



Master of His Art: The Rejection of the Propagandist's Derogatory Fiction of Africa and Western Literary Apprenticeship in Achebe's Novel Crafting Art

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Abstract: Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (1930–2013) stands as the titanic pioneer of modern African fiction, fashioning a literary tradition that broke completely with global literary precedents. In establishing this sovereign narrative space, Achebe executed a dual rejection: first, he repudiated the Euro-centric, propagandist tradition of derogatory colonial fiction of Africa designed to rationalize imperialist exploitation and subjugation of both the continent and its people; second, he consciously declined the path of Western literary apprenticeship. This paper re-examines the ideological imperatives and stylistic mechanics of this rupture, interrogating how and why Achebe abandoned these entrenched traditions to forge an autonomous, humanistic, and self-authenticating African novel tradition. It adopts the analytical text-oriented method of enquiry amenable to the theoretical framework of Neo-criticism. It observes that meticulously deep excavation of African demolished civilization by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Arrow of God*, stands as the permanent rebuttal of theses of the colonial propagandist fiction of Africa. It confirms that these narratives completely rewrote the global literary canon. It concludes that Chinua Achebe's literary legacy bequeathed to the world provides a steady moral compass for endless generations of writers across the global South, as his transformation of the historical wreckage of colonialism into a monument of honour has made his life a classic account of a rigorous intellectual victory that will be celebrated, relished, and retold by audience and scholars for generations to come.



Keywords: Master, Art, Rejection, Propagandist's, Derogatory, Fiction, Africa, Western Literary Apprenticeship, Achebe's Novel Crafting Art

Introduction

The genesis of the African novel is inextricably linked to an act of profound intellectual revolt (Ngũgĩ, 1986). For centuries, the African continent was viewed through the distorted prism of colonial "superstructures"—a discursive landscape cluttered with the ideological debris of derogatory fiction manufactured to justify the materialistic mechanics of imperialism (Said, 1993). In this crowded arena of racist mythmaking, the African subject was systematically reduced to a silent caricature, a pathological foil in a Western psychological drama (Achille, 2021). Enter Albert Chinualumogu Achebe: a scholar, critic, and artist who recognized that to articulate the authentic African experience, the writer must first systematically dismantle the discursive scaffold of falsehoods upon which the Eurocentric colonial canon was erected.

Achebe's historic emergence was far more than the arrival of an exceptional talent; it represented an act of "literary gallantry" that challenged the epistemological foundations of global literature (Gikandi, 2001). By rejecting the seductive path of Western literary apprenticeship, Achebe refused to become a mimic of European aesthetic forms. Instead, he pioneered an "archaeological approach" to narrative creation, piercing through layers of colonial military expeditions and systemic intellectual insults to excavate a vibrant, historically grounded, and sophisticated civilization (Innes, 1990). He understood that the preservation of African dignity required an aggressive counter-discourse—what can be termed the "arrest and obliteration" of the derogatory tradition that sought to negate indigenous philosophy, history, and humanity (Irele, 2001).

This paper explores the mechanics of this paradigm shift. It investigates the why—the moral and philosophical rejection of a Western canon that prioritized material dominance over the human spirit—and the how—the deployment of a precise, humanistic objectivity and linguistic remodeling designed to reconstruct a coherent universe out of historical ruin. Ultimately, we argue that Achebe's creative project achieved a transformative redirection of the global literary gaze, imparting a new ontological "audacity" to the global South (Quayson, 2021).

Through this intervention, Achebe did not merely append a new chapter to world literature; he became an enduring, indomitable narrative of honor for successive generations of scholars and writers to relish, analyze, and retell.

The Philosophical Necessity of Achebe's Rejection

The ideological impetus driving Chinua Achebe's literary revolution was an imperative that was both moral and existential. His refusal to assume the role of an apprentice to the Western canon stemmed from a recognition that compliance meant participating in the ontological erasure of his own people (Lazarus, 2022). This rejection is structured across six philosophical coordinates:

1. The Enthronement of Materialism

The colonial literary tradition was rarely a project of "art for art's sake"; it operated as the cultural vanguard of imperialism, seeking to legitimize the economic extraction of African resources (Boehmer, 2023). By portraying Africa as a primitive, ahistorical, or vacant tabula rasa, these narratives provided moral alibis for imperial expansion. Achebe recognized that writing within this unexamined tradition meant validating an exploitative paradigm that valued African geography and labor while systematically devaluing African human life.

