933
- The Days "3 Volumes" 1933
- Hafez and Shawki 1933
- The Prophet's Life "Ala Hamesh El Sira" 1933
- Curlew's Prayers 1934
- From a Distance 1935
- Adeeb 1935
- The Literary Life in the Arabian Peninsula 1935
- Together with Abi El Alaa in his Prison 1935
- Poetry and Prose 1936
- Bewitched Palace 1937
- Together with El Motanabi 1937
- The Future of Culture in Egypt 1938
- Moments 1942
- The Voice of Paris 1943
- Sheherzad's Dreams 1943
- Tree of Misery 1944
- Paradise of Thorn 1945
- Chapters on Literature and Criticism 1945
- The Voice of Abu El Alaa 1945
- Osman "The first Part of the Greater Sedition
- "El Fitna Al Kubra" 1947

- Spring Journey 1948
- The Tortured of Modern Conscience 1949
- The Divine Promise "El Wa'd El Haq" 1950
- The Paradise of Animals 1950
- The Lost Love 1951
- From There 1952
- Varieties 1952
- In The Midst 1952
- Ali and His Sons (The 2nd Part of the Greater Sediton) 1953
- (Sharh Lozoum Mala Yalzm, Abu El Alaa) 1955
- (Anatagonism and Reform 1955
- Criticism and Reform 1956
- Our Contemporary Literature 1958
- Mirror of Islam 1959
- Summer Nonsense 1959
- On the Western Drama 1959
- Talks 1959
- Al-Shaikhan (Abi Bakr and Omar Ibn El Khatab) 1960
- From Summer Nonsense to Winter Seriousness 1961

- Reflections 1965
- Beyond the River 1975
- Words 1976
- Tradition and Renovation 1978
- Books and Author 1980
- From the Other Shore 1980

Translations

- Jules Simon's The Duty 1920-1921
- Athenians System (Nezam Al-Ethnien) 1921
- The Spirit of Pedagogy 1921
- Dramatic Tales 1924
- Andromaque (Racine) 1935
- From the Greek Dramatic Literature (Sophocle)
1939
- Voltaire's Zadig or (The Fate) 1947
- André Gide: From Greek
- Legends' Heroes
- Sophocle-Oedipe 1947.

Tawfiq al-Hakim

Tawfiq al-Hakim or **Tawfik el-Hakim** (October 9, 1898 – July 26, 1987) (Arabic: توفيق الحكيم *Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm*) was a prominent Egyptian writer. He is one of the pioneers of the Arabic novel and drama. He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, the son of an Egyptian wealthy judge and a Turkish mother. The triumphs and failures that are represented by the reception of his enormous output of plays are emblematic of the issues that have confronted the Egyptian drama genre as it has endeavored to adapt its complex modes of communication to Egyptian society.

Early life

Tawfiq Ismail al-Hakim was born October 9, 1898, in Alexandria to an Egyptian father and Turkish mother. His father, a wealthy peasant, worked as a judge in the judiciary in the village of al-Delnegat, in central Beheira province. His mother was the daughter of a retired Turkish officer. Tawfiq al-Hakim enrolled at the Damanshour primary school at the age of seven. He left

primary school in 1915 and his father put him in a public school in the Beheira province, where Tawfiq al-Hakim finished secondary school. However, due to the lack of proper secondary schooling in the province, Tawfiq al-Hakim moved to Cairo with his uncles to continue his studies at Muhammad Ali secondary school.

After studying in Cairo, he moved to Paris, where he graduated in law and began preparing a PhD thesis at the Sorbonne. However, his attention turned increasingly to the Paris theatres and the Opera and, after three years in Paris, he abandoned his studies and returned to Egypt in 1928, full of ideas for transforming Egyptian theatre.

Egyptian drama before Tawfiq el-Hakim

The cause of 'serious' drama, at least in its textual form, was in the process of being given a boost by one of the Egypt's greatest *littérateurs*, Ahmed Shawqi, "Prince of Poets," who during his latter years penned a number of verse dramas with themes culled from Egyptian and

Islamic history; these included *Masraa' Kliyubatra* (The Death of Cleopatra, 1929), *Magnun wa Layla* (Driven mad by Layla, 1931), *Amirat el-Andalus* (The Andalusian Princess, 1932), and *Ali Bey el-Kebir* (an 18th-century ruler of Egypt), a play originally written in 1893 and later revised. However, between the popular traditions of farcical comedy and melodrama and the performance of translated versions of European dramatic masterpieces, there still remained a void within which an indigenous tradition of serious drama could develop.

Plays

The publication and performance of his play, *Ahl el-Kahf* (The People of the Cave, 1933) was a significant event in Egyptian drama. The story of 'the people of the cave' is to be found in the eighteenth surah of the Qur'an as well as in other sources. It concerns the tale of the seven sleepers of Ephesus who, in order to escape the Roman persecution of Christians, take refuge in a cave. They sleep for three hundred years, and wake up in a completely different era - without realizing it, of course.

In its use of overarching themes - rebirth into a new world and a predilection for returning to the past - el-Hakim's play obviously touches upon some of the broad cultural topics that were of major concern to intellectuals at the time, and, because of the play's obvious seriousness of purpose, most critics have chosen to emphasise such features.

Within a year el-Hakim produced another major work, *Shahrazad* (Scheherazade, 1934). While the title character is, of course, the famous narrator of the One Thousand and One Nights collection, the scenario for this play is set after all the tales have been told. Now cured of his vicious anger against the female sex by the story-telling virtuosity of the woman who is now his wife, King Shahrayar abandons his previous ways and embarks on a journey in quest of knowledge, only to discover himself caught in a dilemma whose focus is Shahrazad herself; through a linkage to the ancient goddess, Isis, Shahrazad emerges as the ultimate mystery, the source of life and knowledge.

When the National Theatre Troupe was formed in Egypt in 1935, the first production that it mounted was *The People of the Cave*. The performances were not a success; for one thing, audiences seemed unimpressed by a performance in which the action on stage was so limited in comparison with the more popular types of drama. It was such problems in the realm of both production and reception that seem to have led al-Hakim to use some of his play-prefaces in order to develop the notion of his plays as 'théâtre des idées', works for reading rather than performance. However, in spite of such critical controversies, he continued to write plays with philosophical themes culled from a variety of cultural sources: *Pygmalion* (1942), an interesting blend of the legends of Pygmalion and Narcissus; *Sulayman el-Hakim* (Solomon the Wise, 1943), and *El-Malik Udib* (King Oedipus, 1949).

Some of el-Hakim's frustrations with the performance aspect were diverted by an invitation in 1945 to write a series of short plays for publication in newspaper article form. These works were gathered together into two

collections, *Masrah el-Mugtama* (Theatre of Society, 1950) and *el-Masrah el-Munawwa* (Theatre Miscellany, 1956). The most memorable of these plays is *Ughneyyet el-Mawt* (Death Song), a one-act play that with masterly economy depicts the fraught atmosphere in Upper Egypt as a family awaits the return of the eldest son, a student in Cairo, in order that he may carry out a murder in response to the expectations of a blood feud.

El-Hakim's response to the social transformations brought about by the 1952 revolution, which he later criticized, was the play *El Aydi El Na'mah* (Soft Hands, 1954). The 'soft hands' of the title refer to those of a prince of the former royal family who finds himself without a meaningful role in the new society, a position in which he is joined by a young academic who has just finished writing a doctoral thesis on the uses of the Arabic preposition *hatta*. The play explores in an amusing, yet rather obviously didactic, fashion, the ways in which these two apparently useless individuals set about identifying roles for themselves in the new socialist context. While this play may be somewhat

lacking in subtlety, it clearly illustrates in the context of el-Hakim's development as a playwright the way in which he had developed his technique in order to broach topics of contemporary interest, not least through a closer linkage between the pacing of dialogue and actions on stage. His play formed the basis of a popular Egyptian film by the same name, starring Ahmed Mazhar.

In 1960 el-Hakim was to provide further illustration of this development in technique with another play set in an earlier period of Egyptian history, *El Sultan El-Ha'er* (*The Sultan Perplexed*). The play explores in a most effective manner the issue of the legitimation of power. A Mamluk sultan at the height of his power is suddenly faced with the fact that he has never been manumitted and that he is thus ineligible to be ruler. By 1960 when this play was published, some of the initial euphoria and hope engendered by the Nasserist regime itself, given expression in *El Aydi El Na'mah*, had begun to fade. The Egyptian people found themselves confronting some unsavoury realities: the use of the secret police to

squelch the public expression of opinion, for example, and the personality cult surrounding the figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser. In such a historical context el-Hakim's play can be seen as a somewhat courageous statement of the need for even the mightiest to adhere to the laws of the land and specifically a plea to the ruling military regime to eschew the use of violence and instead seek legitimacy through application of the law.

A two volume English translation of collected plays is in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works.

Style and Themes

The theatrical art of al-Hakim consists of three types:

1- Biographical Theatre: The group of plays he wrote in his early life in which he expressed his personal experience and attitudes towards life were more than 400 plays among which were "al-Arees", (The Groom) and "Amam Shebak al-Tazaker", (Before the Ticket Office). These plays were more artistic because they were based on Al Hakim's personal opinion in criticizing social life.

2- Intellectual Theatre: This dramatic style produced plays to be read not acted. Thus, he refused to call them plays and published them in separate books.

3- Objective Theatre: Its aim is to contribute to the Egyptian society by fixing some values of the society, exposing the realities of Egyptian life.

Al-Hakim was able to understand nature and depict it in a style which combines symbolism, reality and imagination. He mastered narration, dialogue and selecting settings. While el-Hakim's earlier plays were all composed in the literary language, he was to conduct a number of experiments with different levels of dramatic language. In the play, *El-Safqah* (The Deal, 1956), for example - with its themes of land ownership and the exploitation of poor peasant farmers - he couched the dialogue in something he termed 'a third language', one that could be read as a text in the standard written language of literature, but that could also be performed on stage in a way which, while not exactly the idiom of Egyptian Arabic, was certainly comprehensible

to a larger population than the literate elite of the city. There is perhaps an irony in the fact that another of el-Hakim's plays of the 1960s, *Ya tali el-Shagarah* (1962; The Tree Climber, 1966), was one of his most successful works from this point of view, precisely because its use of the literary language in the dialogue was a major contributor to the non-reality of the atmosphere in this Theatre of the Absurd style involving extensive passages of non-communication between husband and wife. El-Hakim continued to write plays during the 1960s, among the most popular of which were *Masir Sorsar* (The Fate of a Cockroach, 1966) and *Bank el-Qalaq* (Anxiety Bank, 1967).

Influence and Impact on Arabic Literature

Tawfiq el-Hakim is one of the major pioneer figures in modern Arabic literature. In the particular realm of theatre, he fulfils an overarching role as the sole founder of an entire literary tradition, as Taha Hussein had earlier made clear. His struggles on behalf of Arabic drama as a literary genre, its techniques, and its language, are

coterminous with the achievement of a central role in contemporary Egyptian political and social life.

Hakim's 1956 play *Death Song* was the basis of the libretto to Mohammed Fairouz's 2008 opera *Sumeida's Song*.

Personal life

Hakim was viewed as something of a misogynist in his younger years, having written a few misogynistic articles and remaining a bachelor for an unusually long period of time; he was given the laqab (i.e. epithet) of *أرمل و دة* ('*Aduu al Mar'a*'), meaning "Enemy of woman." However, he eventually married and had two children, a son and a daughter. His wife died in 1977; his son died in 1978 in a car accident. He was survived by his daughter after his death in July 23, 1987.

List of works

- Complete Works of Tawfiq al-Hakim
- A Bullet in the Heart, 1926 (Plays)

- Leaving Paradise, 1926 (Plays)
- The Diary of a Prosecutor Among Peasant, 1993 (Novel) (translation exists at least into German and Swedish)
- The People of the Cave, 1933 (Play)
- The Return of the Spirit, 1933 (Novel)
- Sharazad, 1934 (Play)
- Muhammad the Prophet, 1936 (Biography)
- A Man without a Soul, 1937 (Play)
- A Sparrow from the East, 1938 (Novel)
- Ash'ab, 1938 (Novel)
- The Devil's Era, 1938 (Philosophical Stories)
- My Donkey told me, 1938 (Philosophical Essays)
- Braxa/The problem of ruling, 1939 (Play)
- The Dancer of the Temple, 1939 (Short Stories)
- Pygmalion, 1942
- Solomon the Wise, 1943
- Boss Kudrez's Building, 1948
- King Oedipus, 1949
- Soft Hands, 1954
- Equilibrium, 1955
- Isis, 1955

- The Deal, 1956
- The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960
- The Tree Climber, 1966
- The Fate of a Cockroach, 1966
- Anxiety Bank, 1967
- The Return of Consciousness, 1974

Véronique Tadjó

Véronique Tadjó (born 1955) is a writer, poet, novelist, and artist from Côte d'Ivoire. Having lived and worked in many countries within the African continent and diaspora, she feels herself to be pan-African, in a way that is reflected in the subject matter, imagery and allusions of her work.

Biography

Born in Paris, Véronique Tadjó was the daughter of an Ivorian civil servant and a French painter and sculptor. Brought up in Abidjan, she travelled widely with her family.

