



Chinua Achebe: Collected Poems

By Chinua Achebe

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"The father of African literature in the English language and undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the second half of the twentieth century." --Caryl Phillips, *The Observer*

Chinua Achebe's award-winning poems are marked by a subtle richness and the political acuity and moral vision that are a signature of all of his work. Focused and powerful, and suffused with wisdom and compassion, *Collected Poems* is further evidence of this great writer's sublime gifts and it is an essential part of the oeuvre of a giant of world literature.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

One of the world's most admired novelists, Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*; *Anthills of the Savannah*) has maintained a separate (and much less prolific) career as a poet: this slender volume shows American readers that work. Achebe was forced out of his native Nigeria in 1966, just before the grisly and devastating Biafran War of 1967–1970. Some of his most authoritative poems respond to those, and to later, public events. "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" shows its title character combing "the rust-colored hair left" on her son's "skull," "Like putting flowers on a tiny grave." Achebe's other poems include lyrics of hope and resolve, "tearful songs/ Of joy," and responses to ceremonial occasions: "Beware, Soul Brother" advises its listener to "protect this patrimony to which/ you must return when the song/ is finished." "Dereliction" (a good candidate for anthologies) denounces those who abandon local traditions. Some of his language is now dated, or sounds awkward, at least to American ears ("evil forests of Soviet technology"), but other, stronger work shows Achebe's narrative gifts, retelling New Testament stories ("Lazarus") or animating Nigerian legends and myths ("Lament of the Sacred Python"). These and scattered other poems are "Clear-signed with a clarity/ rarely encountered in dreams."

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From [Booklist](#)

The dean of the modern African novel in English (*Things Fall Apart* [1958] and several others), Achebe is also a powerful poet. In the introductory "parable" in this book, he suggests that, compared to his fiction, his poems have been nigh unpublishable. Yet their quality is high enough that they should never go out of print after this fine collected edition. There aren't many of them, and not many fill even three pages. But--contemplating, with remarkable restraint, the cultural effects of imperialism; reeling, seemingly forever, from the horrors of postcolonial wars; striving to understand the present and modernity by means of traditional wisdom, story, and ceremony--they trenchantly make their points about contemporary African life. They are often pungently humorous and ironic, as when telling the case of a modern-day Nigerian "Lazarus" or considering lovemaking "Vultures." Elsewhere they can be rueful as the blues about the human condition; see "Knowing Robs Us," in which, when it comes to joy, we humans don't measure up to mere birds. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"A magical writer—one of the greatest of the twentieth century." —Margaret Atwood

"The father of African literature in the English language and undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the second half of the 20th century." —Caryl Phillips, *The Observer*

"Chinua Achebe is gloriously gifted with the magic of an ebullient, generous, great talent." —Nadine Gordimer

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