2. The Architecture of Subtle Falsehoods

Achebe's grievance extended beyond overt racial slurs to the subtle, structural falsehoods embedded within the Western literary canon (Nnolim, 2020). These narratives thrived on the "myth of the dark continent"—the assertion that Africa possessed no history, no complex social contracts, and no indigenous wisdom prior to European intervention. Achebe identified these tropes as structural deceptions meticulously engineered to instill an inferiority complex within the colonized psyche (Egar, 2022).

3. The Moral Stance against Injustice

As a social thinker, Achebe conceptualized the writer as an essential educator and cultural guide (Osei-Nyame, 2022). He opposed injustice and prejudice because they corrupted the integrity of cross-cultural human dialogue. For Achebe, a novel reliant on racial stereotypes was not merely an aesthetic failure; it was a moral transgression. His creative project was a direct

confrontation with the systemic prejudice that permitted Western audiences to perceive African characters as grotesque caricatures rather than complex human beings.

4. Intellectualism as a Mask for Insult

One of Achebe's most razor-sharp critiques targeted the insults disguised as high-brow intellectualism within European fiction (Jeyifo, 2020). He demonstrated how canonical authors such as Joyce Cary or Joseph Conrad deployed sophisticated prose, stylistic innovations, and deep philosophical inquiries to obscure deeply derogatory views of African humanity. Achebe refused to be seduced by the aesthetic beauty of Eurocentric language when its core message degraded his ancestry, recognizing that intellectualism divorced from empathy is merely a refined instrument of cruelty.

5. The Rejection of the Colonial "Apprenticeship"

Achebe understood that accepting a Western literary apprenticeship demanded more than adopting structural plots; it required internalizing a paternalistic Western gaze (Adesokan, 2021). To slavishly follow those established imperial masters would have constituted a "surrendering of life"—a form of spiritual and cultural suicide. Realizing that the continuity of his culture's historical trajectory depended on breaking the molds of his European teachers, he chose to arrest, silence, and obliterate colonial hegemony to cultivate an authentic African voice.

6. The Reclamation of a Vibrant Culture

Achebe wrote to affirm an objective reality that the Western academy had long ignored: Africa possessed a dynamic, sophisticated culture (Obiechina, 1975). This was a world characterized by a "philosophy of great depth," governed by intricate judicial systems, democratic assemblies, and subtle spiritual dualities, such as the *chi* (Nwoga, 1984). He sought to showcase the "poultry arts"—the layered, rich, and flocking complexities of oratory, poetry, and narrative jurisprudence—that flourished in village squares long before the European arrival. In doing so, he demonstrated that the African novel was not an offshoot of the European tradition, but an autonomous descendant of an ancient oral heritage.

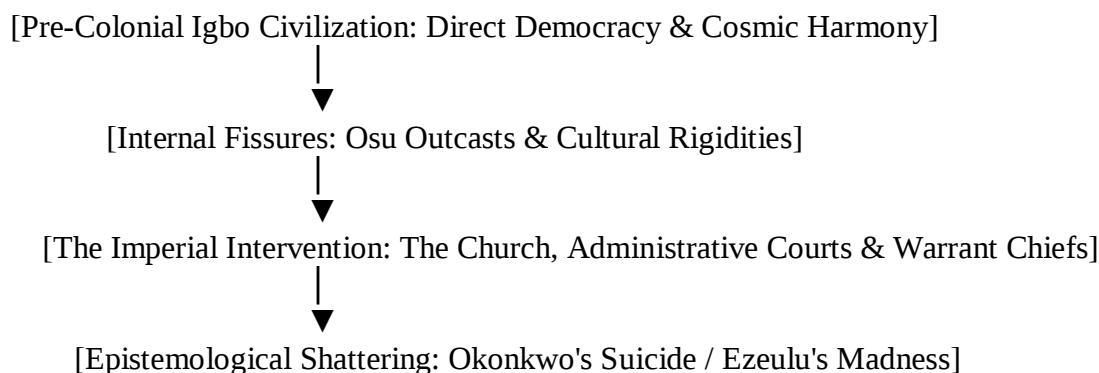
Achebe's Literary Eloquence in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Arrow of God*

Achebe countered the derogatory assumptions of European colonial fiction by systematically dismantling their premises within his masterworks, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *The Arrow of God* (1964). He achieved this through a rhetorical reconstruction of Igbo civilization and a clear-eyed depiction of the colonial encounter.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the narrative establishes the profound "semantic weight" of Igbo civilization through the tragic trajectory of Okonkwo, whose identity is forged in opposition to his father's perceived vulnerabilities. Umuofia is depicted not as a lawless tribe, but as a highly sophisticated direct democracy (Okpewho, 2003). Major geopolitical choices—such as the declaration of war or the arbitration of inter-communal crises—are resolved through collective assemblies in the public marketplace, rendering visible a society where "every king is a subject" to the communal will.