Tadjó completed her BA degree at the University of Abidjan and her doctorate at the Sorbonne in African-American Literature and Civilization. In 1983, she went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., on a Fulbright research scholarship.

In 1979, Tadjó chose to teach English at the Lycée Moderne de Korhogo (secondary school) in the North of Côte d'Ivoire. She subsequently became a lecturer at the English department of the University of Abidjan until 1993.

In the past few years, she has facilitated workshops in writing and illustrating children's books in Mali, Benin, Chad, Haiti, Mauritius, French Guyana, Burundi, Rwanda and South Africa.

She has lived in Paris, Lagos, Mexico City, Nairobi and London. Tadjó is currently based in Johannesburg, where since 2007 she has been head of French Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Awards

Tadjó received the Literary Prize of L'Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique in 1983 and the UNICEF Prize in 1993 for *Mamy Wata and the Monster*, which was also chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century, one of only four children's books

selected. In 2005, Tadjó won the Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire.

Works

Poetry

- *Latérite* (poems; Éditions Hatier "Monde noir Poche", 1984). Bi-lingual edition, *Red Earth – Latérite*; translation by Peter S. Thompson (Washington University Press, 2006)
- *A vol d'oiseau*, Éditions Harmattan; 1986); translated by Wangui wa Goro as *As The Crow Flies* (AWS Heinemann, 2001)
- *A mi-chemin* (poems; Éditions Harmattan, 2000)

Novels

- *Le Royaume aveugle* (novel; Éditions Harmattan, 1991); translated by Janis Mayes as *The Blind Kingdom* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2008)

- *Champs de bataille et d'amour* (Éditions Présence Africaine; Les Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes, 1999)
- *L'ombre d'Imana: Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda*, Actes Sud, 2000); translated as *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* (Heinemann AWS, 2002)
- *Reine Pokou* (Actes Sud, 2005); translated by Amy Reid as *Queen Poku* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2009)
- *Loin de mon père* (Actes Sud, 2010)

Children's

- *La Chanson de la vie* (for children; 1990)
- *Lord of the Dance: An African Retelling* (*Le Seigneur de la Danse*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; 1988)
- *Grandma Nana* (*Grand-Mère Nanan*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996; for children; 2000)
- *Masque, raconte-moi* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes)

- *Si j'étais roi, si j'étais reine* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes); translated by the author as *If I Were a King, If I Were a Queen* (London: Milet Publishing, 2002)
- *Mamy Wata et le Monstre* (*Mamy Wata and the Monster*) (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; Prix UNICEF, 1993; bi-lingual edition London: Milet Publishing, 2000)
- *Le Grain de Maïs Magique* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996)
- *Le Bel Oiseau et la Pluie* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1998)
- *Nelson Mandela: "Non à L'Apartheid"* (Actes Sud Junior, 2010)
- *Ayanda, la petite fille qui ne voulait pas grandir* (Actes Sud Junior, 2007; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes/CEDA)

Mongo Beti

Life

Though he lived in exile for many decades, Beti's life reveals an unflagging commitment to improvement of his home country. As one critic wrote after his death, "The militant path of this essayist, chronicler and novelist has been governed by one obsession: the quest for the dignity of African people."

Early life

The son of Oscar Awala and Régine Alomo, Alexandre was born in 1932 at Akométan, a small village 10 km from Mbalmayo, itself 45 km away from Yaoundé, capital of Cameroon. (The village's name comes from *Akom* "rock" and *Etam* "source": in old maps of the region, the name is written in two parts).

From an early age, Beti was influenced by the currents of rebellion sweeping Africa in the wake of World War II. His father drowned when Beti was seven, and he was

raised by his mother and extended family. Beti recalls arguing with his mother about religion and colonialism; he also recalls early exposure to the opinions and analysis of independence leader Ruben Um Nyobe, both in the villages and at Nyobe's private residence. He carried these views into the classroom, and was eventually expelled from the missionary school in Mbalmayo for his outspokenness. In 1945 he entered the lycée Leclerc in Yaoundé. Graduating in 1951, he came to France to continue his higher education in literature, first at Aix-en-Provence, then at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Early writing and exile

By the early 1950s, Beti had turned to writing as a vehicle of protest. He wrote regularly for the journal *Présence Africaine*; among his pieces was a review of Camara Laye's *Black Child* that criticized Laye for what Beti saw as pandering to European tastes. He began his career in fiction with the short story *Sans haine et sans amour* ("Without hatred or love"), published in the periodical *Présence Africaine*, edited by Alioune Diop,

in 1953. Beti's first novel *Ville cruelle* ("Cruel City"), under the pseudonym *Eza Boto*, followed in 1954, published over several editions of *Présence Africaine*.

It was, however, in 1956 that he gained a widespread reputation; the publication of the novel *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* ("The poor Christ of Bomba") created a scandal because of its satirical and biting description of the missionary and colonial world. Under pressure from the religious hierarchy, the colonial administrator in Cameroon banned the novel in the colony. This was followed by *Mission terminée*, 1957 (winner of the *Prix Sainte Beuve* 1958), and *Le Roi miraculé*, 1958. He also worked during this time for the review *Preuves*, for which he reported from Africa. He worked also as a substitute teacher at the lycée of Rambouillet.

In 1959, he was named certified professor at the lycée Henri Avril in Lamballe. He took the *Agrégation de Lettres classiques* in 1966 and taught at the *Lycée Pierre Corneille* in Rouen. from this date until 1994. Following Nyobe's assassination by French forces in 1958,

however, Beti fell silent as a writer for more than a decade, remaining in exile from his homeland. After his death, Odile Tobner noted that exile was not easy on Beti; he remained tortured by his concern for his embattled country.

Later career

In 1972 he re-entered the world of literature with a bang. His book *Main basse sur le Cameroun, autopsie d'une décolonisation* ('Cruel hand on Cameroon, autopsy of a decolonization') was censored upon its publication by the French Ministry of the Interior Raymond Marcellin on the request, brought forward by Jacques Foccart, of the Cameroon government, represented in Paris by the ambassador Ferdinand Oyono. The essay, a critical history of recent Cameroon, asserted that Cameroon and other colonies remained under French control in all but name, and that the post-independence political elites had actively fostered this continued dependence. Beti was inspired to write in part by the execution of Ernest Ouandie by the government of Cameroon. In 1974 he

published *Perpétue* and *Remember Ruben*; the latter was the first in a trilogy exploring the life and impact of Nyobe. After a long judicial action, Mongo Beti and his editor François Maspéro finally obtained, in 1976, the cancellation of the ban on the publication of *Main basse*.

Beti returned to critical and political writing at the same time that he returned to fiction. In 1978 he and his wife Odile Tobner launched the bimonthly review *Peuples Noirs. Peuples africains* ('Black People. African People'), which was published until 1991. This review chronicled and denounced tirelessly the ills brought to Africa by neo-colonial regimes. During this period were published the novels *La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle* (1979), *Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama futur camionneur* (1983), *La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama* (1984), also *Lettre ouverte aux Camerounais ou la deuxième mort de Ruben Um Nyobé* (1984) and *Dictionnaire de la négritude* (1989, with Odile Tobner). Frustrated by what he saw as the failure of post-independence governments to bring

genuine freedom to Africa, Beti adopted a more radical perspective in these works.

In exile, Beti remained vitally connected to the struggle in Cameroon. Throughout the seventies and eighties, acquaintance with Beti or his work could spell trouble for a citizen of Cameroon; on numerous occasions, Beti used his connections in France to rescue one of his young readers, many of whom knew him from his periodical and his polemical essays. Ambroise Kom, arrested merely for subscribing to *Peuples noirs*, was saved from incarceration by Beti's actions in France on his behalf.

Final years

In 1991 Mongo Beti returned to Cameroon, after 32 years of self-imposed exile. In 1993 he published *La France contre l'Afrique, retour au Cameroun*; this book chronicles his visits to his homeland. After retiring from teaching in 1994, he returned to Cameroon permanently. Various business endeavors in Betiland failed; eventually, he opened in Yaoundé the *Librairie des*

Peuples noirs (Bookstore of the Black Peoples) and organized agricultural activities in his village of Akometam. The goal of the bookshop was to encourage engaged literacy in the capital, and also to provide an outlet for critical texts and authors. During this period, Beti also supported John Fru Ndi, an anglophone opposition leader. He created associations for the defence of citizens and gave to the press numerous articles of protest. The government attempted to hinder his activities. On his first return to Cameroon, police prevented him from speaking at a scheduled conference; Beti instead addressed a crowd outside the locked conference room. He was subjected in January 1996, in the streets of Yaoundé, to police aggression. He was challenged at a demonstration in October 1997. In response he published several novels: *L'histoire du fou* in 1994 then the two initial volumes *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999) et *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (2000), of a trilogy which would remain unfinished. He was hospitalized in Yaoundé on October 1, 2001 for acute hepatic and kidney failure which remained untreated for lack of dialysis. Transported to the hospital at Douala on

October 6, he died there on October 8, 2001. Some critics noted the similarity of his death to that of his heroine Perpetua, who also died while awaiting treatment in one of the country's overburdened hospitals.

Work

From beginning to end, Beti's work was informed by two principles. In terms of style, he was a realist. In a critical statement published in 1955, he asserted that "Given the modern conceptions of the beautiful in literature, given at the very least these essential conceptions, if a work is realistic it has many chances of being good; if not, supposing even that it has formal qualities, it risks lacking resonance, profundity, that of which all literature has the greatest need -- the human; from which it follows that it has much less chance of being good -- if only it had some -- than a realistic work." Beti's fiction remains true to this credo. Thematically, Beti's work is unified by an unwavering commitment to combatting colonialism, both overt and covert. Beti's aim always, even in his harsh criticism of Cameroon's independence

government, was to strengthen African autonomy and prosperity.

"Sans haine et sans amour", 1953, is a short story and Beti's first significant work.

Ville cruelle

1954: Like many first novels by African writers, Beti's first novel features a young protagonist caught between European and African cultures. Banda, the novel's protagonist, is attempting to marry the woman of his choice; he is able to do so by way of a string of improbable coincidences. The novel is not widely read now; Beti published it under the pseudonym Eza Boto, a nom de plume he did not use later in order to dissociate himself from the work. Still, the novel received praise from some critics, such as David Diop, who praised its rigorous depiction of the damage wrought by colonialism.

Le pauvre Christ de Bomba

1956. Beti's breakthrough success. Written as the journal of a young priest's assistant, the novel tells the story of a missionary in the 1930s. The priest slowly realizes the futility and pointlessness of attempting to convert Africans who, as he concludes, already worshipped God in their own way. Gerald Moore notes that in this novel, Beti has learned to use his protagonist's naivete as a tool of satire: the apprentice's simplistic reflections on his experiences with the priest "becomes the pure mirror through which we see the greed, the folly, and the tragic misunderstandings of a whole epoch in Africa's history."

Mission terminée

1957: A comic novel describing the visit of a young Cameroonian man with a western education to a village in the interior. Jean-Marie Medza, the protagonist, has just failed his Baccalauréat exam. He returns home expecting humiliation. Instead, he is charged with the duty of travelling to Kala, a remote village, to secure the return of a young woman who has fled her abusive, domineering husband. In Kala, Medza falls in with a

group of friends his own age. The bulk of the novel depicts a series of farcical misadventures that give Medza a deeper understanding of his own culture and of himself. The English translation is titled *Mission to Kala*.

The novel was well received, winning the Prix Sainte-Beuve in 1958. Wole Soyinka praised its realism, writing "Idealization is a travesty of literary truth; worse still, it betrays only immature hankerings of the creative impulse." The novel also received somewhat contradictory criticism; Chinua Achebe chided Beti for romanticizing the pre-colonial past, while Donatus Nwoga criticized Beti's "cynicism" on the same topic.

Le roi miraculé : chronique des Essazam

1958: Describes the transformation of a fictional African town by capitalism, Christianity, and colonialism. The hero here, Le Guen, had been a minor character in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*; this novel is set shortly after World War II. Le Guen takes advantage of a seemingly miraculous recovery from death to convince the local Chief of Essazam to embrace Christianity. The Chief

does so zealously, but his repudiation of his many wives leads to chaos, as each jockeys for the right to be his one "true" wife. This chaos alarms both the Church and the colonial administration; at the end, Le Guen is transferred, and Essazam returns to its traditional ways.

Main basse sur le Cameroun and Les procès du Cameroun

both 1972; these lengthy essays marked Beti's return to public writing. Both were inspired by Beti's dissatisfaction with the post-independence governments of Ahmadou Ahidjo; this discontent was sparked by the arrest and ultimate execution of UPC activist Ernest Ouandie and Bishop Albert Ndongmo on charges of conspiring to overthrow the government. The works, which took a firm line against neocolonialism, were prohibited both in Cameroon and in France until Beti's legal challenge proved successful in 1976. Beti revised and reissued them in the early 1980s.

Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur

1974. Beti's first novel since *The Miraculous King*. It is sometimes considered part of a trilogy that also includes *Remember Ruben* and *Remember Ruben 2*; however, both in theme and in treatment it is markedly different. The novel treats the investigation of a man, Essola, into the circumstances of the death of his sister. He finds that his greedy parents had forced her into a loveless and inappropriate marriage; her ill-treatment at the hands of her husband began a chain of events that led to her death. The novel is at once a realistic exposition of postcolonial conditions in the nation and an allegory: Perpetua is developed as a symbol of the nation, and her inappropriate marriage symbolizes the squalid and incomplete liberation of the country as a whole.

- *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, 1978 - 1991.
- *Les langues africaines et le néo-colonialisme en Afrique francophone*, 1982.
- *Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama, futur camionneur*, 1983.
- *La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama*, 1984.

- *Lettre ouverte aux Camerounais*, or, *La deuxième mort de Ruben Um Nyobé*, 1986.

Dictionnaire de la négritude

1989; Edited, with Odile Tobner and contributors to the review *Peuples noirs - Peuples africains*. In this work, Beti set out to clarify (and in large part to reject) the doctrine of négritude. His stated goal was to move the concept from its origins in racial mythology to a site in history. In this new position, he believed, negritude could be employed as a conceptual tool for understanding not only African experience but also the role of colonialism in shaping that experience. Entries cover the experience of Africans both in Africa and worldwide (the first entry is for Ralph Abernathy).

La France contre l'Afrique: retour au Cameroun

1993. This work of journalism chronicles Beti's return to Cameroon in 1991. He treats not only his own experiences, which included long-delayed reunions and police harassment, but also his impressions of what more

than two decades of nominal independence and autocratic rule had done to the material and psychological conditions of his countrypeople.

- *L'histoire du fou*, 1994.
- *Trop de soleil tue l'amour*, 1999.
- *Branle-bas en noir et blanc*, 2000.

Bessie Head

Bessie Emery Head (6 July 1937 – 17 April 1986), though born in South Africa, is usually considered Botswana's most influential writer.

Biography

Bessie Emery Head was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the child of a wealthy white South African woman and a black servant when interracial relationships were illegal in South Africa. It was claimed that her mother was mentally ill so that she could be sent to a quiet location to give birth to Bessie without the neighbours knowing. However, the exact circumstances are disputed, and some of Bessie Head's comments, though often quoted as straight autobiography, are in fact from fictionalized settings.

In the 1950s and '60s she was a teacher, then a journalist for the South African magazine *Drum*. In 1964 she moved to Botswana (then still the Bechuanaland Protectorate) as a refugee, having been peripherally

involved with Pan-African politics. It would take 15 years for Head to obtain Botswana citizenship. Head settled in Serowe, the largest of Botswana's "villages" (i.e. traditional settlements as opposed to settler towns). Serowe was famous both for its historical importance, as capital of the Bamangwato people, and for the experimental Swaneng school of Patrick van Rensburg. The deposed chief of the Bamangwato, Seretse Khama, was soon to become the first President of independent Botswana.

Her early death in 1986 (aged 48) from hepatitis came just at the point where she was starting to achieve recognition as a writer and was no longer so desperately poor.

Writing

Most of Bessie Head's important works are set in Serowe, in particular the three novels *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power*. One of her best works is *When Rain Clouds Gather*, in which she writes about a troubled young man called Makhaya who runs

away from his birthplace, South Africa, to become a refugee in a little village called Golema Mmidi, in the heart of Botswana. Here he is faced with many challenges, one of which is the fact that Chief Matenge does not allow his presence in the village. He meets a white man named Gilbert and starts a whole new journey into the unknown.

Head also published a number of short stories, including the collection *The Collector of Treasures*. She published a book on the history of Serowe, the village she settled in, called *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. Her last novel, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, is historical, set in 19th-century Botswana. She had also written a story of two prophets, one wealthy and one who lived poorly called "Jacob: The Faith-Healing Priest".

Head's work, which emphasised the value of ordinary life and humble people, was more in touch with an earlier trend in African writing than many recent writers, who have made overtly political comments. Her writing has endured nonetheless. Religious ideas feature

prominently at times, as in the work *A Question of Power*. It is interesting to note that Head was initially brought up as a Christian; however, she was later influenced by Hinduism (to which she was exposed through South Africa's Indian community).

Most of her writing took place while she was in exile in Botswana. An exception is the early novel *The Cardinals* (published posthumously), written before she left South Africa.

In some ways Bessie Head remained an outsider in her adopted country, and some discern she had something of a love-hate relationship with it. At times she suffered mental health problems and on one occasion put up a public notice making bizarre and shocking allegations about then President Sir Seretse Khama, which led to a period in Lobatse Mental Hospital. *A Question of Power* is based partly on those experiences.

Honours and awards

In 2003 she was awarded the South African "Order of Ikhamanga in Gold" for her "exceptional contribution to literature and the struggle for social change, freedom and peace."

Legacy

In 2007 the Bessie Head Heritage Trust was established, along with the Bessie Head Literature Awards. In July 2007 the library in Pietermaritzburg was renamed the Bessie Head library in her honour.

Bibliography

- *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968)
- *Maru* (1971)
- *A Question of Power* (1973)
- *Looking for a Rain God* (1977)
- *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* (1977)
- *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981)
- *A Bewitched Crossroad* (1984)
- *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989)

- *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990)
- *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head, 1965-1979* (1991)
- *The Cardinals* (1993)
- *Imaginative Trespasser: Letters between Bessie Head, Patrick and Wendy Cullinan 1963-1977* (2005)

Adelaide Fassinou

Adelaide H. Edith Bignon Fassinou (born September 15, 1955 in Porto-Novo) is a Beninese writer and Benin's General Secretary for UNESCO. She has written four novels in French. Her married name is Allagbada.

Publications

- *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. Paris: L'Harmattan (Collection Encres Noires no 194), 2000. (130 pp.). ISBN 2-7384-909. Novel.
- *Yémi ou le miracle de l'amour*. Cotonou (Bénin): Editions du Flamboyant, 2000 (142 pp.). ISBN 99919-41-04-5.
- *L'Oiseau messager*. Cotonou: Editions Ruisseaux d'Afrique, 2002 (24 pp.). ISBN 99919-972-3-7.
- *Toute une vie ne suffirait pas pour en parler*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002 (194 pp.). ISBN 2-7475-3344-1. Nouvelles.
- *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*. Cotonou: Editions du Flamboyant, 2003 (172 pp.). ISBN 99919-41-39-8. Roman.

- *Jeté en pâture*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005 (228 pp.). ISBN 2-7475-8718-5. Roman.
- *La petite fille des eaux*. Bertoua/Cameroun: Editions Ndzé: 2006 (96 pp.). ISBN 2-911464-12-5. Roman (co-written with 10 other writers).

Pepetela

Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana dos Santos (born 1941) is a major Angolan writer of fiction. He writes under the name **Pepetela**.

A white Angolan, Pepetela was born in Benguela, Portuguese Angola, and fought as a member of the MPLA in the long guerrilla war for Angola's independence. Much of his writing deals with Angola's political history in the 20th century. *Mayombe*, for example, is a novel that portrays the lives of a group of MPLA guerrillas who are involved in the anti-colonial struggle in Cabinda, *Yaka* follows the lives of members of a white settler family in the coastal town of Benguela, and *A Geração da Utopia* reveals the disillusionment of young Angolans during the post-independence period. Pepetela has also written about Angola's earlier history in *A Gloriosa Família* and *Lueji*, and has expanded into satire with his series of Jaime Bunda novels. His most recent works include *Predadores*, a scathing critique of Angola's ruling classes, *O Quase Fim do Mundo*, a post-

apocalyptic allegory, and *O Planalto e a Estepe*, a look at Angola's history and connections with other former communist nations. Pepetela won the Camões Prize, the world's highest honour for Lusophone literature, in 1997. Pepetela is a Kimbundu word that means "eyelash," translation of his surname, "pestanda" in Portuguese. The author received this nom de guerre during his time as an MPLA combatant.

Early life

Pepetela was born in Benguela, Portuguese Angola, to white Angolan parents. His mother's family had been an influential commercial and military family in the Moçâmedes (present-day Namibe) region of Angola, his great grandfather having been a major in the Portuguese Army. His mother's family had been in Angola for five generations, whereas his father was born in Angola to Portuguese parents and spent much of his childhood in mainland Portugal. Pepetela had a middle-class upbringing in Benguela, attending a school where students of all races and classes intermingled. He has

claimed that being raised in Benguela gave him more opportunities to befriend people of other races, because Benguela was a much more mixed city than many others in Angola were during the colonial era. He also claims that he began to develop a class consciousness during his school days, noticing the differences between his own lifestyle and the lives of friends who lived in a nearby slum area. In an interview with Michel Laban, he claims that his upbringing also influenced his political views. He had an uncle who was a journalist and writer and who exposed him to many important leftist thinkers. His father also had a considerable library that allowed the young Pepetela to learn more about the French Revolution, something that influenced him profoundly.

When he was 14, the young Pepetela moved to Lubango (then Sá da Bandeira), to continue his studies because there was no high school in Benguela at the time. In Lubango, Pepetela claimed that he became more aware of the problems of race in Angola, as Lubango was a much more segregated community than Benguela. In Lubango he was influenced by a leftist priest, Padre

Noronha, who taught him about the Cuban Revolution and kept him abreast of current events. Upon finishing his schooling in Lubango, Pepetela travelled to Portugal where he began to study engineering. While at the Instituto Superior Técnico in Lisbon he befriended other Angolan students who were associated with the Casa dos Estudantes do Império, the student association of Portuguese students from the overseas. After two years of study he decided that engineering would not fulfill his interests, and he tried to enter the History course at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. However, with the start of the Portuguese Colonial War home in Angola, he was summoned to serve in the Portuguese Armed Forces and decided to flee Portugal.

Novels

- *As Aventuras de Ngunga*, 1972
- *Muana Puó*, 1978
- *Mayombe*, 1980
- *O Cão e os Caluandas*, 1985
- *Yaka*, 1985

- *Luandando*, 1990
- *Lueji, o Nascimento de um Império*, 1990
- *A Geração da Utopia*, 1992
- *O Desejo de Kianda*, 1995
- *Parábola do Cágado Velho*, 1996
- *A Gloriosa Família*, 1997
- *A Montanha da Água Lilás*, 2000
- *Jaime Bunda, Agente Secreto*, 2001
- *Jaime Bunda e a Morte do Americano*, 2003
- *Predadores*, 2005
- *O Terrorista de Berkeley, Califórnia*, 2007
- *O Quase Fim do Mundo*, 2008
- *O Planalto e a Estepe*, 2009

Plays

- *A Corda*, 1978
- *A Revolta da Casa dos Ídolos*, 1980

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 reimagined 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.

*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my fort; he also is become my salvation.
And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people. Isaiah xli. 1, 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 Alrick 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	Herself	Nominated
	for an Enduring		
	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

Kama Sywor Kamanda

Kama Sywor Kamanda is an award-winning writer and poet from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Biography

Kamanda Kama Sywor was born on November 11, 1952, in Luebo, Democratic Republic of Congo, from father Malaba Kamenga and mother Kony Ngalula.

After publishing a first collection of stories at the age of 15, Kamanda studied literature, journalism, political science, philosophy and law, and worked in journalism. In 1970, he participated in the creation of the Union of Congolese Writers (Union des écrivains congolais). Forced to leave the Congo in 1977 due to his political activities, Kamanda lived in various European countries before settling in Luxembourg.

In 1985, Kamanda was the founding president of the African Association of Writers, of which L. S. Senghor was the honorary president. As a poet, story teller and

novelist, Kamanda subsequently produced a considerable body of literary work, including a dozen anthologies of poetry, several hundred stories, as well as several novels.

Living in perpetual exile, this universal writer has gained worldwide notoriety that has seen him travelling constantly for conferences, poetry readings and festivals.

Kamanda's works have been translated into many languages, including English, Japanese, Italian, and Greek. This writer has earned several major prizes and distinctions, including the Paul Verlaine Prize from the Académie française (1987), the Louise Labbé Prize (1990), the Black Africa Grand Prize for Literature (1991), and the Théophile Gautier prize (1993) from the Académie française. In 2005, the International Council for Francophone Studies (Conseil international d'études francophones) conferred upon him the prestigious Maurice-Cagnon Certificate of Honour, for his unique contribution to world francophone literature.

His stories draw their imagery from African traditions, but constitute a universe at the boundary between the

fantastic and the author's own reality. His numerous books of poetry focus on the themes of celebrating Africa and of the pain of exile and solitude, all against a backdrop of fervent celebration of love.

