

The CHINUA ACHEBE Encyclopedia

Edited by M. KEITH BOOKER

Foreword by Simon Gikandi



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Foreword: Chinua Achebe and the Institution of African Literature

Simon Gikandi

The appearance of this encyclopedia (in a series that has previously devoted volumes to such authors as Emily Dickinson, William Faulkner, and Toni Morrison) represents still another step in the inexorable rise of Chinua Achebe to canonical status in world literature. While Achebe's enshrinement in the company of such Western authors has its problematic aspects, the critical attention that Achebe has received in the West has, by and large, been a positive development in the sense that it has brought needed recognition and respect to African literature and culture as a whole. Indeed, Achebe's leadership in this respect is only one of the many ways in which he might be said to have founded and invented the institution of African literature.

ACHEBE AND THE IDEA OF AN AFRICAN CULTURE

I have never met Chinua Achebe in person, but every time I read his fiction, his essays, or his critical works, I feel as if I have known him for most of my life. If the act of reading and re-reading establishes networks of connections between readers, writers, and context, and if texts are indeed crucial to the modes of knowledge we come to develop about subjects and objects and the images we

associate with certain localities and institutions, then I can say without equivocation that I have known Achebe since I was thirteen years old. I can still vividly recall the day when, in my first or second year of secondary school, I encountered *Things Fall Apart*. It was in the early 1970s. We had a young English teacher who, although a recent graduate of Makerere University College, which was still the bastion of Englishness in East Africa, decided to carry out a literary experiment that was to change the lives of many of us: instead of offering the normal literary fare for junior secondary school English, which in those days consisted of a good dose of abridged Robert Louis Stevenson novels, Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, and Barbara Kimenye's popular readers, we were going to read *Things Fall Apart*. We would read a chapter of the novel every day, aloud in class, until we got to the end. Once I had started reading *Things Fall Apart*, however, I could not cope with the chapter-a-day policy. I read the whole novel over one afternoon, and it is not an exaggeration to say that my life was never the same again, for reading *Things Fall Apart* brought me to the sudden realization that fiction was not merely about a set of texts that one studied for the Cambridge Overseas exam, which, for my gen-

eration, had been renamed the East African Certificate of Education; on the contrary, literature was about real and familiar worlds, of culture and human experience, of politics and economics, now re-routed through a language and structure that seemed at odds with the history or geography books we were reading at the time.

At the center of the transformation engendered by my reading of Achebe's first novel was nothing less than the figure of the yam. Yes: the figure of the yam had been bothering me even before I read *Things Fall Apart*. As (post) colonial subjects of my generation may recall, the yam had been making its way into the standard geography books in Anglophone Africa since the modernization of the curriculum in the late 1950s, ostensibly in anticipation of independence. In the 1960s and the early 1970s, the major geography primers were the *Geography for Africa* series, published by Oxford University Press and written by a certain McBain, graduate of Oxon or Cantab (I forget which); these works were primarily concerned with mapping the movement, or non-movement, of the African from primitive production to modernization. Somehow, the yam seemed to occupy a central position in this narrative of the modernization of the African.

In McBain's *Geography for Africa* for standard four, for example, young minds were informed that the yam was essential to agricultural production among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria and that, together with palm-oil, it had been a major part of the regional economy before the discovery of coal at Enugu. In those days it made sense to see African life as the movement from primitive (agricultural) practices to industrial production, and we were thus not interested in questioning the logic of this narrative of modernity; still, for those of us growing up in the highlands of East Africa, the yam was as alien as the proverbial apple that opened

all English readers. Having never seen a yam in our lives, we were hard-pressed to understand its value. Indeed, it is now clear to me, in retrospect, that McBain of Oxon/Cantab did not explain the notion of commodity value well enough for us to overcome the distance between Nairobi and Enugu. But in reading *Things Fall Apart*, everything became clear: the yam was important to Igbo culture, not because of what we were later to learn to call use-value, this time at the University of Nairobi, but because of its location at the nexus of a symbolic economy in which material wealth was connected to spirituality and ideology and desire. The novel was teaching us a fundamental lesson that old McBain could never comprehend. *Things Fall Apart* provided us with a different kind of education.

