



Africa's Tarnished Name

Chinua Achebe

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He needed to hear Africa speak for itself after a lifetime of hearing Africa spoken about by others

Electrifying essays on the history, complexity, diversity of a continent, from the father of modern African literature.

Penguin Modern: fifty new books celebrating the pioneering spirit of the iconic Penguin Modern Classics series, with each one offering a concentrated hit of its contemporary, international flavour. Here are authors ranging from Kathy Acker to James Baldwin, Truman Capote to Stanislaw Lem and George Orwell to Shirley Jackson; essays radical and inspiring; poems moving and disturbing; stories surreal and fabulous; taking us from the deep South to modern Japan, New York's underground scene to the farthest reaches of outer space.

Africa's Tarnished Name Details

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Author : Chinua Achebe

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From Reader Review Africa's Tarnished Name for online ebook

Peter says

Clear, well written and powerful indeed. Not whiney (his words), just well written honesty about Africa. Beautiful observations. Highly recommended.

Clementine says

I'm very interested in postcolonial literature (fiction and nonfiction), but it's been some time since I've read any since my studies have been focused elsewhere. How convenient to have four of Chinua Achebe's essays about postcolonial Africa in one inexpensive volume! Achebe writes with such electrifying power. The last two essays were the most impressive to me, as they grappled with colonial impositions of representations of Africa. (This automatically makes me think of Spivak's essay "Can The Subaltern Speak?", though written a bit more accessibly...) A quick but extremely thought-provoking read filled with zingers.

Lisa says

The Penguin Moderns series is a collection of 50 little books that sell in Australia for \$2.50. Handbag-friendly, they are typically about 50 pages in length, and can be letters, travelogues, short stories, speeches, poetry and essays: selected, says the Penguin website, to represent the radical spirit of Penguin Modern Classics. I have four of them so far:

The Distance of the Moon by Italo Calvino;

Notes on Nationalism by George Orwell;

Why Do You Wear a Cheap Watch by Hans Fallada; and the subject of this review,

Africa's Tarnished Name by Chinua Achebe.

Like the essays and speeches within, Africa's Tarnished Name is a provocative title. There are two essays and two speeches, and all of them are the words of an angry man, one who is outraged by the representation of Africa by the West yet disappointed by Nigeria's post-independence flaws.

'What is Nigeria to me?'

'Travelling White'

'Africa's Tarnished Name', and

'Africa is People'.

Chinua Achebe, (1930-2013), said to be 'the father of African literature', is famous for his ground-breaking novel Things Fall Apart (1958), which I read at school. This was followed by No Longer at Ease (1960, see my review) and No#3 in the trilogy Arrow of God (1964) which is listed in 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die. There are other novels too, (but I'm not going to buy them till I've read Arrow of God!) and also works of non-fiction, among which is The Education of a British-Protected Child (2011), in which these essays and speeches are collected.

The two earliest essays challenge readers to reflect on the experiences of a Nigerian in transition from colonialism. 'Travelling White' was first published in The Guardian in 1989, and it's about Achebe's first travels in 1960, on a Rockefeller Fellowship which funded him to travel anywhere he liked in Africa for six months. He went to Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and planned to visit South-west Africa and South Africa – but abandoned his trip after his experiences in Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe). In a hotel in Salisbury (now Harare) he ordered a drink for the two white academics and a black postgraduate student from the new University of Rhodesia.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2018/08/26/a...>

Nicole says

This is a fantastic little read, which I would highly recommend! These tiny Penguin Modern editions (as well as the Little Black Classics) are really great for trying out an author before embarking on a longer work by them.

In this text, Achebe's sharp assessment of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* stood out to me, as did the explanation of the different ways Africa has been seen by Europe and how Europe's view of Africa has shaped what seems to be a near unshakeable vision of Africa as a continent of "rudimentary souls" (as Conrad describes Africans).

The first time I read *Heart of Darkness*, I thought it was "OK" but with uncomfortable—if well written—passages that I suppose I tried not to believe were what I thought they were. After reading Achebe's thoughts, I feel more confident in my original feelings about Conrad's work and I'm considering reading his colonial novella again to reassess. I'm also considering re-reading Achebe's book *Things Fall Apart*. It didn't leave a huge impression on me at the time, but I wonder if I might now be better equipped to read between the lines of what is being presented in that text.

Roisin says

Number 28 and part of the Penguin Modern Series, this short book contains four fascinating and engaging essays by Chinua Achebe, 'What is Nigeria to Me', 'Travelling White', Africa's Tarnished Name' and 'Africa is People'.

In these essays an Africa is presented and shown from a non-Western viewpoint, exposing how European culture presents Africa. He offers experiences which give some of the writing a personal feel, but as a learned and educated man, describes not only a personal viewpoint, but a historical and economic one. Achebe not only criticises the European presentation of Africa but also for example, tackles Nigeria post-independence.

