



CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN WRITERS TO THE WORLD OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

By

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INTRODUCTION

The term ‘World Literature’ was popularized by German poet Goethe in 19th century. He wrote: “I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men. . .I, therefore, like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same.”

In the nineteenth century, World Literature was generally mentioned as Western literary classics by Homer, Shakespeare, William Wordsworth and so on.

It was only in twentieth century, with the independence of African countries from colonial yoke that World Literature is now being considered in the true sense of its term, representing the literature from all parts and all languages of the world.

Thus, Idowu Koyenikan, a highly acclaimed African author, sets the tone for the spirit of African thoughts and ambitions to the world of English literature in the following words:

“Most people write me off when they see me.

They do not know my story.

They say I am just an African.

They judge me before they get to know me.

¹ - AL Asmarya Islamie University Faculty of Education.



What they do not know is
The pride I have in the blood that runs through my veins;
The pride I have in my rich culture and the history of my people;
The pride I have in my strong family ties and the deep connection to my
community;
So you think I am nothing?
Don't worry about what I am now,
For what I will be, I am gradually becoming.
I will raise my head high wherever I go
Because of my African pride,
And nobody will take that away from me."

Idowu Koyenikan, *Wealth for All Africans: How Every African Can Live the
Life of Their Dreams*

GLOBAL APPEAL OF AFRICAN WRITERS

Authors such as **Chinua Achebe**, **Wole Soyinka** and **J.M. Coetzee** have set the stage for African writers to be noticed globally in the field of English Literature.

Their works of renowned importance have not only been translated into various languages but have also been communicated effectively to the world about the rich tradition and culture of the African continent.

According to a critic, Minna Salami, interconnectivity and technology has increased access to African writers, especially to those who have been seeking to share alternative and unique stories. The world has noticed that Africa has its own stories to tell; stories rooted in the culture of the continent from the perspective of people from the continent.

The writers from Africa have received considerable appreciation from the international community. Their works which include the message of innovation and contain transcultural feelings have got wide acclaim.



The poetic work of Syl Cheney-Coker, particularly his long novel *The last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbur* (1990) embraces some of the themes and concerns of the recent transcultural mode in African writing.

Some of the African writings that have received attention in the West are the poignant slave narratives, such as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), which described vividly the horrors of slavery and the slave trade.

As Africans became more confident, they often reacted against colonial repression in their writings. Others looked to their own past for subjects. Thomas Mofolo, for example, wrote *Chaka* (tr. 1931), about the famous Zulu military leader, in Susuto.

After World War II, as Africans began demanding their independence, more African writers were published and globally acknowledged.

Such writers as, in western Africa, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Kofi Awoonor, Agostinho Neto, Tchicaya u tam'si, Camera Laye, Mongo Beti, Ben Okri, and Ferdinand Oyono and, in eastern Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, and Jacques Rabémananjara produced poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and plays.

All were writing in European languages, and often they shared the same themes: the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation, pride in the African past, and hope for the continent's independent future.

In South Africa, the horrors of apartheid have, until the present, dominated the literature. Es'kia Mphahlele, Nadine Gordimer, Bessie Head, Dennis Brutus, J. M. Coetzee, and Miriam Tlali all reflect in varying degrees in their writings the experience of living in a racially segregated society.

Much of contemporary African literature reveals disillusionment and dissent with current events.

For example, V. Y. Mudimbe in *Before the Birth of the Moon* (1989) explores a doomed love affair played out within a society riddled by deceit and corruption.



In Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was jailed shortly after he produced a play, in Kikuyu, which was perceived as highly critical of the country's government. Apparently, what seemed most offensive about the drama was the use of songs to emphasize its messages.

Here is a list of three distinguished African authors who are made a mark in the world of English literature.

RENOWNED AFRICAN WRITERS

The pace of present African literature is moving at a high-speed, style and tone. The subjects of taboo are widely explored. The emerging African authors of this generation are not afraid to go further afield for the literary fodder. Since the birth of literature in Africa, there have been a number of African authors from all over the continent who have done a lot to contribute to the English literature.

I. Chinua Achebe:

Chinua Achebe is one of the best African authors who have contributed a lot in the field of African literature. He was born in 1930, and schooled at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

His first novel titled '*Things Fall Apart*' was published in 1958. It was Achebe's groundbreaking work which, for the first time opened the door to Africa from the inside. In the words of Nelson Mandela, Achebe brought "Africa to the rest of the world".

In his writings, Chinua Achebe affirms the educational function of literature. He establishes a human context for understanding modern Nigerian history: the first contacts between European and African cultures at the turn of the century.

In *Things Fall Apart* (1958), he portrays the subsequent institutionalization of European religious and political structures in Africa.



In *Arrow of God* (1964), he vividly describes the uneasy years immediately preceding independence of Nigeria while in *No Longer at Ease* (1960), reflects the excitement and disappointment of Nigeria's First Republic.

As a corrective to European literature's stereotypical portraits of Africans as an unvarying, primitive force, Achebe strives to communicate the human complexity of Nigerian existence, to establish the independence of African literature, and to demonstrate the value of traditional Igbo culture.

