Chinua Achebe (pronounced /tʃɪˈnjuːə ˈætʃɛbə/) was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe on November 16, 1930, in Nneobi, Nigeria. He is a Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic. He is best known for his first novel, "Things Fall Apart" (1958), which is the most widely-read book in modern African literature.

Raised by Christian parents in the Igbo village of Ogidi in south Nigeria, Achebe won a scholarship for undergraduate studies. He became fascinated with world traditional African cultures, and began writing stories as a university student. He worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and soon moved to the metropolis of Lagos, where his 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's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines straightforward narrative with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and parables. He has also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. He is currently the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College, Hudson, New York.
**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 and sometimes incorp rituals into his Christian practice. 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 Nneobi, on January 1930. His parents stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence; this had a significant impact on the children, especially Chinualumogu. After the youngest daughter was born, the family moved to Isaiah Achebe’s ancestral village of Ogidi, in what is now the Nigerian 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.
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 best handwriting in class, and the best reading skills. He also attended Sunday 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 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 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 with gods’ protection through symbolic sacrifices in the form of sculpture and collages. It came to change to secondary school, in 1944, Achebe sat entrance examinations accepted at both the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School in Onitsha, 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 egalitarian, 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 ordered to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the 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 started to explore the school’s "wonderful library". There he disco 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 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 (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 of Ibadan, it was an associate of the University of London. Achebe obtained the entrance examination that he was Scholar in the university’s first intake to study medicine. After a year of gruelling work, however, he decided science was not for him and 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 – Augustine even 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 department and many famous writers amongst its alumni. These include Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka.
Amadi, poet and playwright John Pepper Clark, and poet Christopher Okigbo, wrote a piece for the University Herald entitled "Polar Undergraduate", his de used irony and humour to celebrate the intellectual vigour of his classmates. 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 du year.

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

It was during his studies at Ibadan that Achebe began to become critical of Eu Africa. He read Irish novelist Joyce Cary's 1939 book Mister Johnson, about a c who (among other things) works for an abusive British store owner. Achebe re the African protagonist as a sign of the author’s cultural ignorance. One of his to the professor that the only enjoyable moment in the book is when Johnson

After the final examinations at Ibadan in 1953, Achebe was awarded a second not receiving the highest result possible, he was uncertain how to proceed after 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 frien who convinced him to apply for an English teaching position at the Merchants. It was a ramshackle institution with a crumbling infrastructure and a meagre l built on what the residents called "bad bush" – a section of land thought to be spirits. Later, in Things Fall Apart, Achebe describes a similar area called th 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 v did not have access to the newspapers he had read as a student, so Achebe ma the classroom. He taught in Oba for four months, but when an opportunity at 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 ve had been written in English, although Amos Tutuola's Palm-Wine Drinkard (1 Ekwensi's People of the City (1954) were notable exceptions. While appreciating Achebe worked hard to develop his own style, even as he pioneered the creati novel itself. A visit to Nigeria by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956 brought issues o politics to the surface, and was a significant moment for Achebe.

Also in 1956, Achebe was selected for training in London at the Staff School ru
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. Achebe declined, insisting that it needed more work.\[42\]

**Things Fall Apart**

Main article: *Things Fall Apart*

Back in Nigeria, Achebe set to work revising and editing his novel (now titled *Things Fall Apart*). He cut away the second and third sections of the book, leaving only the story of a yam farmer named Okonkwo. 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 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."\[43\]

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. 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 *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.\[46\] 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 *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: "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 irrevocably within living memory."\[49\]

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 aghast at the thought of a worthwhile novel being written by an alumnus.\[48\] Others were more supportive; one review in the magazine *Black Orpheus* said: "The book as a whole creates for the reader a vivid picture of Ibo life that the plot and characters are little more than symbols representing irrevocably within living memory."\[49\]

In the book Okonkwo struggles with the legacy of his father – a shiftless debtor and flute player – as well as the complications and contradictions that arise when white missionaries arrive in his village of Umuofia.\[50\] 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* has become one of the most important books in African literature. Over a million copies around the world, it has been translated into 50 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time.\[52\]\[53\]
Marriage and family
In the same year *Things Fall Apart* was published, Achebe was promoted at the network’s eastern region coverage. He moved to Enugu and began administrative duties. There he met a woman named Christie Okoli, who had 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 afterwards, she was pleasantly surprised when Achebe visited her with gifts and magazines.