Achebe is a fantastic writer and speaks with a strong and formidable voice. Africa has been for too long viewed as distant and unknowable, despite the facts showing the opposite. He challenges and provides an alternate image. In one of the essays, he looks at art, film and literary representation of Africa by Europeans and isn't afraid to challenge accepted Western/European canons of literature.

This is no angry rant, but a black man writing from an informed, perspective, offering another voice, an African one

Izzi says

Review coming soon!

Asun says

Absolutely necessary read for anyone who wishes to understand through a series of essays and from one of Nigeria's best authors, what is like to constantly live with the prejudice and oppression of white society of an entire continent.

Sophie says

This tradition has invented an Africa where nothing good happens or even happened, an Africa that has not been discovered yet and is waiting for the first European visitor to explore it and explain it and straighten it up, or more likely, perish in the attempt.

Η πρόζα του Achebe, ειλικρινής και καταγγελτική, αποτελεί τροφή για σκέψη.

Salvador says

Very Insightful. Although I didn't much enjoy "Things Fall Apart", this is a great collection of texts explaining post-colonial Africa

Ashleigh (a frolic through fiction) says

Originally posted on A Frolic Through Fiction

After reading Achebe's Things Fall Apart for uni and needing to write an essay on postcolonialism, I figured this was the perfect time to pick this one up and get a little extra background knowledge for my essay in the process. Way to multitask, amiright? Reading and studying in one.

Anyway, this is a collection of really short essays written by Achebe about – you guessed it – Africa's tarnished name, and how the representation of Africa has been created by Europe (specifically, Britain). I've found that I really get along with Achebe style of essay writing, as he's not overly academic and includes anecdotes to support his claims, making them more personal and humane than just having words thrown at your face (as most essays feel). You can sense his personality through his writing, hear his disdain at the world and it just works. Granted, sometimes he would go off on a tangent and I'd get lost somewhere along the way, but it soon realigned to what he was trying to say. I suppose it also helps that he always absolutely slates Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, one of my least favourite books of recent years. Good on ya, Achebe. I'll read your rants anytime.

Lauren (Cook's Books) says

I am a prime example of the paradox of proximity. Africa is the closest continent to Europe but in my mind it feels so distant and different. This little collection of essays looks at how that idea took root in the white European psyche over centuries and how it still manifests today through policy and practice. It also takes the danger of relying on these colonial mythologies when reporting in the post colonial sphere, much like Adiche's danger of a single story. The best non fiction exposes our own assumptions and prejudices, diminishing our ignorance if we let it and I think that this little book had given me a more realistic impression of one little piece of Africa and all the complexity it contains. Now it's my job to follow up and educate myself.

AISHA says

This Penguin Modern Classic, number 28, contains of four short texts adapted from various speeches and books by Chinua Achebe. In short, I highly recommend it.

★★★★?

1) What is Nigeria to me?

"Nigeria is child. Gifted, enormously talented, prodigiously endowed, and incredibly wayward. Being a Nigerian is abysally frustrating and unbelievably exciting. I have said somewhere that in my next reincarnation I want to be Nigerian again; but I have also, in a rather angry book called The Trouble with Nigeria, dismissed Nigerian travel advertisements with the suggestion that only a tourist with a kinky addiction to self-flagellation would pick Nigeria for a holiday. And I mean both."

I liked parts of this, especially his reflection on what it means to love and un-love your country at the same time. The beginning was rather slow, however.

2) Traveling White

"But how was it that this prominent German jurist carried such a blind spot about Africa all his life? Did he never read the papers? Why did he need an African novel to open his eyes? My own theory is that he needed to hear Africa speak for itself after a lifetime of hearing Africa spoken by others. / I offer the story of the judge, Wolfgang Zeidler, as a companion to the fashionable claim made even by writers that literature can do nothing to alter our social and political condition. Of course it can."

This was a nice piece on otherness and what it feels like to look different physically.

3) Africa's Tarnished Name

"Africans are not really served by his compassion, whatever it means, they ask for one thing alone - to be seen for what they are: human beings."

This is my favourite piece, as it's longer and contains a ton of footnotes and references. It's elaborate and full of examples. At the same time, it can get repetitive, and that can either bore you or serve as reminders. The critique on Hume stunned me, although I'm not surprised at the lack of diversity, being a sociology major in Europe. Achebe furthers this specific critique in the last piece. I particularly enjoyed the time he used

looking at Joseph Conrad's literature, and how it contributed to painting a violent and unfair image of Africans.

