BIOGRAPHIES
Achebe, Chinua (1930–2013)

Chinua Achebe, born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in Ogidi in eastern Nigeria on 16 November 1930, was a writer, novelist, poet, and critic. Achebe's father Isaiah Okafo Achebe was baptised by the missionaries of the Church Missionary Society and took on missionary teaching. His mother Janet Iloegbunam Achebe belonged to the blacksmith community of Umuike village in Awka. Achebe excelled at school and won a scholarship for higher studies. He graduated in English Literature in 1953 from the University College in Ibadan.

After a short span of teaching at the Merchants of Light School at Oba, Achebe joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1954. He was subsequently elevated to the position of director of external broadcasting in 1961, attained ‘the Voice of Nigeria’ position, and served the corporation until the 1966 Igbo massacre in western and northern Nigeria. During the Nigeria–Biafra war (1967–70), Achebe served the Biafran diplomatic service and undertook extensive trips abroad to speak on behalf of the Biafran cause. At the end of the war in 1970, he joined the University of Nigeria at Nsukka and then held a number of teaching positions at universities in the US and Canada.

Achebe was the recipient of many honorary degrees from universities in the US, Canada, England, Scotland, and Nigeria. He was awarded the Order of the Federal Republic, the Nigerian National Merit Award, the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1974), the Lotus Award for Afro-Asian Writers (1975), the Campion Medal (1996), the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (2002), the Man Booker International Prize (2007), and the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize (2010). He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, London (1981) and an Honorary Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1983) and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2002). In 1998 he was appointed as the prestigious McMillan Stewart Lecturer at Harvard University.

Achebe was the author of five novels: Things Fall Apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960), Arrow of God (1964), A Man of the People (1966), and Anthills of the Savannah (1987). This compendium of work maps the transition of Nigeria from colonial to neo-colonial rule. Achebe’s radical departure from the colonialist historical narratives made crucial differences in representing Nigerian society and character. In Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction (1991), Simon Gikandi aptly says:

there is in all of Achebe's novels a fundamental link between the idea of the nation, the concept of a national culture, and the quest for an African narrative. Fanon's famous dictum that the liberation of the nation is ‘that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible' finds its parallel in Achebe's desire to liberate the African mind from the colonial complex and the 'crisis of the soul' which it triggers in the colonized. (Gikandi 1991: 7)

Regarded by many as the father of the modern African novel, Achebe was induced to write his novels as counter-narratives to Eurocentric discourses, which denigrated Africa. He pointed out how European mythology had constructed Africa, and worked to provide a counter-discourse that took part in the reconstruction of the African self. Achebe imagined a pre-independence national community with shared history as both progressive and useful for writing. In ‘The Novelist as Teacher’, he wrote:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement .... For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul .... I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. (Achebe 1975: 71–72)

Achebe’s resentment at the European representations of Africans in literature incited him to write his maiden and classic novel Things Fall Apart (1958). Written during the same period in which Frantz Fanon was formulating his ideas, the novel delineates a critical study of the Igbo village, Umuofia. In the story, the protagonist Okonkwo lives during the colonisation of Nigeria, struggles with the