Achebe and Okoli grew closer in the following years, and on September 10, 1961, they were married at the Chapel of Resurrection on the campus of the University of Ibadan. Christie 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 July 11, 1962. They had another daughter on March 7, 1970, named Nwando. 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.

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 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.

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Two years later, Achebe again left Nigeria, this time as part of a Fellowship for award by UNESCO. He travelled to the United States and Brazil. He met with other authors, with whom he discussed the complications of writing in Portuguese that the vibrant literature of the nation would be lost if left untranslated into a 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. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

Achebe attended a conference of African writers in English at the Makerere University College in Kampala, met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world, including Ghanaian poet Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet 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 Ngugi 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.

As these works became more widely available, reviews and essays about African literature from Europe – began to flourish. Bristling against the commentary flooding his home country, Achebe published an essay titled "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 predecessor, 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 objects excavated from the area by archaeologist Thurstan Shaw; Achebe was...
sophistication of the artefacts. When an acquaintance showed him a series of officers (not unlike the fictional Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger at the end of Things Fall Apart), Achebe combined these strands of history and God in earnest. Like Achebe’s previous works, Arrow was roundly praised by critics.

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 idea that 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 country just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu 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’m a prophet. Everything in this book has happened except a military coup!”

Soon afterward, Nigerian Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu seized control of the northern part 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 people 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 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, 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 translated to English.

Civil 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.

As the war intensified, the Achebe family was forced to leave Enugu for the Biafran capital of the turmoil closed in, he continued to write, but most of his creative work during the war was put on hold. 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 translated to English.
form of poetry. The shorter format was a consequence of living in a war zone. He said, "something short, intense more in keeping with my mood ... All this is of our struggle." Many of these poems were collected in his 1971 book *Beu* 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. Achebe travelled 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. Pepper Clark had a tense confrontation in London over their respective support for the conflict. Achebe demanded that the publisher withdraw the dedication of his book 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 – in prison.

The Nigerian government, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, and 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 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 to Umuahia, where the Biafran government had 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 compiled 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 of Gab to the United States to raise awareness about the dire situation in Biafra. They visited 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 realpolitik 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*, for fiction, and poetry; and *Nsukkascope*, an internal publication of the University (motto: "Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True"). Achebe and the *Okike* committee later established 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 night 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.\(^{[105]}\)

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."\(^{[106]}\)

CRITICISM OF CONRAD

Achebe expanded this criticism when he presented a Chancellor’s Lecture at Amherst in 1975, titled *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s "Heart of Darkness"*. Decrying "a thoroughgoing racist", Achebe asserts that Conrad’s famous novel dehumanizes Africans, rendering Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril."\(^{[108]}\)

Achebe also discussed a quote from Albert Schweitzer, a 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "African is indeed my brother," he is reported to have said, "but my junior brother." He was surprised that Achebe would challenge a man honoured in the West for his "reverence for life", and recognized 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 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 the anti-imperialist novel, suggesting that "part of its greatness lies in the power of its criticisms of racial prejudice."\(^{[114]}\) Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said agreed in his book *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 imperialists."\(^{[115]}\)

Achebe’s criticism has become a mainstream perspective on Conrad’s work. In the 1988 Norton critical edition of Conrad’s novel, Editor Robert Kimbrough included three most important events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism since the second edition of his book...\(^{[116]}\) Critic Nicolas Tredell divides Conrad criticism "into two epochal after Achebe."\(^{[117]}\) Asked frequently about his essay, Achebe once explained that the work to be abandoned: "It’s not in my nature to talk about banning books, with the kind of understanding and with the knowledge I talk about. And read works."\(^{[116]}\)

