

**CHAPTER 14**  
**THE NOVELIST AS A TEACHER**

*CHINUA ACHEBE*

As Nigerian's most prominent novelist and as the most widely read African writer, both on the African continent and abroad, Chinua Achebe has exerted considerable influence over the development of African literature written in English during the past two decades. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is regarded as a literary classic, and its impact has been so decisive upon contemporary African writers that many critics have begun to criticize his works. *Things Fall Apart* became the first novel by the African writer Chinua Achebe to be adopted as a required text for African secondary school students and the West African.

By 1965, Achebe could point to a significant audience for his works in Nigeria and in other African societies. Achebe's belief that the modern Africa writer should teach, that he has a particular responsibility to shape the social moral values of the society, has been a persistent theme of his various public state affairs. Before the African writer could write about contemporary issues, Achebe maintained, he had first to resolve the question of his humanity.

Achebe later restated his position in 'The Novelist as a Teacher' 'here there is an adequate revolution for me to espouse to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement'. Given Achebe's outlook, it is not surprising that his vision of rehabilitation of Nigerian society should extend to the entire population, not just to adults, and that he – as well as many other contemporary Nigerian writers has devoted considerable attention to writing literature for Nigeria children.

**CHAPTER 15**  
**THE TRUTH OF FICTION**

*CHINUA ACHEBE*

One question one should ask himself is; Are there such things as good and bad fictions? In Chinua Achebe's essay 'The Truth of Fiction' (1978), he writes, 'The greatest virtue of literary fiction is that it is able, by engaging our imaginations, to lead us to discovery and recognitions by an unexpected and instructive route. It helps us locate again the line between the heroic and the cowardly when it seems most shadowy and elusive, and it does this by forcing us to encounter the heroic and cowardly psyche. The life of the imagination is a vital element of our total nature. If we starve it or pollute it, the quality of our life is depressed or soiled. Belief in superior and inferior race; belief that some people who live across our frontiers or speak a different language from ourselves are the cause of all the trouble in the world, or that our own particular group or class or caste has a right to certain things which are denied to others; the belief that men are superior to women, and so on. All are functions generated by the imagination.

Chinua Achebe writes that everyone creates fiction for themselves in order to make our worlds livable. By 'Fictions' he means the story that make sense of things and connect the dots of life. Some of these fictions are beneficent and some are malignant. Achebe is saying that whether these fictions are true or false, good or evil, they have power because they shape the way we see the world. The power to make a story that others will live in is a great power, which begs the question: How can people use their power well? .....With love and with humanity.



**CHAPTER 29**  
**NEGRIITUDE: A HUMANISM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

*LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR*

Negritude launched in the 1930s by, Aime Cesaire and Leon-Gontran Damas was one of the most remarkable cultural movements rooted in the question of blacks identity, consciousness and solidarity. Conceived in the reaction to western domination, “it sought to dispel denigrating myths and stereotypes linked to black people, acknowledging their culture, history and achievement, as well as reclaiming their contributions to the world and restoring their rightful place within the global community.” It’s interesting how the authors of the article have engaged with Negritude as at not just about self-affirmation or liberation from subjugation, but in terms of contribution to humanism. As a project, it relied on a synthetic of intellectualism and the arts to make critical statements about the black world in the relation to the workings of the universe. One of such statements in the Africa’s belief in solidarity, where life forces “seek to knit themselves together” and give priority to the group over the individual, without undermining this person. Just as parts of the body play different roles to ensure the functionality of the whole, every culture has unique attributes that enable it contributes to the development of humanity. Africa has its own values and significantly play on the “civilization of the universal.”

Negritude also carries with it the philosophy of Africa’s art. While the western art came to preoccupy itself with realism, naturalism, and other styles that drew from direct observation of the physical universe, Africa has taught the world that art is not only about photographic, mimicry of the material world, but an attempt to truly engage the imaginations of variegated audiences through representations that reflect elevated artistic experimentation.