In "*The Role of a Writer in a New Nation*" (1964), Achebe states that his first priority is to inform the world that "African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless . . . , that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity."

However, Achebe does not idealize the precolonial past, for he knows that it cannot survive unaltered in a modern world; instead, he encourages his readers to explore continuities with the past that can coexist with modern society.

He is called "the father of modern African writing", Chinua Achebe was one of the most widely read novelists from Nigeria who played a pivotal role in the development of African literature. Considered to be a major writer in not just the country of his birth but throughout the world.

II. Wole Soyinka:

Wole Soyinka is also one of the great heroes in the list of top and best African authors who have won great awards and honours in the world of literature.



He was born in 1934 in Nigeria and he became the first African author to be awarded the Nobel Prize award in literature.

Late 1950's, he wrote his very first important play titled '*A Dance of the Forests*' that satirizes a fledgling nation by highlighting that the present days is no longer a golden age than was in the past.

In some cases, his writing focuses on the modern West Africa in a style of satire, but his belief and serious intent in the evils fundamentals in the practice of power are common in his present work.

As the time moved on, Wole Soyinka's creativity expanded in all directions. In 1981, he published the first of several volumes of autobiography, *Aké: The Years of Childhood*.

In the early 1980s he wrote two of his best-known plays, *Requiem for a Futurologist* and *A Play of Giants*, satirizing the new dictators of Africa.

He wrote several plays in a lighter vein, making fun of pompous westernized world. Other notable plays include *Madmen and Specialists* (performed 1970; published 1971), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995). In these and Soyinka's other dramas, Western elements are skillfully fused with subject matter and dramatic techniques deeply rooted in Yoruba folklore and religion.

Though he considered himself primarily a playwright, Soyinka also wrote novels—*The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973). He also penned several volumes of poetry.

His plays deal with a variety of themes, ranging from comedy to tragedy and from political satire to power struggles of the indigenous people. He played an active role in Nigeria's political history and its struggle with British colonization. He is also recognized as one of the masters of dramatics and theatre, who presented crucial political issues through this literary works.



III. J.M. Coetzee:

J.M. Coetzee is one of today's most-lauded writers. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, and has received the Booker Prize twice, for 1999's *Disgrace* and 1983's *Life & Times of Michael K*.

In a 2003 interview with the Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, Coetzee was asked about his literary influences. His answer was complex, touching on questions of memory and of the different ways that influence can take place, whether overt or subconscious. He also delved into some specifics:

“The writers who have the deepest influence on one are those one reads in ones more impressionable, early life, and often it is the more youthful works of those writers that leave the deepest imprint.”

J.M. Coetzee published his first novel, *Dusklands*, in South Africa in 1974. Three years, he won his native country's top literary honor, the Central News Agency Literary Award, for *In the Heart of the Country* (1977).

With his next novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the author began to build an international reputation.

More novels soon followed, including *Foe* (1986) and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994). Coetzee received especially strong praise for *Disgrace* (1999), including another Booker Prize—making him the first author to win Britain's most famous literary prize twice. Featuring a white woman who is raped by three black men, *Disgrace* proved to be controversial as well.

Coetzee also branched out into memoirs around this time, releasing *Boyhood* in 1997 and *Youth* in 2002. In line with his unique style and somewhat secretive nature, he wrote these works in third person and in present tense. Coetzee has published several essay collections as well, including *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1990), *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996) and *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays*.

Much of Coetzee's writing reflects either directly or indirectly on recent events unfolding within South African society, although critics have warned against straightforward allegorical readings of his work.

A prolific and prizewinning author and essayist, J. M. Coetzee's works have been the subject of much critical and analytical review. In many ways



Coetzee's's fiction defined modern African literature. More than any other African author writing in English, Coetzee has helped the world understand the value of African culture and struggle without ignoring the difficult problems that African nations face in the post-colonialist era.

CONCLUSION

There are many other African writers who have made equally notable contributions to the world of English literature. Some of the notable ones are Amos Tutuola, Camera Laye and Dinaw Mengestu. They have truly through their inspired writings made the world recognize the beauty of African dreams and realities of life.

Due to the creative effort of these writers, Africa's growing role in western European culture is reflected in the increasing interest in the literature.

Confined during the 1970s and 1980s to politically radical circles, African authors now appear in the culture pages of major journals.

New anthologies from leading publishers around the globe have raised the profile of African writings, while increased funding has enabled the professionalization of translation.

'African literature is on its way to becoming a vital manifestation of a universal literature', says Bernard Magnier.

African literature is truly an emerging voice of people in the content and reflects the broader colonial exploits of Western nations.



About the author:

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His contributions regularly appear in the renowned newspapers and magazines around the world, most notable media among them are: [The Tripoli Post](#), Libya, [The Times of India](#), India, [The Wire](#), India, [The Milli Gazette](#), India, [Muslim Village](#), Australia. His articles have also appeared in the [Muslim World League Journal](#), published from Saudi Arabia.

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