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GREAT WRITERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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NOVELISTS  
AND PROSE WRITERS

EDITOR  
JAMES VINSON

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The selection of writers included in this book is based on the recommendations of the advisers listed on page ix.

The entry for each writer consists of a biography, a complete list of his published books, a selected list of published bibliographies and critical studies on the writer, and a signed critical essay on his work.

In the biographies, details of education, military service, and marriage(s) are generally given before the usual chronological summary of the life of the writer; awards and honours are given last.

The Publications section is meant to include all book publications, though as a rule broadsheets, single sermons and lectures, minor pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, etc. are omitted. Under the heading Collections, we have listed the most recent collections of the complete works and those of individual genres (verse, plays, novels, stories, and letters); only those collections which have some editorial authority and were issued after the writer's death are listed; on-going editions are indicated by a dash after the date of publication; often a general selection from the writer's works or a selection from the works in the individual genres listed above is included.

Titles are given in modern spelling, though the essayists were allowed to use original spelling for titles and quotations; often the titles are "short." The date given is that of the first book publication, which often followed the first periodical or anthology publication by some time; we have listed the actual year of publication, often different from that given on the title-page. No attempt has been made to indicate which works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, or which works of fiction were published in more than one volume. We have listed plays which were produced but not published, but only since 1700; librettos and musical plays are listed along with the other plays; no attempt has been made to list lost or unverified plays. Reprints of books (including facsimile editions) and revivals of plays are not listed unless a revision or change of title is involved. The most recent edited version of individual works is included if it supersedes the collected edition cited.

In the essays, short references to critical remarks refer to items cited in the Publications section or in the Reading List. Introductions, memoirs, editorial matter, etc. in works cited in the Publications section are not repeated in the Reading List.

We would like to thank the advisers and contributors for their patience and help.

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 Roark Bradford  
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Samuel Lover  
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Colih MacInnes  
Compton Mackenzie  
Henry Mackenzie  
Hugh MacLennan

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**ABRAHAMS, Peter (Henry).** South African. Born in Vrededorp, near Johannesburg, 19 March 1919. Educated at Church of England mission schools in South Africa. Married 1) Dorothy Pennington in 1942 (divorced, 1948); 2) Daphne Elizabeth Miller in 1948, one son and two daughters. Worked in South Africa as a kitchen helper, porter and clerk, also as an editor in Durban; seaman, 1939-41; settled in England, 1941-56, and lived in France, 1948-50; regular contributor to *The Observer*, London, and the *Herald Tribune*, New York and Paris, 1952-64; emigrated to Jamaica, 1956: Editor, *West Indian Economist*, and Controller, "West Indian News" program, Jamaica, 1958-62. Lives in St. Andrews, Jamaica.

## PUBLICATIONS

## Fiction

- Dark Testament* (stories). 1942.  
*Song of the City*. 1945.  
*Mine Boy*. 1946.  
*The Path of Thunder*. 1948.  
*Wild Conquest*. 1950.  
*A Wreath for Udomo*. 1956.  
*A Night of Their Own*. 1965.  
*This Island Now*. 1966.

## Verse

- A Blackman Speaks of Freedom! Poems*. 1938(?).  
*Here, Friend*. N.d.

## Other

- Return to Goli* (reportage). 1953.  
*Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa*. 1954.  
*Jamaica: An Island Mosaic*. 1957.  
*The World of Mankind*, with others. 1962.

Reading List: *Abrahams* by Michael Wade, 1972.

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Peter Abrahams has spent more of his life outside South Africa than in it (he left there in 1939 when he was twenty years of age) but the impact of the South African system on him in his formative years has been such that with one exception all his work has been set in Africa and deals with racial conflict, oppression, economic injustice, and social and political deprivation. The one exception is *This Island Now*, which is set in Jamaica. It is easy to see why Peter Abrahams chose Jamaica, for, given the conditions which exist there, he is able to explore the same themes which concern him and show them at work in a slightly different setting.

His most successful writing is to be found in his non-fiction, particularly in his autobiography, *Tell Freedom*. Here he describes his early life in South Africa, the frustrations

and humiliations he suffered, and the growing disillusionment until he reached the decision that he must leave. What adds an extra dimension to this work is "the portrait of the artist as a young man" flavour which it possesses. The incompatibility of art and apartheid was a major factor in his choice of exile.

His fiction deals with familiar South-African themes: the boy who leaves the village for the town (*Mine Boy*), the dilemma of the coloured (*The Path of Thunder*). He moves away from the expected in *Wild Conquest*, which deals with the Great Trek and the clash between the Boers and the Matabele, and in *A Wreath for Udomo*, which is set in a fictitious African state in 1956 (Ghana comes most readily to mind).