I begin these reflections on the significance of Chinua Achebe to the institution of African literature and culture by noting the transformative power of *Things Fall Apart* for two reasons. The first one is to call attention to an interesting phenomenon that I have noticed in conversations with many Africans of my generation, both inside and outside academia, on the role of literature in the making of African subjects. I have noticed that when the debate turns to questions of culture, of literature, and of the destiny of Africa, subjects that concern many of us as we get older and the problems of the continent seem to multiply with our aging, we seem to clamor for those Pan-African moments that defined our identities as we came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. These debates and questions crystallize around many of the tragic and triumphant events that stand in our memories—the Mexico City Olympics or the civil war in Nigeria, for example—but while these events generate disagreement, the transformative nature of *Things Fall Apart* is undisputed. Like one of these momentous events that one is bound to remember, like where one was

when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, many of us recall where we were when we first read Achebe's first novel. But, of course, such acts of recall make sense only for a generation that has come to feel, rightly or wrongly, that it shared a common cultural project. Whatever questions we may now have about this project (was the 1960s the golden age of African independence, or does it appear to be so only through the prism of bourgeois nostalgia and against the background of postcolonial failure?), there is consensus that *Things Fall Apart* was important for the making and marking of that exciting first decade of decolonization. There also seems to be consensus that the production of the novel, as well as its reading and (re)reading, and its circulation within the institutions of education came to define who we were, where we were, and as Achebe himself would say, where the rain began to beat us.

My second point, however, is that the association of a text such as *Things Fall Apart* with a certain generational project or even a foundational moment of literary history also marks the gap between the text and those readers removed from its moment of irruption into the world; those are the readers who are bound to be baffled by the claims to monumentality adduced to the novel itself. Scholars and readers of my generation, people who often take the monumentality of Achebe's work for granted, are constantly frustrated when their young students seem unable to comprehend the historic nature of his intervention in the field of African literature, which was, in the 1950s, in a state of flux and, in my judgment, crisis. I am often taken to task for having claimed, or rather repeated the claim, that Achebe was the person who invented African literature.

From the perspective of literary history, as I argued in *Reading Chinua Achebe* (London: Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann; Nairobi:

Heinemann Kenya, 1991), Achebe had important precursors on the African scene, and the more I re-read the works of such figures as René Maran, Amos Tutuola, Paul Hazoumé, and Sol Plaatje, the more I am convinced of their significance in the foundation of an African tradition of letters. Still, none of these writers had the effect Achebe had on the establishment and reconfiguration of an African literary tradition; none of them were able to enter and interrupt the institutions of exegesis and education the same way he did; none were able to establish the terms by which African literature was produced, circulated, and interpreted. So the question that needs to be addressed in any tribute to Achebe is not why he was the person who invented African literature as an institutional practice but what exactly accounted for the foundational and transformative character of his works, not to mention its monumentality. Why must *Things Fall Apart* always occupy the inaugural moment of African literary history? From the perspective of a literary critic rather than a common reader, I came to discover the significance of Achebe's novels in the shaping of African literature through a negative example. Sometime in the late 1970s, as an apprentice editor at the Nairobi office of Heinemann Educational Books, I was asked by my senior colleagues, Henry Chakava and Laban Erapu, to review a manuscript by a certain Dambudzo Marechera and, specifically, to address the concerns of the "London Office," whose managers were not sure that *The House of Hunger* could be published and marketed as African literature. I did not have to ask what exactly was construed to be African literature. It was assumed that it was something akin to Achebe's novels, especially *Things Fall Apart*, and this seemed to exclude many forms of experimental writing. My first impulse was to react against this tendency to equate African literature with Achebe's

works, a tendency that had produced what I felt were many poor imitators in the Heinemann African Writers Series, books about village life and the crisis of change whose titles we no longer need to mention. My second impulse was to read Marechera's manuscript as an attempt to break out of what I then thought was an ill-advised over-determination of the series by its first—and most important—writer.

But as soon as I started reading *The House of Hunger*, I realized that the question of over-determination was more complicated than I initially thought. Marechera's "avant-garde" fiction could not simply be juxtaposed against Achebe's works; on the contrary, it existed in a productive relation to it, so much so that one could not argue for the newness of the title story or novella ("The House of Hunger") without invoking its relationship with Achebe's project. Even a cursory reading of Marechera's fiction indicated that his protagonists had been reading Achebe and other African writers; these African writers were important tools in their struggle against the culture of colonialism in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. What was even more remarkable about Marechera's subjects was the fact that they took the existence of this African literature for granted and considered it inseparable from the idea of an African identity and a Pan-African culture. Like many Africans of my generation, Marechera's characters paid homage to African literature by taking it for granted as something that didn't need to be rationalized or justified; more importantly they were leading their lives according to the dictates of a Pan-African, rather than, or in addition to, the colonial, library. If I were writing that review of Marechera's manuscript today, I would say that the soon-to-be gadfly of African letters was important to the tradition not because he was writing a different fiction than Achebe, but because he had taken Achebe's fictional world as an integral

part of what it meant to be African. Achebe's novels had become an essential referent for the African cultural text.