Okonkwo's ascension within the clan exemplifies an intra-communal meritocracy where status rests on solid personal achievements rather than inherited privilege. His life is harmonized with the Week of Peace and cyclical agricultural rhythms, representing an administrative and social system that prioritizes cosmic equilibrium and communal survival (Mbiti, 1969).

Crucially, Achebe avoids the trap of romanticizing the pre-colonial past; he presents a society marked by internal fissures and structural contradictions that the invading forces would inevitably exploit as summarized by the flowchart below:



The internal cohesion of Umuofia is tested first from within. Okonkwo's accidental manslaughter of a clansman results in his seven-year exile to his maternal home, Mbanta. During



this period of displacement, the expanding colonial church establishes a foothold by purposefully appealing to the community's marginalized strata—the osu (outcasts) and families distressed by the traditional rejection of twins. This introduces a structural "rift in the clan," wherein biological and kinship bonds are superseded by an alien institutional loyalty. As Anyanwu et al. (2019) observe, this ritual and social function of the early church operated not merely on a spiritual plane, but as a deliberate political wedge that systematically fractured communal solidarity from within.

Upon Okonkwo's return, he discovers a fractured Umuofia. The British imperial machinery has advanced beyond religious proselytization to install a formal administrative state complete with a provincial court of law and a District Commissioner completely ignorant of indigenous "semantic logic." The foundational peace and social bonds of the people are shattered as the colonial government criminalizes indigenous governance. As Eldred Jones (1988) notes, this "shattering of the peace" occurred because the British administrative apparatus refused to acknowledge the judicial validity of African law, substituting a participatory direct democracy with a rigid, alien bureaucracy that lacked a moral pulse.

The tragic climax unfolds when Okonkwo, in a desperate bid to ignite a war of liberation and defend his cultural heritage, executes a colonial court messenger. Realizing that his fractured community will not follow his lead, he commits suicide—an act constituting an abomination within Igbo cosmology. The novel closes with the District Commissioner planning a monograph titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. This final irony serves as the ultimate caricature of imperialist propaganda, reducing Okonkwo's complex human tragedy to a brief footnote and underscoring the vital need for a comprehensive reconstruction of history.

Achebe's artistic success relies heavily on his "humanistic objectivity." By depicting the flaws, internal conflicts, and dogmatic rigidities of Umuofia alongside its order and beauty, he achieved a gritty realism that commanded global critical respect (Huggan, 2021). The social structures—titles, oracles, festivals—function not as exotic background scenery, but as the active institutional frameworks maintaining order across every stratum of the community.



His most celebrated methodological innovation remains the indigenization of the English language. He bent the imperial tongue to bear the unique weight of African philosophy, weaving in proverbs—"the palm-oil with which words are eaten"—idioms, and the rhythmic cadences of Igbo speech, proving that African linguistic resources could expand the boundaries of a global medium (Cooper, 2023).

In *The Arrow of God*, Achebe shifts his rhetorical focus to Umuaro, a confederation of six villages bound together by the collective deity, Ulu. The central figure, Ezeulu, is an intellectual chief priest who must navigate the delicate boundary separating his spiritual mandate from a shifting geopolitical landscape. Unlike Okonkwo, Ezeulu is a man of contemplation who watches the phases of the moon to regulate the agrarian calendar. However, he is caught in an intense intra-communal political rivalry with Nwaka, a wealthy leader who challenges the centralization of Ezeulu's religious authority. This domestic friction mirrors the tragic reality of societies weakened from within prior to the decisive external shock.

The external threat materializes in Captain Winterbottom, a British District Officer who embodies the unyielding, mechanical colonial system. Seeking to implement Lord Lugard's policy of Indirect Rule, Winterbottom attempts to manufacture artificial "Warrant Chiefs" to serve the British Crown. In a calculated administrative move, Winterbottom selects Ezeulu for the position, assuming the priest's personal integrity makes him an ideal colonial functionary. When Ezeulu refuses—insisting he is an instrument of his deity rather than a servant of a foreign monarch—the colonial state reacts with bureaucratic efficiency, imprisoning him for two months and disrupting the ritual calendar of Umuaro.