"My poetry speaks of men and women from all continents who fight for a real and just humanism where their dreams can become reality. It's a poetry of life, of love, of hope and of the exaltation of values that encourage the blossoming of the individual within a community where harmony depends upon the contribution of each member." ~ Kama Sywor Kamanda

Literary works

Stories

- Les Contes des veillées africaines, 1967, 1985
- Les Contes du griot, t. I, Préface de Léopold Sedar Senghor, 1988
- Les Contes du griot, t. II (La Nuit des griots), 1991, 1996

- Les contes du griot, t.III (Les Contes des veillées africaines, édition augmentée), 1998
- Les Contes du crépuscule, 2000
- Contes (édition illustrée) 2003
- Contes (Les œuvres complètes) 2004
- Contes africains (Grund) 2006

Poetry

- Chants de brumes. Preface by Jacques Iozard, 1986, 1997, 2002
- Les Résignations. Preface by Mateja Matevski, 1986, 1997
- Éclipse d'étoiles. Preface by Claude Michel Cluny, 1987, 1997
- La Somme du néant. Preface by Pierrette Micheloud, 1989, 1999
- L'Exil des songes. Preface by Marc Alyn, 1992
- Les Myriades des temps vécus. Preface by Mario Luzi, 1992, 1999
- Les Vents de l'épreuve. Preface by Salah Stétié, 1993, 1997

- Quand dans l'âme les mers s'agitent. Preface by Jean-Baptiste Tati Loutard, 1994, 1998
- L'Étreinte des mots. Preface by Maria Luisa Spaziani, 1995
- Le Sang des solitudes, 2002
- Œuvre poétique, 1999
- Oeuvre poétique (édition intégrale), 2008

Novels

- Lointaines sont les rives du destin, 1994, 2000, 2007
- La Traversée des mirages, 2006
- La Joueuse de Kora, 2006
- L'Insondable destin des Hommes, 2013

Essay

- Au-delà de Dieu, au-delà des chimères, 2007

THEATER

- L'Homme torturé, 2013

Translated works

- English : *Wind Whispering Soul*, 2001 ; *Tales*, 2001
- Italian : *Le miriadi di tempi vissuti*, 2004 ; *La stretta delle parole*, 2004
- Japanese : *Les Contes du griot*, t. I, 2000 ; t. II, 2005
- Chinese : *Les Contes du griot*, t. I, 2003 ; t. II, 2004

Prizes and distinctions

- French Academy Paul Verlaine award, 1987
- Louise Labé award, 1990
- Black Africa Association of French-Speaking Writers, 1991
- Special Poetry Award, Academic Institute of Paris, 1992
- Silver Jasmin for Poetical Originality, Agen, 1992
- French Academy Théophile Gautier award, 1993

- Melina Mercouri award, Greek Poets and Writers Association, 1999
- Poet of the Millennium 2000 award, International Poets Academy, India, 2000
- Honorary Citizen Joal-Fadiouth, Senegal, 2000
- Poetry award, International Society of Greek Writers, 2002
- Exceptional Contribution Honor Certificate Maurice-Cagnon, International Council for French Studies, 2005
- Master Diploma for Specialty Honors in Writing, World Academy of Letters, United States of America, 2006
- French Academy Heredia award, 2009

Kofi Awoonor

Kofi Awoonor (13 March 1935 – 21 September 2013) was a Ghanaian poet and author whose work combined the poetic traditions of his native Ewe people and contemporary and religious symbolism to depict Africa during decolonization. He started writing under the name **George Awoonor-Williams**. He taught African literature at the University of Ghana. Professor Awoonor was among those who were killed in the September 2013 attack at Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, where he was a participant at the Storymoja Hay Festival

Biography

Awoonor was born in Ghana when it was still called the Gold Coast. He was the eldest of 10 children in the family.¹ He was educated at Achimota School and then proceeded to the University of Ghana. While at university he wrote his first poetry book, *Rediscovery*, published in 1964. Like the rest of his work, *Rediscovery* is rooted in African oral poetry. In Ghana, he managed the Ghana Film Corporation and founded the Ghana Play

House. His early works were inspired by the singing and verse of his native Ewe people.

He then studied literature at University College London, and while in England he wrote several radio plays for the BBC. He spent the early 1970s in the United States, studying and teaching at Stony Brook University (then called SUNY at Stony Brook). While in the USA he wrote *This Earth, My Brother, and My Blood*. Awoonor returned to Ghana in 1975 as head of the English department at the University of Cape Coast. Within months he was arrested for helping a soldier accused of trying to overthrow the military government and was imprisoned without trial and was later released. *The House by the Sea* is about his time in jail. After imprisonment Awoonor became politically active. he continued to write mostly nonfiction. Awoonor was Ghana's ambassador to Brazil from 1984 to 1988, before serving as his country's ambassador to Cuba. From 1990 to 1994 Awoonor was Ghana's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, where he headed

the committee against apartheid. He was also a former Chairman of the Council of State.

Death

On 21 September 2013, Awoonor was among those killed in an attack at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi. He was in Kenya as a participant in the Storymoja Hay Festival, a four-day celebration of writing, thinking and storytelling, at which he was due to perform on the evening of his death. His nephew Nii Parkes, who was attending the same literary festival, has written about meeting him for the first time that day. The Ghanaian government confirmed Awoonor's death the next day. His son Afetsi was also shot, but was later discharged from hospital.

Awoonor's remains were flown from Nairobi to Accra, Ghana, on 25 September 2013.

His body was cremated and buried at particular spot in his hometown at Weta in the Volta Region. Also there

was no crying or mourning at his funeral all according to his will before death.

Works

Poetry

- *Rediscovery and Other Poems* (1964)
- *Night of My Blood* (1971) – poems that explore Awoonor's roots, and the impact of foreign rule in Africa
- *The House By the Sea* (1978)
- *The Promise of Hope: New and Selected Poems* (to be published in 2014)

Understanding and interpreting his works

It is said that Awoonor wrote a great number of his poems as if he was envisioning his own demise. But he is a peculiar and unique writer, one who strives, almost too hard, to bring his ancestry and culture into his poems, sometimes even borrowing words from the local Ewe dialect. Being such a strong and avid practitioner of

the traditional religion meant that he was of a relict species. Especially for one so highly educated, it was an even rarer phenomenon. That awareness, not only that he was a relict specimen as an individual, but that the entire culture was suffering entropy, may have come through his poems in a manner that would suggest at first that he was writing about his mortal end. Besides the personal and cultural lament, Awoonor also shrewdly decried what he would have considered the decadent spectre of Western influences(religions, social organisation and economic philosophy) on the history and fortunes of African people in general. He would lambast the thoughtless exuberance with which Africans themselves embraced such things, and gradually engineered what he would have considered a self-degradation that went far beyond a loss of cultural identity. He would often construct his writings to look at these things through the lens of his own Ewe culture.

Novels

- *This Earth, My Brother* (1971) – a cross between a novel and a poem
- *Comes the Voyager at Last* (1992)

Non-fiction

- *The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History, Culture, and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara* (1975), Anchor Press, ISBN 0-385-07053-5
- *Ghana: A Political History from Pre-European to Modern Times* (1990)
- *The African Predicament: Collection of Essays* (2006)

Benjamin Sehene

Benjamin Sehene (born 1959) is a Rwandan author whose work primarily focuses on questions of identity and the events surrounding the Rwandan genocide. He has spent much of life in Canada and lives in France.

Sehene was born in Kigali to a Tutsi family. His family fled Rwanda in 1963 for Uganda, and he studied in Paris at the Sorbonne in the early 1980s, before emigrating to Canada in 1984. He currently lives in Paris. He is a member of International PEN.

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Sehene returned to Rwanda, hoping to better understand what had happened. He subsequently wrote *Le Piège ethnique* (*The Ethnic Trap*) (1999), a study of ethnic polemics, and *Le Feu sous la soutane* (*Fire under the Cassock*) (2005), an historical novel focusing on the true story of a Hutu Catholic priest, Father Stanislas, who offered protection to Tutsi refugees in his church before sexually exploiting the women and participating in massacres.

Sehene also contributes articles to the online newspaper rue89.

Publications

- *Le Piège Ethnique*(*The Ethnic Trap*)] Dagorno, Paris, (1999) ISBN 2-910019-54-3
- Rwanda's collective amnesia, in *The UNESCO Courier*, (1999).
- *Un sentiment d'insécurité*, Play, Paris, 2001
- "Dead Girl Walking" (short story)
- *Le Feu sous la soutane* (*Fire under the Cassock*), L'Esprit Frappeur, Paris (2005) ISBN 2-84405-222-3
- "Ta Race!" (Short story), Éditions Vents d'Ailleurs, [La Roque d'Anthéron], France, 2006 ISBN 2-911412-40-0
- *Die ethnische Falle* Wespennest 2006

Kofi Aidoo

Kofi Aidoo is a Ghanaian writer. He was born in the 1950s at Sagyimase in the Akim Abuakwa Traditional

Area of Ghana, where he also began his Elementary Education at Asikwa. The first of nine children born to a senior touring officer at the Ghana Prisons Services; his interests in writing began at a very tender age writing short stories on his escapades with his father around the country. While studying at Anum Presbyterian Training College, his literary works found their way into the BBC-Africa Service weekly bulletin. He studied journalism part-time at the Ghana Institute of Journalism while working as a teacher in Accra, and published his first work *Saworbeng*, a collection of eleven stories interspersed with lays to mimic the traditional mode of storytelling.

Works

- *Saworben: a collection of short stories*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977
- *Of Men and Ghosts*, ISBN 978-9964-1-0342-2, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1991. Longman, 1994

J. B. Danquah

Nana **Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah** (December 1895 – 4 February 1965) was a Ghanaian statesman, pan-Africanist, scholar and historian. He played a significant role in pre- and post-colonial Ghana. In fact, he is credited with giving Ghana its name. During his political career, he was one of the primary opposition leaders to Ghanaian president and independence leader Kwame Nkrumah.

Biography

Early life

Danquah was born in the Ghanaian town of Bepong in Kwahu in the Eastern region. He was descended from the royal family of Ofori Panyin Fie, once the rulers of the Akyem states, and still then one of the most influential families in Ghanaian politics. His elder brother is Nana Sir Ofori Atta I and he is the father of actor Paul Danquah.

J. B. Danquah entered the University of London immediately after completing secondary school and was educated in law and philosophy. He was the first continental African to receive a doctorate in law from the University of London. He also became the first president of the West African Students' Union.

Path to Independence

Danquah became a member of the Legislative Council in 1946 and actively pursued independence legislation for his country. He helped to found the pro-independence United Gold Coast Convention. His historical research led him to agree with Dr Kwame Nkrumah's proposition that on independence the Gold Coast be renamed Ghana after the early African empire of that name.

Literary output

Among his writings are *Gold Coast: Akan Laws and Customs and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution* (1928), a play entitled *The Third Woman* (1943), and *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944).

Paulina Chiziane

Paulina "Poulli" Chiziane (born 4 June 1955, Manjacaze, southern province of Gaza, Mozambique) is an author of novels and short stories in the Portuguese language. She studied at Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo. She was born to a Protestant family that moved from Gaza to the capital Maputo (then Lourenço Marques) during the writer's early childhood. At home she spoke Chopi and Ronga.

Chiziane was the first woman in Mozambique to publish a novel. Her writing has generated some polemical discussions about social issues, such as the practice of polygamy in the country. For example, her first novel, *Balada do Amor ao Vento* (1990), discusses polygamy in southern Mozambique during the colonial period. Related to her active involvement in the politics of Frelimo (Liberation Front of Mozambique), her narrative often reflects the social uneasiness of a country ravaged and divided by the war of liberation and the civil conflicts that followed independence. Her novel

"Niketche: Uma História de Poligamia" won the José Craveirinha Prize in 2003.

Interpretation

Chiziane's writing has often been defined as political and feminist. Writing for this author is a mission. It is a way to express the difficulties that women encounter when faced with the heterogeneity of Mozambican cultural traditions and the newly developed legal and administrative systems. Chiziane's writing addresses regional differences in cultural and political aspects of gender relations. In her novel *Niketche*, for instance, she depicts the Mozambican South as dominated by a patriarchal culture, whereas the North is shaped by traditions of matriarchal rule. She also alludes to the fact that Frelimo itself assumed an ambiguous attitude with regard to polygamy, making it illegal at first, but then tolerating its continuing practice. Throughout her work, Chiziane's attention has focused on broad social issues related to women's rights and concerns, such as monogamy and polygamy, but also on subjective and

intimate relationships between individual men and women. Chiziane has stated that, in accordance with the tradition of her land, she considers herself a storyteller rather than a novelist.

Novels

- *Balada de Amor ao Vento* (1990) ISBN 978-972-21-1557-5
- *Ventos do Apocalipse* (1996) ISBN 972-21-1262-7
- *O Setimo Juramento* (2000) ISBN 972-21-1329-1
- *Niketche: Uma História de Poligamia* (2002) - Companhia das Letras, ISBN 85-359-0471-9
- *O Alegre Canto da Perdiz* (2008) - Caminho, ISBN 978-972-21-1976-4.

Lília Momplé

Biography

Lília Momplé was born on the Island of Mozambique, into a family of mixed ethnic origins, including Makua, French, Indian, Chinese, and Mauritian. She attended the Instituto Superior de Serviço Social (Higher Institute of Social Service) in Lisbon and graduated with a degree in Social Services. In 1995, she became secretary general of the Association of Mozambican Authors, a position she held until 2001. She also represented Mozambique at various international meetings.