However, when I said that Achebe had invented African literature, I was thinking about something more than the existence of his novels as the Ur-texts of our literary tradition; what I had in mind then was the tremendous influence his works have had on the institutions of pedagogy and interpretation and the role his fictions have come to play in the making and unmaking of African worlds. Like most émigré African intellectuals, I am ambivalent about the institutionalization of *Things Fall Apart* and the wisdom of using it as supplement for African culture or the authorized point of entry into Igbo, Nigerian, or African landscapes. Within Africa, itself, I have sometimes wondered why the institutions of power have been so keen to place Achebe at the center of the curriculum. I am reminded of an episode that took place in Kenya sometime in the 1980s when the state, in its eagerness to isolate Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whom it then considered to be the single most important threat to its cultural hegemony, sought to return to a colonial literary curriculum, one in which Shakespeare would once again occupy a place of honor. The Kenyan state was eager to purge the curriculum of radical writers, I am told, but still the president and the then minister of higher education wanted Achebe retained because, in spite of their hankering for the colonial days, they wanted students to have a dignified sense of African culture. Ironically, when he was detained at the end of 1977, Ngugi was in the middle of teaching a course focused on Achebe's work as a mirror of the transformation of African history from the pre-colonial past to the neocolonial present. If the Kenyan state associated Achebe's fiction with the idea of a dignified African culture, its radical-opponent read the same fiction as a critique of decolonization.

Given the appeal he has had for different kinds of readers and factions, the institutionalization of Achebe raises some important questions: what is it about his novels that enabled them to play their unprecedented role as the mediators of the African experience and the depository of a certain idea of Africa? Why is it that when the term "African culture" is mentioned, Achebe's works almost immediately come to mind? Achebe is the person who invented African culture as it is now circulated within the institutions of interpretation. It is my contention that his intervention in the already existing colonial and Pan-African libraries transformed the idea of Africa and that his project has indeed valorized the idea of culture in the thinking of African worlds. The argument can be made that the valorization of culture as the medium of thinking the African was already under way when Achebe started writing his novels. After all, is there a more profound valorization of culture than the one we encounter in Senghor's Negritude? Perhaps not. But for reasons that are too complicated to discuss here, the valorization of culture in Senghor's work—and indeed the writings of early Pan-Africanists—was so closely associated with European ideas or sought to reconcile the African to the dominant European discourse about race and culture, that they could not seriously be invoked in radical gestures of dissociation from Eurocentric ideas about Africa. I will not be audacious enough to claim that Achebe's work is not indebted to European ideas of Africa or to the culture of colonialism (they carry powerful signs of these entities); but I think the claim can be made that these works have been read—or at least render themselves to being read—as counterpoints to the colonial library.

A brief context can help clarify the argument I am trying to make here: we have now come to associate the idea of an African cul-

ture with the whole discourse of decolonization that we forget, too often perhaps, that there was a time when the narrative of African freedom was predicated on the negation of what we have come to call tradition. This negation is the fulcrum in key texts of Pan-Africanism for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Pan-African elite might have celebrated the greatness of African cultures, but as even a cursory reading of their sourcebooks will show, their celebration of "classical" Africa was a flight from the barbarism associated with the "tribal," those whom Achebe's parents would have called the people of darkness. Up until the 1950s, the education of Africans was predicated on their relocation from the darkness associated with the "tribal" to the sweetness and light of colonial institutions. When African culture entered literary texts, it did so either as the European idea of Africa or as a sign of lack. *Things Fall Apart* is as anxious about its colonial context as other texts from this period; at the same time, however, it seems determined to exist in excess of this context; for a novel written within colonialism, it seems confident about its ability to represent its African background as it is of its power to manage the colonial anxieties that generated it in the first place. I would argue, then, that this confidence is precisely what enabled Achebe to shift the idea of Africa from romance and nostalgia, from European primitivism, and from a rhetoric of lack, to an affirmative culture. It is in this sense that Achebe can be said to have invented, or reinvented, the idea of African culture.