## CHAPTER 30

### WHAT IS NEGRITUDE?

*ABIOLA IRELE*

Negritude is a cultural movement launched in Paris in the 1930s by French speaking black graduate students from France's colonies in Africa and the Caribbean territories. In this broad perspective, Negritude can be taken to correspond to a certain form of Pan Negro feeling and awareness, and as a movement, to represent the equivalent on the French speaking side of what has come to be known as PAN-AFRICANISM.

Negritude is simply the recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as black people of our history and our culture. Negritude can also be seen as a literary and ideological philosophy, developed by the Francophone African intellectual writers, and politicians in France during the 1930s. Negritude intellectuals disfavored French colonialism and claimed that the best strategy to oppose it was to encourage a common racial identity for black Africans. Negritude took its root from the Latin *Niger* which was used exclusively in a racist context within France. The body of imaginative and ideological writings produced of French-speaking black intellectuals represents an extensive exploration of the black condition in both its historical setting and in its direction towards an ultimate significance. A distinctive vision of African and black man and its relation to the world, thus stands at the very heart of literature of Negritude and informs it in a fundamental way, provides what can be said to constitute the 'mental structure' that underlies the imaginative expression of French-speaking black writers, and which emerges with a sharp clarity in the ideological writings.

Senghor describes African as being one of the worms created on the Third day....a pure sensory being. Senghor derives from his exposition of distinctive psychology of the

Negro-African, what one might call a theory of knowledge implicit in the African's attitude to the world, a black epistemology. It is not surprising that Senghor's theory of the African's method of knowledge and his aesthetic theory should be intimately related and even coincide it. It is certainly not a matter of chance that is philosophy of Negritude is a spiritualist one, and that the terms he uses are from being precise, positive and sharply defined ones that one would expect in an analytic exposition.

However, Senghor's African socialism does not offer more than the idea of social and political action. His socialism does not have the concrete quality of parallel ideas evolved in English-speaking Africa. Nonetheless, taken as an extension of his history of Negritude and in his historical context in which Senghor's work and thinking are situated, it is not without a certain relevance and significance.

**PRODIGALS, COME HOME!**

*CHINWEIZU*

Unlike Modern poems from Africa, these Modern African Poems, even when they are written in English, are within the poetic traditions of indigenous African cultures. Though Modern Poetry from Africa is poetry written by Africans, it is poetry dominated by modern European sensibility. Modern African Poetry, on the other hand, is poetry written by Africans, and, above all else, dominated by a sensibility derived from the African tradition. Beier and Moore have, correctly, given the title 'Modern Poetry from African' to their anthology of poetry written in European languages by contemporary Africans. One thing working today on extended seams of the African poetic tradition, their voices to echoes from our tradition in order to sing of our world of now and here and that they are written in European languages is not even the point. For their forms, as well as the sensibilities and the attitudes that inform their treatment, remain, for the most part, outside the African tradition.

**CHAPTER 40  
THE DEAD END OF AFRICAN LITERATURE?**

*OBIAJUNWA WALI*

With the now seeming defeat of the Negritude and Tutuola schools of African writing, what now represents Africa literature can be seen from the examples from some of the writings of the artists and critics who now dominate our literature? Another significant event

in the conference is the tacit omission of Amos Tutuola. Not only was Tutuola, who undoubtedly is one of the most significant writers in Africa today, not present in the conference, but there was a careful exclusion of his work in the discussion of the conference.

African literature as now understood and practiced, is merely a minor appendage in the main stream of European literature. Both creative writer and literary critics read and devour European literature and critical methods. The consequence of this kind of literature is that it lacks any blood stamina, and has no means to self-enrichment. The ordinary local audience, with little or no education in the European manner, and who constitute an overwhelming majority, has no chance of participating in the kind of literature. Writers such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo talked about the Mallarme's idea of an aristocracy and limited poetic community. An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language. What one would like future conferences on African literature to devote time to, is the all important problem of African writing in languages, and all its implications for the development of truly African sensibility. In fact, the secondary place with African languages now occupy in our educational system would be reserved if our writers would devote their tremendous gifts and ability to their own languages.