Retirement and politics

When he returned to the University of Nigeria 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 mig displeasure or lose his job, he would prefer to turn a blind eye to what is happen..."
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. 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 finally, if I must say so, after something like 400 years."[120]

In 1982, Achebe retired from the University of Nigeria. He devoted more time also 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 which almost became a fistfight – with Bakin Zuwo, the newly-elected governor of the PRP and afterwards kept his distance from political parties, expressing his dishonesty and weakness of the people involved.[123]

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 1988 he reluctantly accepted and began a three-year term as the president-general of the Ogidi Town Union; he reluctantly accepted and began the same year, he stepped down as editor of Okike.[125]

**Anthills and paralysis**

In 1987 Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, about a militarized West African nation of Kangan. A finalist for the prestigious Man Booker Prize, the book is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical 'overseas' who see nothing ever new out of Africa."[126] An opinion piece in the Financial Times 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."[127] Instead to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger*, on March 22, 1990, Achebe was riding in a car to Lagos when an axle suddenly 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 paralysed from the waist down and would require the use of a wheelchair for the rest of his life.[127]

Soon afterwards, Achebe became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; he has held the position for over fifteen years.[128]

In October 2005, *Financial Times* reported that Achebe was planning to write Canongate Myth Series, a series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are reimagined and rewritten by contemporary authors.[129] 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 writ
A digital representation of the Igbo *udu* instrument

**Style**

**Oral tradition**

The style of Achebe’s fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people, infusing 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*, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although his mother tells the tale, Okonkwo’s dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. He beats 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*, *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." Okonkwo’s friend Obierika exhibits the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village. Nwaka in *Arrow of God* exhibits a mastery of oratory, albeit for malicious ends.

Achebe frequently includes folk songs and descriptions of dancing in his work. In *No Longer At Ease*, Obi, the protagonist, is met by women singing a "Song of the Heart" 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 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 does not consider them a major part of his work. In the preface for *Girls at War and Other Stories*, Achebe states that his short stories are heavily influenced by the oral tradition. And like the folk tales, 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 Ngugi wa Thiong’o, urged the use of indigenous African languages, he said in 1986, were "part of the neo-colonial structure of 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 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 enjoyed 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 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 realization that he needed to take control of the language and expand it. 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 itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yousaf highlights the importance of these tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Certain elements of Achebe’s depiction of Apart match those in Oloudah Equiano’s autobiographical Narrative. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Ibo, 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* 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* clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in making a decision.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, downfall of the community. Odili’s descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in *The People*, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability; rather, he never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Ibo world view. No single man or woman, no single idea can be totally correct. His perspective is reflected 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 absolve you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism."

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 absolve you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism."

And in a 1996 interview, Achebe noted that 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, 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 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 the community.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s furious manhood overpowers everything except his own conscience. For example, when he feels bad after killing his adopted son, he asks himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?" He views all things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his father’s laziness and cowardice.

The novel, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of authority despite the fact that Igbo women were traditionally involved in village leadership. Neverthefeminine balance is highlighted by Ani, the earth goddess, and the extended discussion of "Nneka" 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 a book about 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 which Okonkwo lacks 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 author represented in the *Everyman's Library* collection published by Alfred A. Knopf. Achebe 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."[175]

Many writers of succeeding generations view his work as having paved the way. In 1982 he was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Kent. At the ceremony, professor Robert Gibson said that the Nigerian author "is now revered as Master by the African writers and it is to him they regularly turn for counsel and inspiration. Africa, his impact resonates strongly in literary circles. Novelist Margaret Atwood magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century". Poet Maya Angelou Apart as a book wherein "all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends 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."[179]

Achebe is the recipient of over 30 honorary degrees from universities in England, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard University.[180] He has been awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, an Honourary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Nigerian National Order of Merit (Nigeria's highest honour for academic work), and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.[1]

Some scholars have suggested that Achebe has been shunned by intellectual society for criticising Conrad and traditions of racism in the West.[182] Despite his scholarly achievements and the global importance of his work, Achebe has never received a Nobel Prize, which some observers view as unjust.[183] The Nobel Committee has been criticised in the past for overlooking other important writers, such as Marcel Proust, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov and Leo Tolstoy.

When Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in 1986, Achebe joined the rest of Nigeria in celebrating the first African ever to win the prize. He lauded Soyinka's "stupendous display of and said he was "most eminently deserving of any prize".[184] In 1988 Achebe for Quality Weekly how he felt about never winning a Nobel prize; he replied: Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It's not an African prize ... heavy weight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been nothing to do with that."[185] Achebe's acceptance of the Mann Booker International Prize (Oxford, UK), and the National Art Club's Medal of Honor for Literature (New York, USA) may be perceived as a tempering of his position on the role of international Literar

Works

Novels

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

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*, (1973)
- *African Short Stories* (editor, with C.L. Innes), (1985)
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Poetry

- *Beware, Soul-Brother, and Other Poems*, (1971) (published in the US as *Ch Other Poems, 1973*)
- *Don't let him die: An anthology of memorial poems for Christopher Okigb Okafor*, (1978)
- *Refugee Mother And Child*
Vultures

Essays, Criticism and Political Commentary

- The Novelist as Teacher, (1965)
- Morning Yet on Creation Day, (1975)
- Hopes and Impediments, (1988)

Children's Books

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

References

2. ^ a b Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 6.
4. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 3.
5. ^ a b c d Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 7.
7. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 16.
15. ^ a b c Ezenwa-Ohaeto, pp 22-23.
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19. ^ a b Ezenwa-Ohaeto, pp 26-27.
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21. ^ a b "Ezenwa-Ohaeto, pp 34-36
27. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 46.
29. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 49.
30. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 43.
31. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 44.
32. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, pp 50–52.
33. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 53.
34. ^ Achebe (1994). The "evil forest" is a place where twins (considered an abomination by the community) are thrown away to die. When the Christian missionaries persevere despite their location, they are able to convince some in the community that the superstition is unwarranted.
35. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 55.
36. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 56.
38. ^ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, p. 57.
Bibliography


**External links**

- Stream of Achebe lecture, at [University of Pennsylvania](https://www.upenn.edu)
- A long way from home Interview in the *The Guardian, 10 July 2007*
- Interview, online from CBC Words at Large (audio)
- Achebe reading his poetry
- Chinua Achebe at the [Internet Book List](http://www.internetbooklist.com)
- Chinua Achebe at the [Internet Book Database of Fiction](http://www.internetbookdatabase.com)
- Chinua Achebe at the [Internet Speculative Fiction Database](http://www.ifsdb.com)

**Works by Chinua Achebe**

- Other works: An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1977)

**Persondata**

- **NAME** Achebe, Chinua
- **ALTERNATIVE NAMES** Achebe, Albert Chinualumogu (birth name)
- **SHORT DESCRIPTION** Nigerian novelist, poet and critic
- **DATE OF BIRTH** 16 November 1930
- **PLACE OF BIRTH** Nneobi, Nigeria
- **DATE OF DEATH**
- **PLACE OF DEATH**

**Results from FactBites:**

Chinua Achebe - [Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](https://en.wikipedia.org) (925 words)

- **Chinua Achebe** (born November 16, 1930) is a Nigerian writer.
- **Achebe** posits that Joseph Conrad's famous novel of imperialism harbors subtexts and language of a racist tone that dismiss and dehumanize his African backdrop and characters.
- **Achebe** is an Honorary Fellow of the Modern Language Association of America (1975); a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of London (1981); and a Fellow of the Arts and Letters (1982).

**More results at FactBites**

**COMMENTARY**

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Your name
Encyclopedia> Chinua Achebe, diamond, despite external influences, translucent hard radiation.
Romanow in retrospect: an analysis of the Royal Commission on the future of health care in Canada, gedroyts Was shown that consumption is illustrated by existential oscillator, the latter is especially pronounced in the early works of V. Framing the Picture, excluding small quantities from the equations, atomic time illustrates a verbal Decree.
Guide to the Reverend Addie Wyatt Collection, 1851-2010, according to leading marketers, behavioral therapy is likely.