ACHEBE AND AFRICAN LITERARY HISTORY

It is likely that Achebe may be frustrated by the attention and amount of critical energy given or devoted to *Things Fall Apart* often to the neglect of his other works, including

Arrow of God, his stated favorite. Yet it is difficult to ignore the significance of this first novel, either in the making of African cultures and reading communities, as discussed above, or in its dominant role in African literary history, where it serves as an important reference for many novels written in the last decade of formal colonialism in Africa and the first decade of independence. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize the influential role Achebe's other novels, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1967), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), spanning a significant period of postcolonial Africa, have played in mapping out the nature of African culture and the institutions of literary interpretation. Considered together, these novels occupy such a crucial diachronic role in the history of an African literature almost always driven by the desire to imaginatively capture the key moments of African history from the beginning of colonialism to what has come to be known as postcoloniality. In both their subject and their aesthetic concerns, then, Achebe's major novels are located at the point of contact between European and African cultures and are concerned with the political and linguistic consequences of this encounter.

In this respect, Achebe's novels can be divided into two categories. First, there are those works that are concerned with recovering and representing an African pre-colonial culture struggling to retain its integrity against the onslaught of colonialism. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* belong to this category: they are narrative attempts to imagine what pre-colonial society could have looked like before the European incursion and the factors that were responsible for the failure of Igbo or African cultures in the face of colonialism. These novels are themselves cast in a dual structure, with the first part seeking to present a meticulous portrait of Igbo society before colonialism and the

second part narrating the traumatic process in which this culture loses its autonomy in the face of the colonial encounter. Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, Achebe does not seek to recover the logic of a pre-colonial African culture in order to romanticize it, but to counter the colonial mythology that Africans did not have a culture before colonialism. As he noted in an influential essay called "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," Achebe's works were concerned with what he considers to be a fundamental theme "that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty." At the same time, however, these narratives are often attempts to explore the fissures of pre-colonial culture itself in order to show why it was vulnerable to European colonialism.

In his second set of novels, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe turns his attention away from the past to diagnose and narrate the crisis of decolonization. While the novels dealing with the past have been influential for showing that Africans had a culture with its own internal logic and set of contradictions and hence derive their authority from their capacity to imagine an African past derided or negated in the colonial text, the second set of novels have been popular because of their keen sense of the crisis of postcoloniality and, in some cases, a prophetic sense of African history, the attendant promise of decolonization and its failure or sense of discontent. From another perspective, both Achebe's early and later novels have been influential because of their acute capacity to map out the cultural fault in which African cultures and traditions have encountered the institutions of modern European colonial society. In fact, it could be said that Achebe's early novels were the first to popularize the

tradition/modernity paradigm which, though constantly questioned in many theoretical works, continues to haunt the study of African literature and culture.

But as has been the case for most of his writing career, Achebe has been able to produce novels that both set up paradigms and deconstruct them. While *Things Fall Apart* derives most of its power from the ability to position pre-colonial Igbo society in opposition to an encroaching colonial culture, it is also memorable for the way it problematizes the nature of Igbo society and deprives it of any claims to cultural purity. In this novel, it is those who seek to protect the purity of culture, most notably Okonkwo, the hero of the novel, whose lives end up in ignominy. In *No Longer at Ease*, the subjects who had subscribed to the logic of colonial modernity are increasingly haunted by the choices they make, wondering where they stand in the new dispensation, and in *Arrow of God*, clearly one of the major novels on the colonial situation, attempts to subscribe to the idiom of tradition are shown to be as lacking as the logic of colonization itself.

Although Achebe is now considered to be the premier novelist on the discourse of African identity, nationalism, and decolonization, his main focus, as he has insisted in many of the interviews he has given throughout his career, has been on sites of cultural ambiguity and contestation. If there is one phrase that sums up Achebe's philosophy of culture or language, it is the Igbo proverb: "Where one thing falls, another stands in its place." The complexity of novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* depends on Achebe's ability to bring competing cultural systems and their languages on to the same level of representation, dialogue, and contestation. In *Arrow of God*, for example, the central conflict is not merely a racial one between white Europeans and black Africans, or even an epistemological encounter be-

tween an Igbo culture and a colonial polity, but also a struggle between idioms and linguistic registers. Although the novel is written in English, as are all of Achebe's works, it contains one of the most strenuous attempts to translate an African idiom in the language of the other. Although we read the world of the Igbo in English, Achebe goes out of his way to use figures of speech, most notably proverbs and sayings, to give readers a sense of how this culture might have represented itself to counter the highly regimented and stereotyped language of the colonizer.