Literary career

Many of Momplé's literary influences came from her grandmother, who, although she could not read or write, would always tell stories. These stories inspired young Lília because their heroes were often fragile creatures, rather than more typically powerful ones. Portuguese writers, such as Eça de Queirós and Fernando Pessoa, also influenced Momplé's career path. However, it was

not until she read the writings of the Mozambican poet José Craveirinha that she made the decision to become a writer. Craveirinha was the first Mozambican author to portray African characters as protagonists in his poetry. Since Momplé was a teacher for many years, many of her stories focus on topics related to education. In her works, Lília Momplé also explores the traditional duties of women and expectations attending them within society, along with the hardships they face. She tends to emphasize issues of race, class, gender, and color and ethnic differences in her fiction.

Literary works

- *Ninguém Matou Suhura (No One Killed Suhura)*, 1988
- *Neighbours*, 1995
- *Os Olhos da Cobra Verde (The Eyes of the Green Snake)*, 1997

Mia Couto

António Emílio Leite Couto (born July 5, 1955), better known as **Mia Couto**, is a world-renowned Mozambican writer and the winner of the 2014 Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Life

Early years

Couto was born in the city of Beira, Mozambique's second largest city, where he was also raised and schooled. He is the son of Portuguese emigrants who moved to the former Portuguese colony in the 1950s. At the age of fourteen, some of his poetry was published in a local newspaper, *Notícias da Beira*. Three years later, in 1971, he moved to the capital Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) and began to study medicine at the University of Lourenço Marques. During this time, the anti-colonial guerrilla and political movement FRELIMO was struggling to overthrow the Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique.

After independence of Mozambique

In April 1974, after the Carnation Revolution in Lisbon and the overthrow of the *Estado Novo* regime, Mozambique was about to become an independent republic. In 1974, FRELIMO asked Couto to suspend his studies for a year to work as a journalist for *Tribuna* until September 1975 and then as the director of the newly created Mozambique Information Agency (AIM). Later, he ran the *Tempo* magazine until 1981. His first book of poems, *Raiz de Orvalho*, was published in 1983; it included texts aimed against the dominance of Marxist militant propaganda. Couto continued working for the newspaper *Notícias* until 1985 when he resigned to finish his course of study in biology.

Literary work

Not only is Mia Couto considered one of the most important writers in Mozambique, but many of his works have been published in more than 20 countries and in various languages, including Portuguese, English, French, German, Italian, Serbian and Catalan. In many

of his texts, he undertakes to recreate the Portuguese language by infusing it with regional vocabulary and structures from Mozambique, thus producing a new model for the African narrative. Stylistically, his writing is influenced by magical realism, a style popular in modern Latin American literatures, and his use of language is reminiscent of the Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa, but also deeply influenced by the baiano writer Jorge Amado. He has been noted for creating proverbs, sometimes known as "improverbs", in his fiction, as well as riddles, legends, metaphors, giving his work a poetical dimension. An international jury at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair named his first novel, *Terra Sonâmbula* (Sleepwalking Land), one of the best 12 African books of the 20th century. In 2007, he became the first African author to win the prestigious Latin Union literary prize, which has been awarded annually in Italy since 1990. Mia Couto became only the fourth writer in the Portuguese language to take home this prestigious award, having competed against authors from Portugal, France, Colombia, Spain, Italy, and Senegal. Currently, he is a biologist employed by the

Limpopo Transfrontier Park while continuing his work on other writing projects.

Awards and honors

- 2014 Neustadt International Prize for Literature
- 2007 Latin Union Prize

Books

- *Raiz do Orvalho* (poetry, 1983)
- *Vozes Anotecidas* (short stories, 1986). [*Voices Made Night*. Translated by David Brookshaw. (1990) ISBN 0-435-90570-8]
- *Cada Homem É uma Raça* (short stories, 1990) ISBN 972-21-0071-8
- *Cronicando* (crônicas, 1991) ISBN 972-21-0585-X
- *Terra Sonâmbula* (novel, 1992) ISBN 972-21-0790-9 [*Sleepwalking Land*. Translated by David Brookshaw. (2006) ISBN 1-85242-897-X]
- *Estórias Abensonhadas* (short stories, 1994) ISBN 972-21-0933-2

- *Every man is a race* [Translation of selected works from: *Cada homem é uma raça*, and *Cronicando*; translated by David Brookshaw] (1994) ISBN 0-435-90982-7
- *A Varanda do Frangipani* (novel, 1996) ISBN 972-21-1050-0 [*Under the Frangipani*. Translated by David Brookshaw. (2001) ISBN 0-86486-378-0]
- *Contos do Nascer da Terra* (short stories, 1997)
- *Mar Me Quer* (novella, 1998)
- *Vinte e Zinco* (novella, 1999) ISBN 972-21-1250-3
- *Raiz de orvalho e outros poemas* (1999) ISBN 972-21-1302-X
- *O Último Voo do Flamingo* (novel, 2000) ISBN 972-21-1334-8 [*The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. Translated by David Brookshaw. (2004) ISBN 1852428139]
- *Mar me quer* (2000)
- *O Gato e o Escuro* (children's book, 2001)
- *Na Berma de Nenhuma Estrada e Outros Contos* (short stories, 2001)

- *Um Rio Chamado Tempo, uma Casa Chamada Terra* (novel, 2002)
- *Contos do Nascer da Terra* (short stories, 2002)
- *O País do Queixa Andar* (crônicas, 2003)
- *O Fio das Missangas* (short stories, 2003)
- *A chuva pasmada* (2004) ISBN 972-21-1654-1
- *Pensatempos: textos de opinião* (2005) ISBN 972-21-1687-8
- *O Outro Pé da Sereia* (novel, 2006) ISBN 972-21-1795-5
- *Venenos de Deus, Remédios do Diabo* (novel, 2008) ISBN 978-972-21-1987-0
- *Jesusalém* (novel, 2009)
- *A Confissão da Leoa* (novel, 2012)

Abdulrazak Gurnah

Abdulrazak Gurnah (born 1948 in Zanzibar) is a Tanzanian novelist based in the United Kingdom.

Career

From 1980 to 1982, Gurnah lectured at the Bayero University Kano in Nigeria. He then moved to the University of Kent, where he earned his PhD in 1982. He is now a Professor and Director of Graduate studies there within the Department of English. His main academic interest is in postcolonial writing and in discourses associated with colonialism, especially as they relate to Africa, the Caribbean and India. He has edited two volumes of *Essays on African Writing*, has published articles on a number of contemporary postcolonial writers, including V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and Zoe Wicomb. He is the editor of *A Companion to Salman Rushdie* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).`

Gurnah has supervised research projects on the writing of Rushdie, Naipaul, G. V. Desani, Anthony Burgess, Joseph Conrad, George Lamming and Jamaica Kincaid.

Novels

- *Memory of Departure* (1987)
- *Pilgrims Way* (1988)
- *Dottie* (1990)
- *Paradise* (1994)
- *Admiring Silence* (1996)
- *By the Sea* (2001)
- *Desertion* (2005)
- *The Last Gift* (2011)

The most famous of these are *Paradise*, *Desertion* and *By the Sea*, the first of which was shortlisted for both the Booker and the Whitbread Prize. *By the Sea*, meanwhile, was longlisted for the Booker and shortlisted for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award.

Short stories

- *My Mother Lived on a Farm in Africa* (2006)

Adelaide Casely-Hayford

Adelaide Casely-Hayford, *née Smith* (27 June 1868—16 January 1960), was a Sierra Leone Creole advocate, an activist for cultural nationalism, educator, short story writer, and feminist. She established a school for girls in 1923 to instil cultural and racial pride during the colonial years under British rule. Promoting the preservation of Sierra Leone national identity and cultural heritage, in 1925 she wore a traditional African costume to attend a reception in honour of the Prince of Wales, where she created a sensation.

Early life and education

Adelaide Smith was born on 27 June 1868 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to a mixed-race father (of English and royal Fanti parentage) from the Gold Coast and a Creole mother of English, Jamaican Maroon, and Sierra Leone Liberated African ancestry. The young Adelaide and her sisters spent most of their childhood and adolescence in England, where her father had retired in 1872 with his family on a pension of 666 poundsterling. She attended

Jersey Ladies' College (now Jersey College for Girls), then at the age of 17 went to Stuttgart, Germany, to study music at the Stuttgart Conservatory. She returned to England, where, together with her sister, she opened a boarding home for African bachelors who were there as students or workers.

Marriage and family

While in England, Adelaide Smith married J. E. Casely Hayford (a.k.a. Ekra-Agiman). Their marriage may have given her a deeper insight into African culture and influenced her transformation into a cultural nationalist. Their daughter Gladys Casely-Hayford became a well-known Creole poet.

Return to Freetown

After twenty-five years abroad, Casely-Hayford and her sisters returned to Sierra Leone. Inspired by the ideas of racial pride and co-operation advanced by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), she joined the Ladies Division of the Freetown

Branch. She rose to be its president. In June 1920, she resigned from the association because of a conflict of interest between it and her proposed Girls' Vocational School. She toured the United States, giving public lectures to correct American notions about Africa.

Back in Freetown, Casely-Hayford embarked on establishing a vocational institution to help girls learn their cultural background and instil national pride. In October 1923, the Girls' Vocational School opened in the Smith family home with fourteen pupils. As principal, Casely-Hayford would have preferred the pupils to wear native dress to school, but their parents rejected this idea.

She spent her later years writing her memoirs and short stories. Her short story "Mista Courifer" was featured in Langston Hughes' *African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems* (1960), a collection of short works by African writers, published in the United States.

Legacy and honors

Casely-Hayford opposed the injustices of the colonial system and advocated cultural nationalism, earning the respect of British authorities.

- 1935, she was awarded the King's Silver Jubilee Medal.
- 1950, she received the MBE.

Arthur Shearly Cripps

Arthur Shearly Cripps (10 June 1869 - 1 August 1952) was an English Anglican priest, missionary and activist, short story writer, and poet who spent most of his life in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Biography

Cripps was born in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, and was educated at Charterhouse School and Trinity College, Oxford, where he read history. He then trained at Cuddeston Theological College, taking holy orders, and from 1894 had the parish Ford End in Essex.

He became a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, intending to work in Mashonaland, after reading criticism of the methods of Cecil Rhodes. From 1902 he had a parish near Enkeldoorn (now known as Chivhu) in what was then Southern Rhodesia.

He was in conflict with the British South Africa Company over land distribution, taking the side of the African population. He was given the Shona name *Mpandi*, or 'the man who walks like thunder'. After more than 20 years he returned to England for a time after a quarrel with the British administration; but went back shortly for the rest of his life, having in 1927 published *Africa for Africans*, on the land issue.

Arthur Cripps lived for some time in Manyene Communal Lands, about 120 km South of Harare, 20 km North of Chivhu. An area of Manyene is now known by the name he gave it when he established the mission work there, Maronda Mashanu, which means "The Five Wounds" in the local Shona language. Father Cripps was buried in the chancel of the church (now a ruin) at Maronda Mashanu.

Some people from the area believe that Arthur Cripps performed miracles. For example there are claims that a white man who wanted to assault him for associating with Africans was crippled the moment he raised his

hand. They claim that the man was only healed when Father Cripps prayed for him.

His great-great-nephew is the Welsh poet, Owen Sheers, who has written about him in the award-winning *Dust Diaries* (2004).

Legacy

In his research on his great-great-uncle, Owen Sheers attended the annual memorial service at Cripps' grave.

“There were huge crowds of people dancing around the grave,” said Sheers. “It was fascinating that a missionary priest who had gone out there at the turn of the century in a period when the British were more or less the bad guys was still being honoured almost 50 years after his death.”

There is also a road in Harare, Cripps Road, named after Arthur Cripps.

Works

- *Titania and Other Poems* (1900)
- *Primavera: Poems by Four Authors* (1900)
- *Jonathan: A Song of David* (1902)
- *The Black Christ* (1902) poems
- *Magic Casements* (1905)
- *Lyra Evangelistica: Missionary Verses of Mashonaland* (1909)
- *Faerylands Forlorn: African Tales* (1910)
- *The Two of Them Together: A Tale About Africa To-Day* (1910)
- *The Brooding Earth* (1911) novel
- *Pilgrimage of Grace, Verses on a Mission* (1912)
- *Bay-Tree Country* (1913) novel
- *Pilgrim's Joy Verses* (1916)
- *Lake and War: African Land and Water Verses* (1917)
- *Cinderella in the South: South African Tales* (1918)
- *An Africa for Africans: A Plea on Behalf of Territorial Segregation Areas and Their Freedom in a Southern African Colony* (1927)
- *Africa: Verses* (1939)

Dambudzo Marechera

Dambudzo Marechera (born Charles William Dambudzo Marechera, June 4, 1952, Rusape, Southern Rhodesia – August 18, 1987, Harare) was a Zimbabwean novelist and poet.

Early life

Marechera was born in Vhengere Township, Rusape, Zimbabwe (then known as Southern Rhodesia), to Isaac Marechera, a mortuary attendant, and Masvotwa Venenzia Marechera, a maid.

