



Home and Exile

By Chinua Achebe

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"A rare opportunity to glimpse a bit of the man behind the monumental novels." --*Chicago Tribune*

Powerful and deeply personal, these three essays by the great Nigerian author articulate his mission to rescue African culture from the narratives written by Europeans. Looking through the prism of his experiences as a student in English schools in Nigeria, he recalls his first encounters with European perspectives on Africa in the works of Joyce Cary and Elspeth Huxley. He examines the impact that his novel *Things Fall Apart*—as well as fellow Nigerian Amos Tutola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mt. Kenya*, among other works—had on efforts to reclaim Africa's story. He confronts the persistence of colonial views of Africa. And he argues for the importance of living and writing the African experience: Africa needs stories told by Africans.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Based on three lectures distinguished Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe gave at Harvard University in 1998, this short but trenchant work does not pretend to be a full-fledged autobiography. Instead, Achebe makes forceful use of his personal experiences to examine the political nature of culture. Born in 1930, the son of a Christian convert, young Achebe received a privileged colonial education and "was entranced by the far-away and long-ago worlds of the stories [in English books like *Treasure Island* and *Ivanhoe*], so different from the stories of my home and childhood." Yet he and fellow university students indignantly rejected Anglo-Irishman Joyce Cary's highly praised novel *Mister Johnson*, which bore no resemblance to their knowledge of Nigerian life. This encounter "call[ed] into question my childhood assumption of the innocence of stories," Achebe comments, using scathing assessments of white Kenyan writer Elspeth Huxley and Indian/Caribbean expatriate V.S. Naipaul to remind us that all literature reflects its creators' beliefs and prejudices. Achebe is not an enemy of Western culture; he merely asserts Africans' right to their own perspective and their own art, as exemplified in works like his groundbreaking 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Though blunt, his argument is tempered by humor and a passionate belief in "the curative power of stories." --Wendy Smith

From Publishers Weekly

Though it is labeled autobiographical by the publisher, this small book, which originated as three lectures given at Harvard University in December 1998, barely covers the rudiments of Achebe's long and productive life (he is now 70). But the great Nigerian novelist and poet, a master of compression, needs little more than 100 pages to tell the dramatic story of the emergence of a native African literature; in the 1950s, students at English-dominated universities started speaking out against the long European tradition of depicting Africans as "a people of beastly living, without a God, laws, religion," which dates back to Captain John Lok's voyage to West Africa in 1561. "Until the lions produce their own historian," says Achebe, quoting an African proverb of uncertain provenance, "the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter." With characteristic ease and economy, he traces the long African tradition of asserting the worth of the individual, born of Igbo myths that described each community as created separately with its own original ancestor. This notion of individuality, which made the Africans vulnerable to the Atlantic slave traders and to colonial occupation, is the same quality that defined the native African fiction and poetry that emerged in the 1950s, at the time of independence for many African nations. This slim volume told in Achebe's subtle, witty and gracious style is one of those small gems of literary and historical analysis that readers will treasure and reread over the years. (June)

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From Library Journal

To love Achebe is to love Africa and language. As he is Africa's most prominent novelist and critic, this book's 100-plus pages don't seem ample enough to chronicle the development of such an extraordinary intellectual and literary talent. Furthermore, because of his lyrical prose and accessible ideas, at the end one is left desiring more of Achebe's ruminations (both serious and humorous) on empire, postcolonialism, Western writers (e.g., Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and Elspeth Huxley) on Africa, universal culture, and expatriation and exile. Reading Achebe is to know Africa in a way that few are able to tell. Achebe weaves anecdotes from his childhood, schooling, and writing life with African proverbs and literary and political theory to contribute beautifully to the "process of 're-storying' peoples who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession." His passion and truth are sensuous and contagious, warming one's soul. Highly recommended for all libraries.

-Sherri Barnes, Univ. of California Lib., Santa Barbara

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