**CHAPTER 41**  
**THE LANGUAGE OF AFRICAN LITERATURE**

*NGUGI WA THIONG'O*

In this excerpt, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o makes the call of African writers to begin writing literature in their own languages, and to make sure that literature is connected to their people's revolutionary struggles for liberation from their (new) colonial contexts.

Broken into nine sections, he discusses the power of writing in African language and the crippling nature of continuing to write in Euro-American languages while trying to decolonize through a mixture of personal memoir and theoretical treatise.

In the first section, he discusses African literature and about the need to understand the dual context of imperialism, decolonization and self determination. Ngugi puts language at the centre of this contentious collision; 'the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to the natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe'. In the second section, he gives his personal example of this dynamic, which is reminiscent of Fanon's critique of the early stage of the native intellectual. Ngugi refers to the 1960 African writer's conference at Makerere University College in Kampala Uganda: 'A conference of African Writers of English Expressions'. Excluding writers who write in African tongues, it proceeded to discuss questions of what African literature is or could be while accepting that it must be in English.

Ngugi discussed his early childhood experience of language in the third section. He contrast his village lessons via stories in his native tongue, Gikuyu, where in language was powerful, magical and musical. Then he speaks of the school, where in he was forced to learn English and witness as English was used to sort students into the pyramid hierarchy. The fourth section was Ngugi's theoretical section on the 'relationship of language to human experience, culture, and the human perception of reality'. He first divides language into a 'dual character'.

In the fifth section, Ngugi applies those insights above to the scene when an imperialist imposes a foreign language on children. They first dominate the language of real life in order to control people's wealth. The sixth section describes the fallout of the states affairs in much the same way that Fanon does, though with what seems a greater compassion

and level clarity. Ngugi asked ‘what is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot be without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?’ While we were haranguing enemies in European tongues, imperialists have continued to spout their lies in our native tongues (such as translating the bible into all African languages).

In the final section, he details his switch to writing in his mother-tongue of Gikuyu from 17 years writing in the Afro-European tradition. He was met with sadness and feelings of abandonment in academic circles.

Writing in his own language, then, is hugely important to anti-imperial struggle. But only if the writing is also coupled with carry the content of our people’s anti-imperialist struggle to liberate their productive forces from foreign control.

## CHAPTER 43

### AFRICAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE: TRAGEDY AND HOPE

*DANIEL P. KUNENE*

African-language literatures have received attention from European and Eurocentric critics who pieced together scraps of information obtained from reviews and other commentaries by scholars who knew the language or worked in close collaboration with those who did. There is no question but that the demands of such scholarship are rigorous. The combination of

skills required for such studies included thorough linguistic proficiency, knowledge of the customs, mores and world view of the people, and a keen sense of the possibilities for new critical criteria and methodologies best suited to individual languages or groups of related languages.

The moral of such references to African literature studies by anthropologists, missionaries, and, in some cases indeed by colonial civil servants, is that, despite all the acknowledged evils of colonialism, the deculturating influence of Christianization, and the arrogant, paternalistic attitude of the bearers of western civilization in general, some studies made by the agents of these processes have a value that is essential to the study of the literatures of various African societies; what they began ought to be carried forward (if anything with even greater rigor) by modern African literature scholars. There ought to be no separation of language literature either in minds of African literature scholars and teachers, or in the instructions in which such research and teaching take place. It is ironic that, in the United States, for example, African literatures are often taught in English department instead of this aberration, any genuine interest in African literatures should be reflected in a serious attempt to combine literature studies with compatible language studies.

Concurrently with this movement, and often overshadowed by it in the new-found euphoria accompanying the discovery of African literature, creators of literatures in the languages of Africa continued to ply their trade, largely ignoring, if not totally unaware of it. The effect of the above summarized movement was that there were thenceforth two streams of literature: the new-found African literature written in the European languages, and the much older grassroots literatures, composed in the languages of Africa, which remain autonomous even while being aware of their immediate neighbours, the very antithesis of African literature. However, bits and pieces of African-language-based literatures were siphoned into the stream of African literature through translation.