Abrahams never makes facile judgements, the truth is rarely simple. For example, Boer and Matabele alike are criticized in *Wild Conquest*, and in *A Wreath for Udomo* there are no easy solutions to the dilemmas facing the leader of a newly independent African state. Abrahams's greatest weakness lies in his depiction of character. They lack psychological depth and tend to become romanticized mouth-pieces for Abrahams's ideas. It is almost certain that his reputation as an artist is likely to decrease and his main interest will be as a phenomenon of literary history.

—Anna Rutherford

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**ACHEBE, Chinua.** Nigerian. Born Albert Chinualumogu in Ogidi, East Central State, 16 November 1930. Educated at the Government College, Umuahia, 1944–47; University College, Ibadan, 1948–53, B.A. (London) 1953. Married Christie Okoli in 1961; two sons and two daughters. Talks Producer, Lagos, 1954–57, Controller, Enugu, 1958–61, and Director, Lagos, 1961–66, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation; Co-Founder, with Christopher Okigbo, and Chairman, Citadel Books Ltd., Enugu, 1967. Since 1967, Senior Research Fellow, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Visiting Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1972–73, University of Connecticut, Storrs, 1975. Founding Editor, Heinemann African Writers series, 1962–72, and since 1970 Director, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., and Nwankwo-Ifejika Ltd., publishers, Enugu. Since 1971, Editor, *Okike*, a Nigerian journal of new writing. Travelled to the United States, with Gabriel Okara and Cyprian Ekwensi, to seek help for Biafra, 1969. Member, University of Lagos Council, 1966; Chairman, Society of Nigerian Authors, 1966. Since 1971, Member of the East Central State Library Board. Recipient: Margaret Wrong Memorial Prize, 1959; Nigerian National Trophy, 1960; Rockefeller Fellowship, 1960; UNESCO Fellowship, 1963; Commonwealth Poetry Prize, 1973; Neil Gunn International Fellowship, 1974. D.Litt.: University of Stirling, Scotland, 1974; University of Southampton, Hampshire, 1974. Honorary Fellow, Modern Language Association of America, 1974; Fellow, Ghana Association of Writers, 1975. Lives in Nigeria.

#### PUBLICATIONS

##### Fiction

- Things Fall Apart.* 1958.  
*No Longer at Ease.* 1960.  
*The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories.* 1962.  
*Arrow of God.* 1964.



*A Man of the People.* 1966.  
*Girls at War* (stories). 1972.

#### Verse

*Beware Soul-Brother and Other Poems.* 1971; revised edition, 1972.  
*Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems.* 1973.

#### Other

*Chike and the River* (juvenile). 1966.  
*How the Leopard Got His Claws* (juvenile). 1972.  
*Morning Yet on Creation Day.* 1975.  
*In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka at the University of Washington.* 1975.

Editor, *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria.* 1971.

Bibliography: in *Africana Library Journal*, Spring 1970.

Reading List: *The Novels of Achebe* by G. D. Killam, 1969; *Achebe* by Arthur Ravenscroft, 1969; *Achebe* by David Carroll, 1970; *Achebe* edited by Bernth Lindfors and C. L. Innes, 1978.

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Chinua Achebe published four novels between 1958 and 1966, but since that time has turned to short stories and poetry. The turbulent history of Nigeria in the last ten years may explain this shift, especially as Achebe is an Ibo and thus sadly involved in the Biafran war. Some of Achebe's novels, while they are obviously relevant to the confused situation in Nigeria today, are also impressive records of Nigeria's past.

In *Things Fall Apart*, perhaps his most impressive work, Achebe describes the fall of Okonkwo, a tribal chieftain unable to accommodate himself to the new values brought in by English missionaries. While Achebe is careful not to take sides in the conflict between African and European values, the tragedy of Okonkwo is such that we are sympathetic to his side, especially as the African code of behaviour is shown to be more fluid than that of the missionaries. It is Okonkwo's failure to recognize this fluidity which causes his downfall. In *No Longer at Ease*, we see Okonkwo's grandson Obi, living in the 1950's, in a similar dilemma as he tries to reconcile the claims of his African tribe and the lessons he has learnt in Europe. *No Longer at Ease*, a slight work, shows Obi's decline into corruption, a decline never satisfactorily explained. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe returns to the past, this time to the 1920's when Nigerian tribal life has to accommodate itself to the colonial administration. Both Ezeulu, the tribal priest, and Winterbottom, the Colonial administrator, fail because they try to impose their own rigid deterministic philosophy on an intransigent world. In *A Man of the People*, we have the familiar conflict between the virtuous but priggish narrator Odih and the corrupt but charming politician Nanga as they struggle for power in a newly independent state. Corruption wins, and the conclusion of the novel is a pessimistic one. Achebe is a little uncertain in his use of the first person narrative in the last novel, but all his novels are stylistically effective, especially in the use of dialogue, where the subtle variation of stately African phrases, their slightly absurd literal translations, pidgin English, and the formal English of administrators and missionaries serve to point the conflicts he is describing.

—T. J. Winniffrith