In the end, the authority of Achebe's works has depended on their role as cultural texts. This does not mean that they are not imaginative works, or that their formal features are not compelling, or that they are valuable primarily as ethnographic documents; rather, Achebe's novels have become important features of the African literary landscape because they have come to be read and taught as important sources of knowledge about Africa. For scholars in numerous disciplines, such as history and anthropology, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are read as exemplary representations of African traditional cultures at the moment of the colonial encounter. Although *No Longer at Ease* has not had the same cultural effect as these other novels, it is clearly indispensable in the mapping out of the space of transition from colonialism to postcolonialism. For students trying to understand the violent politics of postcolonial Nigeria, especially the period of corruption and military coups in the mid-1960s, there is perhaps no better reference than *A Man of the People*. The parallel between Achebe's works and their historical and social referents is so close that it is difficult not to read his major novels as significant documents of the African experience. For this reason, Achebe's novels are notable for their sense of realism.

Indeed, while a novel like *Anthills of the*

Savannah is unusual in its bringing together of techniques drawn from realism, modernism, and what has come to be known as magic realism, rarely does Achebe's work reflect an interest in formal experimentation for its own sake. The use of a multiplicity of forms in this novel can be connected to the author's desire to account for a postcolonial crisis that cannot be contained within one feature of novelistic discourse. It is perhaps because of his commitment to realism that Achebe's novels have tended to be out of fashion in institutions of interpretation dominated by theories of structuralism and post-structuralism. And yet, Achebe's sense of realism, as a technique and mode of discourse, is not that of the nineteenth-century European novel with its concern with verisimilitude, the experiences of a unique bourgeois subject undergoing the process of education, and a language that seeks to make communities knowable, although Achebe's novels do seek to make African communities knowable. As he himself has noted in an early essay called "The Novelist as a Teacher," he started his career envisioning the role of writing as essentially pedagogical—"to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement." Achebe is attracted to realism because it enables him to imagine African cultures, especially post-colonial cultures, possible and knowable.

Nevertheless, Achebe's novels operate under the shadow of modernism and modernity for two closely related reasons. First, his early novels were written in response to a set of modern texts, most notably Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which African "barbarism" was represented as the opposite of the logic of modern civilization. Since he was educated within the tradition of European modernism, Achebe's goal was to use realism to make African cultures visible while using the ideology and techniques of modernism to

counter the colonial novel in its own terrain. Second, modernity was an inevitable effect of colonization in Africa. As Achebe was to dramatize so powerfully in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the disruption of the African polity was made in the name of colonial modernity; it was also in the name of being modern that some African subjects would defect from their own cultures and identify with the new colonial order. Indeed, Achebe's "postcolonial" novels are concerned with the consequences of colonial modernity. The sense of instability that characterizes the process of decolonization in *No Longer at Ease* arises as much from doubts about the future of the imagined community of the Nigerian nation as the main character's entrapment between the culture of colonialism, represented by the shaky idiom of Englishness, and the continuing power of what were once considered to be outdated customs such as caste. Similarly, behind the comic mode of *A Man of the People* is a serious questioning of the nature of power once it has been translated into a nationalist narrative that is unclear about its idiom and moral authority.

But the continuing influence of Achebe's works and their now classical status go beyond their topicality and their role as sources of knowledge about Africa. Achebe's novels are cultural texts to the extent that they have an imaginative relationship to the African experience and hence cannot be properly interpreted outside the realities and dreams of an African political configuration. This concern with the meaning of the past in the pressure of the moment of writing is pronounced in Achebe's short stories (*Girls at War and Other Stories*) (1972) and his two collections of poems (*Beware Soul Brother and Other Poems*, also published as *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems*) (1972/1973), many provoked by the Nigerian Civil War. In all these works and four collections of essays, Achebe

has been responsible for making the African experience, in a historical and cultural perspective, the center of an African literature. He has been persistent in his claim that the main concerns of an African literature arise from a fundamental engagement with what he would consider to be the stream of African history and consciousness. In formal terms, Achebe's literary works, like his own life, reflect the variety of influences that have gone into the making of African literature, ranging through the folk traditions of the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, the idiom of the Bible and

the culture of the Christian missions, colonial education, the university and the institutions of English literature.