In his 1978 book, *The House of Hunger*, and in interviews, Marechera often falsely suggests that his father was either run over by "a 20th century train" or "came home with a knife sticking from his back" or "was found in the hospital mortuary with his body riddled with bullets". Such incorrect accounts may be part of Marechera's penchant to revise even the "facts" of his own life. German researcher, Flora-Veit Wild seems to give too much weight to an account given by

Marechera's older brother, Michael, about the destructive element in the younger Marechera's life. Michael suggests that Dambudzo was a victim of their mother's muti, implying that he was cursed in some way. Interestingly, when Marechera returned from London and was made writer-in-residency at the University of Zimbabwe, his mother and sisters attempted to come and meet him but he rejected them offhand, accusing the mother of trying to kill him. Still, it is known that Marechera never even made an effort to meet with any member of his family until he died in 1987.

He grew up amid racial discrimination, poverty, and violence. He attended St. Augustine's Mission, Penhalonga, where he clashed with his teachers over the colonial teaching syllabus, the University of Rhodesia (now the University of Zimbabwe), from which he was expelled during student unrest, and New College, Oxford, where his unsociable behaviour and academic dereliction led to another expulsion.

In his short career he published a book of stories, two novels (one posthumously), a book of plays, prose, and poetry, and a collection of poetry (also posthumous).

Works

His first book, *The House of Hunger* (1978), is the product of a period of despair following his time at Oxford. Among the nine stories it contains, the long title story describes the narrator's brutalized childhood and youth in colonial Rhodesia in a style that is emotionally compelling and verbally pyrotechnic. The narrative is characterized by shifts in time and place and a blurring of fantasy and reality. Regarded as signalling a new trend of incisive and visionary African writing, the book was awarded the 1979 *Guardian* fiction prize.

Black Sunlight (1980) has been compared with the writing of James Joyce and Henry Miller but it did not achieve the critical success of *House of Hunger*. Loosely structured and stylistically hallucinatory, with erudite digressions on various literary and philosophical points of discussion, Marechera's second book explores the idea

of anarchism as a formal intellectual position. *The Black Insider*, posthumously published in 1990, is set in a faculty of arts building that offers refuge for a group of intellectuals and artists from an unspecified war outside, which subsequently engulfs them as well. The conversation of the characters centres on African identity and the nature of art, with the protagonist arguing that the African image is merely another chauvinistic figure of authority.

At Oxford University, Marechera struck his professors as a very intelligent but rather anarchic student who had no particular interest in adhering to course syllabi, choosing rather to read whatever struck his fancy. He also had a reputation for being a quarrelsome young man who did not hesitate to fight his antagonists physically, especially in the pubs around Oxford. He began to display erratic behaviour that may have been a result of excessive drinking or culture shock but which the school psychologist diagnosed as schizophrenia. Marachera threatened to murder certain people and attempted to set the university on fire. He was also famous - or notorious

- for having no respect for authority derived from notions of racial or class superiority. For trying to set the college on fire, Marechera was given two options: either to submit to a psychiatric examination or be sent down; he chose the latter, charging that they were mentally raping him.

At this point, the trajectory of Marechera's life became troubled, even landing him in a Welsh jail for possession of marijuana. He joined the rootless communities around Oxford and other places, sleeping in friends' sitting-rooms and writing various fictional and poetic pieces on park benches and regularly getting mugged by thugs and terrorized by the police for vagrancy. During this period he also lived for many months in the squatting community at Tolmers Square in central London, and it is believed that this is where he finished writing his first book. It was thus from the combined experiences at the University of Rhodesia, Oxford and vagrancy on the streets of England and Wales that Zimbabwe's most celebrated novel, *The House of Hunger*, emerged. After it was taken on by James Currey at Heinemann and

published in their African Writers series, Marechera became something of an instant celebrity in the literary circles of England. However, his self-destruct button proved irresistible and he constantly caused outrage. At the buffet dinner for the award of the *Guardian* fiction prize to him for *House of Hunger*, in a tantrum Marachera memorably began to launch plates at a chandelier. Nevertheless, Leeds University offered him a position as writer-in-residence - something that Marechera liked to misrepresent as a professorship, though this may have been part of his eccentric tendency to have several narratives for virtually everything about himself.

It seems that Marechera thought the British publishing establishment was ripping him off, so he resorted to raiding the Heinemann offices at odd times to ask for his royalties. Still, he lived in dire poverty and his physical health suffered greatly because he did not eat enough and drank too much. Friends, fellow Zimbabwean students such as Musaemura Zimunya (a poet in his own right), Rino Zhuwarara, Stanley Nyamufukudza (another

gifted writer) and mere casual friends were all suspected by Marechera of being involved in his many troubles even when they acted in good faith. In the end he hung around with the down-and-outs who lived on the fringes of the literary establishment, barging into parties and generally getting into trouble and more than once, being bailed out by Currey. To complicate matters, many Africans, including fellow Zimbabwean students, did not feel Marechera was helping his cause by putting on airs, affecting an upper-class English accent and having an eccentric sense of dress. For his disruptive behaviour, Marechera was regularly thrown out of the Africa Centre, the cultural meeting-place for African and Afrocentric scholars and students. Some accounts suggest that Marechera married to a British woman but not much is known about the union.

Marechera returned to the newly independent Zimbabwe in 1982 to assist in shooting the film of *House of Hunger* but fell out with the director and remained behind in Zimbabwe when the crew left, leading a homeless existence in Harare before his death five years later,

from an AIDS-related pulmonary disorder. *Mindblast; or, The Definitive Buddy* (1984) was written the year after his return home and comprises three plays, a prose narrative, a collection of poems, and a park-bench diary. The book criticizes the materialism, intolerance, opportunism, and corruption of post-independence Zimbabwe, extending the political debate beyond the question of nationalism to embrace genuine social regeneration. The combination of intense self-scrutiny, cogent social criticism, and open, experimental form appealed to a young generation of Zimbabweans, the so-called mindblast generation, who were seeking new ways of perceiving their roles within the emergent nation.

Marechera's poetry was published posthumously under the title *Cemetery of Mind* (1992). Like his stories, his poems show the influence of modernist writers from Arthur Rimbaud and T. S. Eliot to Allen Ginsberg and Christopher Okigbo, and confirm his proclivity for perceptive social critique, intense self-exploration, and verbal daring.

In an interview Marechera said of himself, "I think I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met." This is an accurate assessment of Marechera's role in shocking the reader into looking at himself anew through the eyes of the other. His individualism, literary experimentation, and iconoclasm ensure that his work resists narrow definitions; it is constantly shifting and crossing boundaries.

Marechera's legacy

Dambudzo Marechera remains Zimbabwe's most important cultural product on the creative writing front. Since his death, dozens of younger writers and many of his colleagues have written numerous accounts and biographies detailing his troubled life and works. In the 1990s, the most prominent were foreigners, especially the German scholar, Flora Veit-Wild, who has written both a biography and a sourcebook of Marechera's life and works. What Wild misses dismally is the fact that Marechera edited his own life as he went along. Wild

seems to take many of the things she got from Marechera as facts. In an article in *Wasafiri* magazine in March 2012, Wild answered the question of why she "did not write a proper Dambudzo Marechera biography", by saying: "My answer was that I did not want to collapse his multi-faceted personality into one authoritative narrative but rather let the diverse voices speak for themselves. But this is not the whole truth. I could not write his life story because my own life was so intricately entangled with his." She then described in detail her very personal involvement with him over an eighteen-month period.

Peter Nazareth

Peter Nazareth (born 27 April 1940) is a Ugandan-born critic and writer of fiction and drama.^[1]

Life

Peter Nazareth was born in Uganda of Goan and Malaysian ancestry, and was educated at Makerere University (Uganda) and at the universities of London and Leeds in England.

While residing in Africa, he simultaneously served as senior finance officer in Idi Amin's finance ministry until 1973, when he accepted a fellowship at Yale University (United States) and emigrated from Uganda. He is currently professor of English and African-American World Studies at the University of Iowa (United States), where he is also a consultant to the International Writing Program. Nazareth attracted major media attention for teaching that university's popular course "Elvis as Anthology," which explores the deep mythological roots of Elvis Presley's roles in popular culture.

His literary criticisms have been enriched by his trenchant observations of the fate of diverse global economic and academic migrants, spanning the Asian, African and black American cultural histories. This includes specifically, the Goan diaspora settled in Western countries, the post Idi Amin Asian emigration from Eastern Africa and of the cultural superstitions of the pre Obama presidency of American politics.

Works

Books

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- *Literature and Society in Modern Africa*, East African Literature Bureau, 1972; Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980; published as *An African View of Literature*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.
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- *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978.
- *Literature of the African Peoples*, Study Guide for Independent Study with audiotape/CD, Center for Credit Programs, The University of Iowa, 1983.
- *A Feny Fele*, Budapest: Europa Publishing House, 1984 (selected essays in Hungarian translation)
- *The General is Up*, Toronto: TSAR Books, 1991
- *In the Trickster Tradition: The Novels of Andrew Salkey, Francis Ebejer and Ishmael Reed*, London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, 1994.
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Edited Anthologies

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- *Critical Essays on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, New York: G.K. Hall, 2000
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Significant Essays

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- "Elvis as Anthology," *In Search of Elvis: Music, Race, Art, Religion*, ed. Vernon Chadwick, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997, pages 37–72 plus Endnotes 253–258.
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- "Dark Heart or Trickster?", *The Journal of The Korean Society Nineteenth Century Literature in English*, Vol. 9-3, 2005, pages 291–321 (on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*).

- "Path of Thunder: Meeting Bessie Head", *Research in African Literatures*, ed. John Conteh-Morgan, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Vol. 37, No. 4, Winter 2006, pages 211–229.
- "Heading Them Off at the Pass," *The Critical Response to Ishmael Reed*, ed. Bruce Allen Dick, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999, pages 140–148.

Taban Lo Liyong

Taban Lo Liyong (born 1939) is one of Africa's well-known poets and writers of fiction and literary criticism. His political views, as well as his on-going denigration of the post-colonial system of education in East Africa, have inspired criticism and controversy since the late 1960s.

Biography

He was born in Uganda. After matriculation there, he attended Howard University and the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, where he was the first African to graduate in 1968. On the completion of his studies in the U.S., the tyrannical regime of Idi Amin prevented him from returning to Uganda. He went instead to neighbouring Kenya, and taught at the University of Nairobi. He has also taught at international universities in Sudan, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Japan, and South Africa, and maintains that his diverse experience offers an opportunity to place Africa in a position intellectually on par with the rest of the world, thereby

recognizing its various and valuable contributions to history and scholarship.

In collaboration with Henry Owuor-Anyumba and renowned Kenyan academic and writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he wrote *On the Abolition of the English Department* in 1968. Acknowledging the formidable influence of European literature over African writing, Liyong and his colleagues called for the educational system to emphasize the oral tradition (as a key traditional African form of learning), Swahili literature, as well as prose and poetry from African-American and Caribbean society.

Through *On the Abolition of the English Department*, Lo-Liyong and his allies attempted a re-consideration of the humanities curriculum at the University of Nairobi, most particularly of its investment in foreign (British) literature and culture. They questioned the value of an English Department in an African context: "We have eyes, but we don't see. We have ears, but we don't hear. We can read, but we don't understand what we read."

They suggested that the post-colonial African university must first establish a counter-curriculum of African languages and literatures and then return to a study of European and other world literatures from an African perspective: “If there is a need for ‘study of the historic continuity of a single culture’, why can’t this be African? Why can’t African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?”

Liyong, Owuor-Anyumba, and wa Thiong'o were criticized for advocating cultural or even racial purity within academia. Rather, they sought to re-establish in East Africa traditional modes of knowledge and understanding in literature, in an effort towards authenticity and as a means for the region to better understand itself in the context of national independence. By placing African culture at the centre of education, “all other things [would] be considered in their relevance to [the African] situation, and their contribution towards understanding [itself]”. This philosophy was also politically significant at a time when East African

governing bodies were struggling against the influence of colonial powers such as the U.S. and Britain.

Independently, Liyong has had published over twenty books. These include *Carrying Knowledge Up a Palm Tree* (1998), an anthology of poetry that addresses various contemporary issues and follows African progress in recent history.

The East African Literature Bureau (EALB) published many of Liyong's earlier works in English as well as East African languages. The EALB played an instrumental role in disseminating the opinions of African academics in the period right after Kenyan independence from Britain in 1963. Many of these publications criticized neocolonialism, the new method by which former colonial nations maintained their dominance over the newly independent states. The emerging theories held that East African governments and institutions were manipulated by money and corruption into upholding structures that undermined local culture while uplifting colonial ideals.

Lo-Liyong's work emerges from this environment of cultural and political uncertainty. His work draws on the continent's tradition in its form as well as its content. Of his poetry, Liyong says: "the period of introspection has arrived; personal introspection, communal introspection. Only through introspection can we appraise ourselves more exactly." In one of his most controversial assertions, Liyong rejects long-established literary conventions defined by Aristotle for effective writing. In *The Uniformed Man* (1971), Liyong calls for readers to approach text in a less familiar way, that is, not to follow the usual conventions of literature such as "introduction, exposition, rising action, etc. up to the climax". Instead, text should be unconstrained by expectation and read with a consistent appreciation for "each word, phrase, or sentence".