Because Ezeulu is incarcerated during the precise period required to consume the sacred yams and announce the harvest, the ritual cycle is broken. Upon his release, Ezeulu engages in a stubborn theological struggle with his own people, refusing to eat the remaining yams out of season despite impending starvation. He views himself as the punitive arrow of Ulu, chastising a community that failed to support him against his political rivals.

However, the community perceives this ritual lockdown as the internal destruction of African unity by their own spiritual custodian. The "semantic weight" of the ritual becomes a



trap; the populace cannot harvest without the priest's declaration, and the priest cannot speak without his god's mandate.

Ultimately, the mechanical colonial system exploits this impasse. The Christian mission, under the direction of the opportunistic Mr. Goodcountry, offers a nourishing bait: he informs the starving populace that they may harvest their crops in the name of the Christian God, immune to Ulu's retribution, provided they bring their first fruits to the church. Desperate for survival, the people of Umuaro abandon the shrine of Ulu for the altar of Christ.

The traditional music ceases, and the modern institutional apparatus triumphs. Ezeulu is left a broken man, witnessing the dissolution of his culture and the death of his handsomest son, Obika, abandoned by his deity and isolated within his own community.

For the contemporary scholar, Achebe's novels constitute a critical archive of cultural archaeology (Udumukwu, 2025). By exploring the internal mechanics of Igbo society, Achebe successfully encapsulates the tragic disruption of indigenous systems while permanently silencing colonial myths regarding African "primordial chaos." By documenting the marketplace as a site of open parliamentary debate, the blacksmith's forge as a space of technology, and the seasonal festival as a sophisticated theater of the soul, Achebe performs a historic act of historiographical restoration, proving that pre-colonial African societies were already mature masterpieces of social engineering.

The Outcome of Achebe's Endeavour

The historical impact of Chinua Achebe's literary project is measured by the fundamental epistemic shift he triggered within global consciousness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2024). The outcomes of his intellectual pursuit can be mapped across four primary achievements:

The Discarding of Imperial Falsehoods: By exposing the mechanical, biased nature of colonial fiction, Achebe dismantled the intellectual authority of the derogatory tradition, replacing racial tropes with the nuanced realities of African life.

The Correction of the Global Gaze: Achebe forced Western readers to recalibrate their perspectives. Audiences accustomed to viewing Africa as a primitive backdrop for European



adventures were confronted with African protagonists operating as complex moral agents, philosophers, and historical judges.

Empowerment of the Global South: Achebe's success provided writers throughout the postcolonial world with the artistic audacity to articulate their own historical truths, transforming the novel into an instrument of cultural self-determination and decolonization.

Enrichment of World Literature: By integrating the logic of the chi, the wisdom of oral rhetoric, and the unique cadences of African speech into modern English prose, Achebe expanded the expressive boundaries of the global novel, moving the African writer from the periphery of apprenticeship to the status of an absolute master of the art.

Conclusion

The deep historical archives of African civilization, so meticulously excavated by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Arrow of God*, stand as the definitive refutation of the colonial propagandist tradition. The historical tragedy detailed in these novels is never the inherent failure of the African social order, but rather the shattering of its internal peace by an external colonial system that lacked the semantic capacity to comprehend the civilization it was destroying. The British imperial administration, with its absolute courtrooms and calculated extractions of material wealth, remained blind to the profound artistry inherent in the *egwugwu* judicial trials or the sophisticated intra-communal diplomacy of local peace offerings. Imperialism repeatedly mistook a profound indigenous quietude for a void, and a mastered tongue for primitive noise.

Ultimately, these narratives completely rewrote the global literary canon. They proved African subject was never an *ignoramus* waiting for external enlightenment, but the architect of a coherent world where the forge and the altar worked in structural harmony to preserve the peace and bond of the community. Through the historical tragedies of *Okonkwo* and *Ezeulu*, we confront the powerful output of a culture that refused to be an empty container devoid of internal product. Achebe remains the definitive Master of His Art because he successfully reclaimed the narrative from historical exploiters, replacing their fabrications with the vibrant reality of African human agency.



Achebe's life was defined by a rare literary gallantry—an active, unbroken lifetime commitment to a cause demanding immense personal and professional sacrifice to wage and sustain an intellectual war against centuries of misrepresentation. Through his unwavering stance, Achebe's biography merged with his fiction; he transcended the traditional status of a storyteller to become the story itself—an enduring monument of cultural restoration.

His literary legacy bequeathed to the world provides a steady moral compass for endless generations of writers across the global South as his transformation the historical wreckage of colonialism into a monument of honour has made life a classic account of rigorous intellectual victory that will be celebrated, relished, and retold by audience and scholars for generations to come.

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