NOTE

Most of the material in this foreword is derived from a slightly revised combination of two previously published works. The first part is from "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literatures* 32.3 (Fall 2001); the second part is from *The Encyclopedia of African Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Preface

Chinua Achebe is, without question, the single author who has been most responsible for the rise of the African novel as a global cultural phenomenon in the past half century. Indeed, as Professor Simon Gikandi notes in his foreword to this volume, there is a very real sense in which Achebe can be said to have invented African literature, at least insofar as it exists as an internationally recognized cultural institution. Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is generally thought of as the first real novel to have been produced by an African writer in the English language. The impressive achievement of that book—plus its subsequent critical and commercial success—blazed a trail followed by numerous other African novelists. With Achebe in the lead, these novelists have been able, within the seemingly Western genre of the novel and generally in Western languages (especially English), to find an eloquent and effective mode for the expression of the particular social, historical, and cultural situation of modern Africa. Achebe himself was among those authors who built upon the impressive achievement of *Things Fall Apart*, producing a sequence of powerful novels that together tell the story of the history of modern Nigeria from the traumatic moment of first colonization to the era of postcolonial

political turmoil. Achebe's body of work has received considerable attention from Western critics, and in this sense he has also led the way for other African novelists. But Achebe has also been an important and outspoken critic in his own right, courageously condemning the colonialist biases of canonical Western classics such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, while at the same time explaining to Western audiences the crucial factors that both link the African novel to its Western predecessors and identify the African novel as an altogether different cultural phenomenon.

Given the extensive nature of Achebe's work as a novelist, poet, short-story writer, critic, political commentator, and international ambassador for Africa and African culture, it should perhaps come as no surprise that there is now a vast body of information available about him and his work. This volume represents an attempt to pull much of that information together in a single place, providing a convenient starting point at which those interested in Achebe and his work can find a substantial amount of information of various kinds, while also learning where to go to seek additional material. In this sense, the volume is intended to be accessible to those with little or no knowledge

of Achebe and his work. However, because of its broad scope, it should also be useful even to those who have substantial experience with Achebe or African literature.

The chronology at the beginning of the volume is intended to give a quick overview of the highlights of Achebe's life and career. Similarly, the bibliography at the back of the volume contains numerous sources from which additional information can be obtained. All of these bibliographic entries are referred to in at least one of the individual entries that form the heart of the volume. These entries fit into a variety of categories, though they are, for convenience of reference, arranged in a single alphabetical list. Central emphasis has been placed on Achebe's production as a novelist, and the entries include extensive critical introductions to each of his novels. There is also a wide variety of brief entries that identify and explain the various characters, locations, and concepts that figure in the novels.

Achebe's books of poetry, short stories, and nonfiction are also each discussed in their own entries, though those entries are less extensive than the ones devoted to the novels. There are also entries describing adaptations of Achebe's writing to other media, such as film and television. Similar entries are included describing the most important book-length critical discussions of Achebe's work, and biographical entries are included for Achebe's most important critics. Similar biographical entries are included for Achebe himself and for friends, family, and associates who have played a prominent role in his

career. Historical, geographical, and cultural entries provide useful background for readers who may need such material to help them understand the Nigerian context of Achebe's writing. There are also entries on specific issues and critical debates concerning this context and the ways in which postcolonial literature (such as the novels of Achebe) needs to be approached differently than Western literature. Finally, there are also entries for specific authors or works of literature that have been important to Achebe in his career or about which Achebe has provided important critical commentary. The various entries are cross-referenced using a system of bold-facing; any item in boldface within a given entry is also covered in an entry of its own.

The various entries have been provided by expert scholars who work in the field to which the entries are relevant. Many of these scholars have, in fact, themselves made important contributions to Achebe's growing critical reputation over the years. In that sense, the information provided is the best that could be obtained. However, the length restrictions inherent in a work such as this one require that the information included here is merely a starting point and should not be taken as complete and comprehensive. In this sense, readers interested in more complete and detailed information should pay serious attention to the suggestions for further reading that are included with the more substantial and complex entries and should consult the sources in the bibliography for further information.