Lo-Liyong addresses an African audience in the majority of his work, but mostly he attempts to universally put forward the idea that African knowledge is of benefit to the intellectual world at large. African experience, including that of the diaspora, should not be

marginalized intellectually. In his introduction to *The Uniformed Man*, he addresses the issues raised in *On the Abolition of the English Department* when he claims that “the [African] audience can only get full emotional satisfaction when they find that the world of the theatre and their world is completely evoked”.

Despite his various contributions to poetry and fiction, Liyong considers his essays of most significance, calling them “essays with a practical nature”. His eclectic and unconventional approaches to literature and literary theory make him an enduring study and a living icon of African nationalism. He remains a staunch political activist, committed to the causes of exploited communities. He was recently a professor of literature and Head of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Venda in South Africa. Professor Liyong is currently the Acting Vice Chancellor of Juba University in South Sudan. After over 20 years of war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement brought peace to South Sudan and Professor Liyong has returned home to

contribute his outstanding intellectual and managerial prowess.

Bibliography

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- *Franz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* (1971)
- *Another Nigger Dead* (1972)
- *Ballads of Underdevelopment* (1976)
- *Another Last Word* (1990)

Yvonne Vera

Yvonne Vera (September 19, 1964 - April 7, 2005) was an award-winning author from Zimbabwe. Her novels are known for their poetic prose, difficult subject-matter, and their strong women characters, and are firmly rooted in Zimbabwe's difficult past. For these reasons, she has been widely studied and appreciated by those studying postcolonial African literature.

Life

Vera was born in Bulawayo, in what was then Southern Rhodesia, to her mother Ericah Gwetai. At the age of eight, she worked as a cotton-picker near Chegutu. She attended Mzilikazi High School and then taught English literature at Njube High School, both in Bulawayo. In 1987 she travelled to Canada and she married John Jose, a Canadian whom she had met while he was teaching at Njube. At York University, Toronto, she completed an undergraduate degree, a master's and a PhD, and taught literature.

In 1995, Vera returned to Zimbabwe and in 1997 became director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, a gallery that showcases local talent ranging from that of professional artists to school children. In 2004 she went back to Canada, where she died on April 7, 2005, of AIDS-related meningitis.

Works

While at university, Vera submitted a story to a Toronto magazine: the publisher asked for more, so she sat down to write them. Her collection of short stories, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, was published in 1992. It was followed by five completed novels:

- *Nehanda* (1993), short-listed for Commonwealth Writers' Prize
- *Without a Name* (1994), awarded Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Africa and Zimbabwe Publishers' Literary Award
- *Under the Tongue* (1997)

- *Butterfly Burning* (2000), awarded German Literature Prize 2002, chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century in 2002
- *The Stone Virgins* (2002), awarded Macmillan Writers' Prize for Africa

At the time of her death she was working on a new novel, *Obedience*. Her works have been published in Zimbabwe, Canada and several other countries, including translations into Spanish, Italian and Swedish.

Vera wrote obsessively, often for 10 hours a day, and described time when she was not writing as "a period of fasting." Her work was passionate and lyrical. She took on themes such as rape, incest and infanticide, and gender inequality in Zimbabwe before and after the country's war of independence with sensitivity and courage. She said, "I would love to be remembered as a writer who had no fear for words and who had an intense love for her nation." In 2004 she was awarded the Swedish PEN Tucholsky Prize "for a corpus of works dealing with taboo subjects".

Vera also edited several anthologies by Zimbabwean women writers.

Lenrie Peters

Lenrie Leopold Wilfred Peters (1 September 1932 - 28 May 2009) was a Gambian surgeon, novelist, poet and educationist.

Biography

Peters was born in Bathurst (now Banjul) in to Lenrie Ernest Ingram Peters and Kezia Rosemary. Lenrie Sr. was a Sierra Leone Creole of West Indian or black American origin. Kezia Rosemary was a Gambian Creole of Sierra Leonean Creole origin. Lenrie Jr. grew up in Bathurst and moved to Sierra Leone in 1949, where he was educated at the Prince of Wales School, Freetown, gaining his Higher School Certificate in science subjects.

In 1952 he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to read Natural Sciences, graduating with a B.Sc. in 1956; from 1956 to 1959 he worked and studied at the University College Hospital, London, and 1959 was awarded a Medical and Surgery diploma from

Cambridge. Peters worked for the BBC from 1955 to 1968, on their Africa programmes.

While at Cambridge he was elected president of the African Students' Union, and interested himself in Pan-Africanist politics. He also began writing poetry and plays, as well as starting work on his only novel, *The Second Round* (published in 1965). Peters worked in hospitals in Guildford and Northampton before returning to the Gambia, where he had a surgical practice in Banjul. He was a fellow of the West African College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Surgeons in England.

Peters was President of the Historic Commission of Monuments of the Gambia, was president of the board of directors of the National Library of the Gambia and Gambia College from 1979 to 1987, and was a member and President of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) from 1985 to 1991.

He died in Dakar, Senegal, aged 76.

Published works

Poetry

- 1964: *Poems* (Ibadan: Mbari Publications)
- 1967: *Satellites* (London: Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 37)
- 1971: *Katchikali* (London: Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 103) ISBN 0-435-90633-X ; ISBN 0-435-90103-6
- 1981: *Selected Poetry* (London: Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 238) ISBN 0-435-90238-5

Novels

- 1965: *The Second Round* (London: Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 22) ISBN 0-435-90022-6

Aminata Traoré

Aminata Dramane Traoré (born 1947) is a Malian author, politician, and political activist. She served as the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Mali from 1997 to 2000 and is a former coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme. She is the current Coordinator of *Forum pour l'autre Mali* and Associate Coordinator of the International Network for Cultural Diversity and was elected to the board of the International Press Service in July 2005. She is a member of the scientific committee of the Fundacion IDEAS, Spain's Socialist Party's think tank.

Views

Traoré is a prominent critic of globalization and the economic policies of the most developed nations. Specifically, she has voiced opposition to the Western countries' subsidization of their own cotton farmers, which leaves West African countries at a disadvantage in competing for space in Western markets. Traoré is one of the signatories, or members of the *Group of Nineteen*,

of the Porto Alegre Manifesto issued at the 2005 World Social Forum.

She defends Ahmed Sékou Touré, the former president of neighbour country Guinea, saying his bad reputation as a dictator and his attempts at exterminating the Fulas from the Fouta Djalon in Guinea is due to propaganda and misinformation.

Published works

- 1999 *L'étau. L'Afrique dans un monde sans frontières. Babel Actes Sud.*
- 2002 *Le Viol de l'Imaginaire. Fayard/Actes Sud.*
- 2005 *Lettre au Président des Français à propos de la Côte d'Ivoire et de l'Afrique en général. Fayard.*
- 2008 *L'Afrique humiliée. Fayard.*
- 2012 *L'Afrique mutilée. Taama Editions.*

Boubacar Diallo

Boubacar Diallo is a Burkinabé film maker. The son of a veterinarian, he worked as a journalist, launching the satirical weekly magazine *Journal du Jeudi* and publishing two novels and a collection of short stories.

In 2005, he embarked on a new career as a film maker, shooting three films, *Traque à Ouaga*, the romantic comedy *Sofia*, and the Danish coproduction *Dossier brûlant*, a drama.

With the financial assistance of the Francophonie and the French Foreign Ministry, he produced the TV series *Série noire à Koulbi*, a crime drama in 30 15-minute episodes, in 2006.

Asare Konadu

Samuel Asare Konadu (18 January 1932 – 1994) was a Ghanaian journalist, novelist and publisher, who also wrote under the pseudonym **Kwabena Asare Bediako**.

Biography

Born in Asamang, Ashanti Region, Gold Coast, Asare Konadu attended local primary and middle schools before studying at Abuakwa State College. He entered the Ghana Information Service in 1951, and also worked as a reporter for the Gold Coast Broadcasting Service. In 1956 he was sent abroad by the government to study in London and at Strasbourg University, joining the Ghana News Agency on his return to Ghana in 1957. Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* was reviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1969, and as a guest to the United States State Department in 1972 he was interviewed by the Voice of America (VOA).

He also published popular literature from his own imprint, Anowuo Educational Publications, under the name Kwabena Asare Bediako.

Works

- *Wizard of Asamang*, Accra, Ghana: Waterville Pub. House, 1964
- *The Lawyer Who Bungled His Life*, Accra: Waterville Pub. House, 1965
- *Come Back Dora: a husband's confession and ritual*, Accra: Anowuo Educational Publications, 1966
- *Shadow of Wealth*, Accra, Anowuo Educational Publications, 1966
- (as Kwabena Asare Bediako) *Don't Leave me MERCY*, Anowuo Educational Publications, 1966
- (as Kwabena Asare Bediako) *A Husband for Esi Ellua*, Anowuo Educational Publications, 1967
- *A Woman in Her Prime*, 1967. African Writers Series 40. London: Heinemann.

- *Night Watchers of Korlebu*, Accra: Anowuo Educational Publications, 1967
- *Ordained by the Oracle*, 1969. African Writers Series 55. London: Heinemann.
- *Devils in Making*, Accra : Anowuo Educational Publications, 1989
- *The Coup Makers*, Accra : S.A. Konadu; 1994.

Currently, his titles are being published by Adaex Educational Publications.

María Nsúé Angüe

María Nsúé Angüe (born 1945 in Ebebeyín (Río Muni), Spanish Guinea) is a noted contemporary Equatorial Guinean writer and former Minister of Education and Culture.

Background and early life

Born to ethnic Fang parents, she emigrated with her family to Spain when she was only eight years old. In Spain she studied literature and discovered her passion for writing. She returned to Equatorial Guinea and worked for the country's Ministry of Culture and Education. In years following, she decided to abandon Africa to permanently move to Madrid, Spain.

Writings

Acclaimed novel *Ekomo*

Her 1985 novel, and most acclaimed work, *Ekomo* was the first novel written by an Equatoguinean woman to be

published. It tells the story of a Fang woman who breaks taboos by speaking out after the death of her husband.

Poetry, articles and poems

Nsué Angüe has also written several short stories, articles and poems. Frequent topics addressed in her work involve women's rights and post-colonial African society. Much of her work is inspired by popular Fang literature.

Mustafa Mahmud

Mustafa Kamal Mahmoud Husayn (Arabic: مصطفى في كمال محمود حسين) (25 December 1921 – 31 October 2009) commonly known as **Mustafa Mahmud** (Arabic: مصطفى محمود) was an Egyptian scientist and a prolific author. Dr. Mustafa Mahmoud was born in Shibin el-Kom, Munufiyya province, Egypt. He was trained as a doctor, but later chose a career as a journalist and author, traveling widely and writing on many subjects.

Autobiography

The material in this section is derived from self-published information by the subject.

Early life

Mustafa Mahmud says that he was raised in a middle-class family. His father was employed as a secretary in the province of El Gharbiyya. He was a pious man with a model character - exemplary behavior, patience, endurance, persistence and work. He steadfastly

performed his Prayers at the mosque, even the Dawn Prayer which he used to perform in congregation. Furthermore, he was affectionate to his children and sacrificed himself for their sake as did his mother.

Mustafa Mahmud says he led his early life in a pleasant atmosphere wherein there was no oppression or violence. Rather, he enjoyed freedom and responsibility. In his early age in elementary school, he failed three years consecutively (He was good student, but after an Arabic language teacher beat him, he got so angry and he left that school, until that teacher reallocated to teach in another school Mustafa came back to his school to continue studying there), yet he was left without any reproach or blame. In his childhood, he used to lay down ill. Thus, he was deprived of enjoying rough play, and running, which the children used to indulge in. He remained an introvert and spent his early days in imagination and dreams. He dreamed of being a great inventor or a discoverer or a traveler or a famous scientist. His role models were Christopher Columbus, Edison, Marconi and Pasteur.

Living in Tanta next to As Sayyid El Badawy Mosque, attending the celebrations in El Mawlid (a religious festival) and the Sufi and Dervishes' recitals all had a great influence on his psychological and innovative structure.

Mustafa Mahmud's father suffered from paralysis for seven years and died in 1939. His death occurred after he had finished his secondary school, when he was making the decision to join the Faculty of Medicine. Shortly thereafter, his family left Tanta for Cairo along with his mother.

Mustafa Mahmud had described his life during adolescence as similar to that of the taming an unruly horse, the bridle of which was free for one time, and controlled for many others. The struggle was so hard, as it went on for a long time, leaving behind a body covered by wounds and contusions.

Medical Studies

Mustafa Mahmud chose medicine as a field of study. In his autobiography, he says that he felt content with it, and that he would be able to acquire science and knowledge of the mysteries. The study was intense, and it required strong desire, concentration, and devotion. Even though he needed to be more strict with himself, he was ambitious and his love for science and knowledge inspired him. However, he was often dissatisfied because of his feebleness; most of the time his ailing body forced him to stay in bed.

In his third year of studies he was admitted into hospital for two years of treatment. He describes this long isolation as a positive contribution to the development of his character, when he could indulge himself totally to reading and thinking of literary works. In these two years, the meditative character was fashioned within himself, and thus the writer was born.