4) Africa Is People

"Africa believes in people, in cooperation with people. If the philosophical dictum of Descartes 'I think, therefore I am' represents a European individualistic ideal, the Bantu declaration 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu' represents an African communal aspiration: 'A human is human because of other humans.'"

It's sad how much people who are, and look, different have to justify their own existence. You'd think the world had changed, which it has, but it's truly a neverending struggle of trying to prove that you're human, and that you deserve to BE as much as everyone else.

"Our humanity is contingent on the humanity of our fellows. No person or group can be human alone. We rise above the animal together, or not at all. If we learned that lesson even this late in the day, we would have taken a truly millennial step forward."

Bookdragon Sean says

Achebe is an angry man and in everything he writes he is full of rage and frustration at a world that denies the voice of his brothers. This passion is persuasive and powerful: his voice is commanding.

He doesn't play around with words, instead preferring to cut straight towards the harsh truth of reality. Africa is dramatically unrepresented in Western media, literature and politics. White men and European leaders gather to discuss the economic future of Africa; they put into place action plans that seek to alter the future of the continent. The ideas are cold and will cause suffering to the people, a fact the white man cares not for.

"Africa is people"

Simple words, but when delivered to such a gathering of leading authorities Achebe silenced the room. The white man is so detached from the realities of the people that he has forgotten (or simply doesn't care?) about this simple truism. Again, western representation of Africa is to blame. People have become so desensitised to African culture.

And it is because of this that Achebe writes so strongly against Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is a book that portrays the blacks as primitive and incapable of any sense of sophisticated society. What these writers don't seem to understand is that technological advances are not necessarily the same as civilisation, morality and simple human decency.

This is a great edition, full of many of Achebe's most powerful pieces. They are not words to be missed.

Alessandra says

A small collection of extracts of Achebe's essays on Africa, belonging, culture and history. Absolutely a must read!

Kirsty says

The twenty-eighth book on the Penguin Modern list is 'the father of modern African literature' Chinua Achebe's *Africa's Tarnished Name*. Of Achebe's work, the only book of his which I had read before picking this up is *Things Fall Apart*, which I very much enjoyed. I was really looking forward, therefore, to reading some of his non-fiction, and this collection of 'electrifying essays on the history, complexity and appropriation of a continent' felt like the perfect way in which to begin his oeuvre.

Africa's Tarnished Name is comprised of four essays: 'What's Nigeria to Me?', which is adapted from a speech given in Lagos in 2008; 'Travelling White', which was first published in *The Guardian* in 1989; the titular essay, published in *Another Africa* in 1998; and 'Africa is People', which has been adapted from a speech delivered in Paris in 1998. All of these essays can be found in the 2011 collection entitled *The Education of a British-Protected Child*.

Achebe was born into the 'Igbo nation', one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, and the largest in Nigeria. In 'What's Nigeria to Me?', Achebe discusses nationality, and the granting of independence to Nigeria in 1960. He goes on to point out the governmental issues which came with this independence, and the subsequent coups and massacres of citizens, which led to a bloody Biafran civil war. He discusses, quite openly, his difficult relationship with Nigeria. He writes that his feeling toward the country 'was one of profound disappointment', before going on to say: 'I found it difficult to forgive Nigeria and my countrymen and -women for the political nonchalance and cruelty that unleashed upon us these terrible events, which set us back a whole generation and robbed us of the chance, clearly within our grasp, to become a medium-rank developed nation in the twentieth century.'

Achebe's essays feel immediately warm and amusing, particularly with regard to their tongue-in-cheek humour. The first essay begins: 'Nigerian nationality was for me and my generation an acquired taste - like cheese. Or, better still, like ballroom dancing. Not dancing per se, for that came naturally; but this titillating version of slow-slow-quick-quick-slow performed in close body contact with a female against a strange, elusive beat. I found, however, that once I had overcome my initial awkwardness I could do it pretty well.'

He discusses, amongst other things, the portrayal of Africa in fiction, and Western perceptions of the continent. Achebe makes some very interesting points throughout. 'Africa's Tarnished Name', for instance, begins: 'It is a great irony of history and geography that Africa, whose landmass is closer than any other to the mainland of Europe, should come to occupy in the European psychological disposition the furthest point of otherness, should indeed become Europe's very antithesis.' The second essay, 'Travelling White', details Achebe's travels in other African countries during 1960, and the racism which he encountered along the way.

In each of these essays, Achebe has packed so much into such a compact space, without sparing his reader explanations. He writes with brevity, and with confidence, and speaks with both authority and intelligence. These essays are filled with wisdom and measured arguments, and are often quite profound. There is so much which can be learnt from this important collection, and it is clear to see why the author is so revered. Achebe is a gifted essayist, and I certainly do not want to leave it too long before I read more of his work.