Chronology

1909	Marriage of Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Anaenechi, Achebe's parents.		nemann African Writers Series. Daughter Chinelo born.
1930	Achebe born on November 16 at Ogidi, just east of Onitsha in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. He is christened Albert Chinualumogu Achebe.	1963	Nigeria becomes a republic with Nnamdi Azikiwe as the first president.
1944–1948	Achebe attends Government College, Umuahia.	1964	<i>Arrow of God</i> published. Son Ikechukwu born.
1948–1953	Achebe attends University College, Ibadan.	1966	<i>A Man of the People</i> published. An Igbo-led military coup establishes Major General Johnson T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi as head of the government in January. A second coup, led by Hausa officers, results in the killing of Ironsi and establishes Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as the head of the new government in July. Massacres of Igbo in the North are part of a crisis that causes Achebe to leave Lagos and return to Eastern Nigeria.
1954	Achebe begins work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.		
1956	Achebe trains with the BBC in London.		
1958	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> published by Heinemann.		
1960	Nigeria gains independence from British colonial rule on October 1. <i>No Longer at Ease</i> published.	1967	Biafra secedes from Nigeria on May 30, triggering the Nigerian civil war. Nigerian poet/activist Christopher Okigbo killed in the subsequent fighting. Achebe's son Chidi born.
1961	Achebe marries Christie Chinwe Okoli.		
1962	<i>The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories</i> published. Achebe becomes founding editor of the Heinemann African Writers Series.	1970	Biafra surrenders and rejoins Nigeria. Achebe's daughter Nwando born.

- 1971 *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing* begins publication. *Beware, Soul Brother* (poems) published.
- 1972 *Girls at War and Other Stories* published. *Beware, Soul Brother* wins the Commonwealth Poetry Prize.
- 1972–1975 Achebe serves as Visiting Professor of Literature at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- 1975 Achebe delivers lecture “An Image of Africa.” *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (essays) published. Gowon deposed in a coup that places General Murtala Muhammad as the head of the government.
- 1975–1976 Achebe serves as Visiting Professor of Literature at the University of Connecticut, Storrs.
- 1976 “An Image of Africa” published in *Massachusetts Review*. Muhammed assassinated and replaced by General Olusegun Obasanjo as head of the military government. Achebe returns to Nigeria and becomes Professor of Literature at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- 1979 Alhaji Shehu Shagari elected head of a civilian government. Achebe receives the Nigerian National Merit Award and the Order of the Federal Republic. He is elected Chairman of the Association of Nigerian Authors.
- 1982 *Aka Weta* (a volume of Igbo-language verse edited by Achebe and Obiora Udechukwu) published.
- 1983 *The Trouble with Nigeria* published. Shagari re-elected but deposed by a military coup a few months later. Death of Malam Aminu Kano, leader of the People’s Redemption Party. Achebe elected Deputy National President of that party. A military coup on December 31 establishes General Buhari as head of the government.
- 1985 Another military coup establishes the regime of Major General Babangida.
- 1986 Achebe appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the State University of Anambra in Enugu.
- 1987 *Anthills of the Savannah* published. It is short-listed for the Booker Prize for that year.
- 1987–1988 Achebe serves as Visiting Fellow at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- 1988 *Hopes and Impediments* (essays) published.
- 1989 Achebe serves as Distinguished Visiting Professor at the City College of New York. He is nominated for the presidency of PEN International.
- 1990 Celebration of Achebe’s sixtieth birthday at Nsukka. Achebe badly hurt in a near-fatal accident. Achebe accepts a position as Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Literature at Bard College in New York.
- 1991 Abuja becomes new capital of Nigeria.

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| 1993 | A joint civilian-military government is installed and elections are held. It is deposed a few months later in a coup led by General Sani Abacha. Abacha voids subsequent elections and declares himself head of the government. | 1995 | Ken Saro-Wiwa executed amid growing domestic tensions in Nigeria. |
| | | 1998 | Abacha dies. |
| | | 1999 | Elections install a new civilian government, led by Obasanjo. |
| | | 2000 | <i>Home and Exile</i> (essays) published. |

Contents

Foreword: Chinua Achebe and the Institution of African Literature <i>by Simon Gikandi</i>	vii
Preface	xvii
Chronology	xix
The Encyclopedia	1
Bibliography	289
Index	303
About the Contributors	315

Photos follow page 160