After his recovery, he resumed his medical studies and says that he subsequently realized an immense change within himself. He discovered within himself the artist

who reflects, reads, and peruses regularly the major sources of literature, plays, and novels. Owing to this new activity, (which in no time he became an expert at), he began to write regularly to the newspapers, (in his final year of Medicine). Accordingly, he had to intensify his effort to graduate and attain success. He started writing for El Tahrir and Rose El Yusef magazines. Due to his illness he graduated two or three years after his colleagues, in 1953.

He states that illness, suffering, and long isolation in the hospital caused his talents to gush forth ... and pain was the very effective source and the real motive for all of those positive characteristics and benefits he developed as a human, a man of letters and a thinker. Pain also refined his character, made his innate nature so clear, revealed his religious sense, which led to his enlightenment, awareness and remembrance of God.

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- 3-*Al-Islam Al-Siyasi Wa-Al-Marakah Al-Qadimah* (Political Islam and the upcoming battle) ISBN 977-08-0403-7
- 4-*Qiraah Lil-Mustaqbal* (Reading for the future) ISBN 977-08-0037-6
- 5-*Al-Sual Al-hair* ISBN 977-02-2611-4 (The Perplexed Question)
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- 8-*Ayyuha Al-Sadah - Ikhlaul Al-Aqniah* (Gentlemen, Unveil These Masks)(1984) ISBN 977-02-0901-5
- 9-*Al-Islam - Ma Huwa* (What is Islam?) (1984) ISBN 977-02-1110-9
- 10-*Hal Huwa asr Al-Junun* (Is It The Age of Insanity) (1983) ISBN 977-02-0499-4

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- 12-*Dialog Antara Muslim Dan Atheis* (1981) ISBN 9971-77-021-0
- 13-*Ukdhubat Al-Yasar Al-Islami* (1978) ISBN 977-247-404-2
- 14-*Al-Islam fi khandak*
- 15-*Al Hob al kadeem (The old love)*
- 16-*Al Roh wal Gsad (The Spirit & The Body)*
- 17-*Al Sir Al A'zam (The Greatest Secret)*
- 18-*Al Sirk (The Circus)*
- 19-*Al Shaytan Yahkom (The Devil Rules)*
- 20-*Al Ghad al Moshta'il (The Burning Tomorrow)*
- 21-*Al Quran Ka'in Hai (Quran: A Living Creature)*
- 22-*Al Wgoud wal 'dm (Existence and nothingness)*
- 23-*Einstein and Relativity*
- 24-*Gohnam el-so'ra*
- 25-*Hekayat Mosafer*

- 26-*Ra'it Allah (I Saw God)*
- 27-*Rehlati men al shak ila al iman (My journey from Doubt to Belief)*
- 28-*Al- Ankabout (The Spider)*
- 29-*Asr el-orood (Age of Monkeys)*
- 30-*In Love and Life*
- 31-*Death mystery*
- 32-*Mohammed*
- 33-*Fire under the ashes*
- 34-*Getting out of the Coffin*
- 35-*Adventure in the Desert*
- 36-*Al-Torah*
- 37-*Quran: serious attempt to a modern understanding*
- 38-*Allah (GOD)*
- 39-*Smell of the Blood*
- 40-*Opium*
- 41-*What's Behind The Gate of Death*

Naguib Mahfouz

Naguib Mahfouz (Arabic: نجيب محفوظ *Nagīb Maḥfūz*, IPA: 11 December 1911 – 30 August 2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is regarded as one of the first contemporary writers of Arabic literature, along with Tawfiq el-Hakim, to explore themes of existentialism. He published 34 novels, over 350 short stories, dozens of movie scripts, and five plays over a 70-year career. Many of his works have been made into Egyptian and foreign films.

Early life and education

Born into a lower middle-class Muslim family in the Gamaleyya quarter of Cairo, Mahfouz was named after Professor Naguib Pasha Mahfouz (1882–1974), the renowned Coptic physician who delivered him. Mahfouz was the seventh and the youngest child in a family that had five boys and two girls. The family lived in two popular districts of the town, in el-Gamaleyya, from where they moved in 1924 to el-Abbaseyya, then a new

Cairo suburb; both provided the backdrop for many of Mahfouz's writings. His father, whom Mahfouz described as having been "old-fashioned", was a civil servant, and Mahfouz eventually followed in his footsteps. In his early years, Mahfouz read extensively and was influenced by Hafiz Najib, Taha Hussein and Salama Moussa. His mother often took him to museums and Egyptian history later became a major theme in many of his books.

The Mahfouz family were devout Muslims and Mahfouz had a strict Islamic upbringing. In an interview, he elaborated on the stern religious climate at home during his childhood. He stated that "You would never have thought that an artist would emerge from that family."

The Egyptian Revolution of 1919 had a strong effect on Mahfouz, although he was at the time only seven years old. From the window he often saw British soldiers firing at the demonstrators, men and women. "You could say ... that the one thing which most shook the security of my childhood was the 1919 revolution", he later said.

After completing his secondary education, Mahfouz was admitted to King Fouad I University (now the University of Cairo), where he studied philosophy, graduating in 1934. By 1936, having spent a year working on an M.A., he decided to become a professional writer. Mahfouz then worked as a journalist at *er-Risala*, and contributed to *el-Hilal* and *Al-Ahram*. The major Egyptian influence on Mahfouz's thoughts on science and socialism in the 1930s was Salama Moussa, the Fabian intellectual.

Writing career

Mahfouz published 34 novels, over 350 short stories, dozens of movie scripts and five plays over a 70-year career. Possibly his most famous work, *The Cairo Trilogy*, depicts the lives of three generations of different families in Cairo from World War I until after the 1952 military coup that overthrew King Farouk. He was a board member of the publisher *Dar el-Ma'aref*. Many of his novels were serialized in *Al-Ahram*, and his writings also appeared in his weekly column, "Point of View".

Before the Nobel Prize only a few of his novels had appeared in the West.

Writing style and themes

Most of Mahfouz's early works were set in Cairo. *Abath Al-Aqdar (Mockery of the Fates)* (1939), *Rhadopis* (1943), and *Kifah Tibah (The Struggle of Thebes)* (1944), were historical novels, written as part of a larger unfulfilled project of 30 novels. Inspired by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), Mahfouz planned to cover the entire history of Egypt in a series of books. However, following the third volume, he shifted his interest to the present and the psychological impact of social change on ordinary people.

Mahfouz's prose is characterised by the blunt expression of his ideas. His written works covered a broad range of topics, including socialism, homosexuality, and God. Writing about some of these subjects was prohibited in Egypt. In his works, he described the development of his country in the 20th century and combined intellectual and cultural influences from East and West. His own

exposure to the literature of non-Egyptian culture began in his youth with the enthusiastic consumption of Western detective stories, Russian classics, and such modernist writers as Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and James Joyce. Mahfouz's stories are almost always set in the heavily populated urban quarters of Cairo, where his characters, mostly ordinary people, try to cope with the modernization of society and the temptations of Western values.

Mahfouz's central work in the 1950s was the *Cairo Trilogy*, which he completed before the July Revolution. The novels were titled with the street names *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*. Mahfouz set the story in the parts of Cairo where he grew up. The novels depict the life of the patriarch el-Sayyed Ahmed Abdel Gawad and his family over three generations, from World War I to the 1950s, when King Farouk I was overthrown. Mahfouz stopped writing for some years after finishing the trilogy. Disappointed in the Nasser régime, which had overthrown the monarchy in 1952, he started publishing again in 1959, now prolifically

pouring out novels, short stories, journalism, memoirs, essays, and screenplays. He stated in a 1998 interview, he "long felt that Nasser was one of the greatest political leaders in modern history. I only began to fully appreciate him after he nationalized the Suez Canal."

Tharthara Fawq Al-Nīl (*Chatter on the Nile*, 1966) is one of his most popular novels. It was later made into a film during the régime of Anwar al-Sadat. The story criticizes the decadence of Egyptian society during the Nasser era. It was banned by Sadat to avoid provoking Egyptians who still loved former president Nasser. Copies were hard to find prior to the late 1990s.

The *Children of Gebelawi* (1959, also known as *Children of the Alley*) one of Mahfouz's best known works, portrayed the patriarch Gebelawi and his children, average Egyptians living the lives of Cain and Abel, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. Gebelawi built a mansion in an oasis in the middle of a barren desert; his estate becomes the scene of a family feud that continues for generations. "Whenever someone is depressed,

suffering or humiliated, he points to the mansion at the top of the alley at the end opening out to the desert, and says sadly, "That is our ancestor's house, we are all his children, and we have a right to his property. Why are we starving? What have we done?" The book was banned throughout the Arab world, except in Lebanon, until 2006, when it was first published in Egypt. The work was prohibited because of its alleged blasphemy through the allegorical portrayal of God and the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In the 1960s, Mahfouz further developed the theme that humanity is moving further away from God in his existentialist novels. In *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961) he depicted the fate of a Marxist thief, who has been released from prison and plans revenge.

In the 1960s and 1970s Mahfouz began to construct his novels more freely and to use interior monologues. In *Miramar* (1967) he developed a form of multiple first-person narration. Four narrators, among them a Socialist

and a Nasserite opportunist, represent different political views. In the center of the story is an attractive servant girl. In *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981) and in *The Journey of Ibn Fatouma* (1983) he drew on traditional Arabic narratives as subtexts. *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth* (1985) is about conflict between old and new religious truths. Many of his novels were first published in serialized form, including *Children of Gebelawi* and *Midaq Alley* which was adapted into a Mexican film starring Salma Hayek (*El callejón de los milagros*).

Nobel Prize for Literature

Mahfouz was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature, the only Arab writer to have won the award. Shortly after winning the prize Mahfouz was quoted as saying "The Nobel Prize has given me, for the first time in my life, the feeling that my literature could be appreciated on an international level. The Arab world also won the Nobel with me. I believe that international doors have opened, and that from now on, literate people will consider Arab literature also. We deserve that

recognition. The Swedish letter to Mahfouz included the quotations "rich and complex work invites us to reconsider the fundamental things in life. Themes like the nature of time and love, society and norms, knowledge and faith recur in a variety of situations and are presented in thought-provoking, evocative, and clearly daring ways. And the poetic quality of your prose can be felt across the language barrier. In the prize citation you are credited with the forming of an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind." Because Mahfouz found traveling to Sweden difficult at his age, he did not attend the award ceremony.

Works

- *Old Egypt* (1932, translated from English) رسم
القديم
- *Whisper of Madness* (1938) نون جلا سمه
- *Mockery of the Fates* (1939) رادق ألالا شعب
Translated into English under the name *Khufu's Wisdom*.
- *Rhadopis of Nubia* (1943) سي بودار

- *The Struggle of Thebes* (1944) تبيط حافك
- *Cairo Modern* (1945) قديجل قرهال
- *Khan El-Khalili* (1945) يليلخل ناخ
- *Midaq Alley* (1947) قدلما قاقز
- *The Mirage* (1948) بارسلا
- *The Beginning and The End* (1950) ةياهنو ةيادب
- *Palace Walk* (1956) نيرصقلا نييب (*Cairo Trilogy, Part 1*)
- *Palace of Desire* (1957) قوشلا رصق (*Cairo Trilogy, Part 2*)
- *Sugar Street* (1957) ةيركسلا (*Cairo Trilogy, Part 3*)
- *Children of Gebelawi* (1959) انتراح دالوأ
- *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961) بالكل او صللا
- *Quail and Autumn* (1962) فيرخل او نامسلا
- *God's World* (1962) مللا ايند
- *Zaabalawi* (1963) يوالبعز
- *The Search* (1964) قيرطلا
- *The Beggar* (1965) ذاحشلا
- *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) لينلا قوف قرثرث
- *Miramar* (1967) رامريم

- *The Pub of the Black Cat* (1969) طقلا قرامخ
الأ سود
- *A story without a beginning or an ending* (1971)
حكاية بلا بداية ولا نهاية
- *The Honeymoon* (1971) لسعلا رهش
- *Mirrors* (1972) ايارملا
- *Love under the rain* (1973) رطملا تحت بحلا
- *The Crime* (1973) تميرجلا
- *al-Karnak* (1974) تكنركلا
- *Stories from Our Neighbourhood* (الكح) يات حارتنا
(1975)
- *Respected Sir* (1975) مرتحمل اقرضح
- *The Harafish* (1977) شيفارحلا قمحلم
- *Love above the Pyramid Plateau* (1979) بحلا
فوق هضبة الهرم
- *The Devil Preaches* (1979) ظعي ناطيشلا
- *Love and the Veil* (1980) بحلا رصع
- *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981) تليل فلأ يلايل
- *Wedding Song* (1981) تبقلل حارفأ
- *One hour remains* (1982) عاس نمزلا نم يقابل
- *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983) نبا قلح
فطومة

- *Akhenaten, Dweller in Truth* (1985) ىف شئاعلا
الءقفة
- *The Day the Leader was Killed* (1985) لتقم موي
الزء بم
- *The Hunger (Al-Go'a)* (1986) عوجلأ
- *Speaking the morning and evening* (1987) شءءء
الصء باء والامساء
- *Fountain and Tomb* (1988)
- *Echoes of an Autobiography* (1994)
- *Dreams of the Rehabilitation Period* (2004) مالءأ
فءرة الءقاةة
- *The Seventh Heaven* (2005)