



# BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

## BEN OKRI

Ben Okri was born in 1959 in Minna, Nigeria. He was educated in London and in Nigeria, returning to England to attend the University of Essex where he studied Comparative Literature. By this time, he had already been writing for several years and had already published his first novel, Flowers and Shadows (1980). During his three years at Essex he published his second novel, The Landscapes Within (1982) which was described by Hilary Bailey as a 'strange and brilliant book'.

Between 1984 and 1985 Ben Okri worked as a broadcaster for the BBC World Service on a programme called 'Network Africa' and was poetry editor of West Africa Magazine for seven years until 1987.

His short story collection, Incidents at the Shrine was short-listed for The Commonwealth Prize in 1987 and his subsequent collection Stars of the New Curfew was short-listed for The Guardian Fiction Prize in 1988.

Ben Okri's novel, The Famished Road was published in March 1991 and won The Booker Prize for Fiction in October that year.

He now divides his time between London and Cambridge where he is a Fellow Commoner in the Creative Arts at Trinity College.

His new novel Songs of Enchantment will be published in March 1993.

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June 14, 1993

Harry Garuba  
English Department  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria

Dear Harry,

This is a note to acknowledge with thanks your prompt delivery of the DLB entry on Ben Okri. I am looking forward to receiving the additional pages on Songs of Enchantment.

I'll be back in touch with you again as the book approaches the production stage. I'm still waiting for a few tardy essays to come in.

Hope all is going well for you. Regards to everyone in Ibadan.

Best wishes,

Bernth Lindfors

P.S. Do you have access to any photos of Okri? Would the Daily Sketch or another Nigerian paper have one that we could use?

February 21, 1993

Harry Garuba  
English Department  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria

Dear Harry,

I am enclosing a list of entries on Ben Okri taken from three successive volumes of my bibliography, Black African Literature in English. If some of these materials are not available to you, send me a list of the item numbers preceding the essays you need, and I'll try to supply as many as I can. Nothing published after 1986 is listed, but I am currently working on a 1987-1991 update of the bibliography and will send you a list of more recent scholarship soon.

I trust that your writing is going well. Please remember that our deadline is June 1st. Earlier submissions are of course welcome.

Sincerely yours,

Bernth Lindfors

P.S. I expect there will be many more entries on Okri on the 1987-1991 list, but it will be another week or two before I can send that list to you.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN, NIGERIA  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



TELEPHONE: IBADAN 400550-400614 (65 lines) Ext. 1464  
& 1414  
CABLES & TELEGRAMS: UNIVERSITY IBADAN

3rd November, 1992.

Dear Prof. Lindfors,

I write to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 27th September, 1992. I wish to express my willingness to prepare a bibliographical essay on Ben Okri for inclusion in your proposed Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 3. I hope that you will send the detailed format soon.

May I also use this medium to request that you send a list of the Nigerian novels you have not being able to find so I can send them in my next letter to you.

Greetings to Judy and the family.

Very best wishes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Harry Garuba'.

Harry Garuba.

November 16, 1993

Harry Garuba  
English Department  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria

Dear Harry,

Thank you for agreeing to prepare an entry on Ben Okri for the third volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography's Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers. Please note that the entry should run between 6000 and 6500 words instead of between 4000 and 5000 words as previously stated. The publisher has given us more space for each of the entries in this volume so you will be able to deal with your author in greater detail.

I am enclosing:

1. a memorandum of agreement which you should sign, address and date;
2. a contributor's questionnaire which you should fill out with your addresses, phone numbers, and fax number;
3. a contributor's style sheet;
4. a sample essay from the first volume in the series.

Please return items 1 and 2 to me at your earliest convenience. If any questions arise while you are preparing your entry for the volume, do not hesitate to contact me at the address above or by phone at 512-472-4712 (home) or 512-471-5522 (office) or by fax at 512-471-4909. Please keep in mind that our deadline is 1 June 1993.

Thanks again for offering to join us in this project.

Sincerely yours,

Bernth Lindfors

P.S. I'll send the list of Nigerian novels later. I still haven't sorted out and shelved all the titles I picked up on my travels, but I should be able to find time to do that once the term ends in mid-December. Right now I'm bogged down with student papers.

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Just as the poem "Demolition Street: London '83" reads like a retelling of the short story "A Hidden History", Ben Okri, now a fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge has brought out a new novel Songs of Enchantment (1993) in which he indulges in his penchant for retelling old stories from new perspectives. In "Songs of Enchantment" all the old characters from The Famished Road re-surface in a new novelistic exploration that builds upon the old themes broached in the earlier novel.

(as from) 68 Churchfield Road  
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Dorset BH15 2QP  
England

28. 5. 1993

Dear Bernth,

here is Harry G's DLB article on Ben Okri. He's had almost as tough a time as me getting biographical info, but cracked the walls of silence in the end (I've had another, belated, attempt to do so with Chinweizu: but no way).

The Osofisan poems and the interview collection are for you. Kraft Books by far the brightest star in the Nigerian publishing scene at present.

Would be grateful if you could mail the remaining copies of Opon Ifa for me:

Dr (Mrs) Folabo Ajayi  
3058 W 9th St  
Lawrence, KS 66047-4518

Prof Richard Joseph  
Institute of African Studies  
Emory University  
PO Box 21375  
Atlanta, Georgia 30322

Mr Michael Wilkerson  
Director, Ragdale Foundation  
1260 N Green Bay Road  
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

All the best,



Chris Dunton

POSTSCRIPT,

THE FINAL SECTION OF HARRY'S PIECE,  
ON SONGS OF ENCHANTMENT, STILL HAS  
TO BE ADDED = HE'S JUST GOT HOLD  
OF THE BOOK. HE'LL POST TO YOU

NEXT WEEK ; HE THOUGHT IT BETTER TO SEND  
THE BULK TO YOU NOW.



John Onu, "Beyond Ben Okri's Surrealism: A Gestalt Perspective" (Lagos: The Guardian 10 April 1993); 19;

Jasper A. Onuekwusi, "Social Criticism in the Fiction of Young Nigerian Writers: Iyayi and Ben Okri" in Ernest Emenyonu ed. Literature and Society: Selected Essays, (Oguta, Nigeria: Zim Pan-African Publishers, 1986), 212-216;

Abioseh M. Porter, "Ben Okri's The Landscapes Within: A Metaphor for Personal and National Development" World Literature Written in English, Vol 27, No 2 (Autumn 1987); 184-195.



11110. Aiyejina, Funso. "Isidore Okpewho: Chronicler of Universal Sentiments." *GUARDIAN*, 11 January 1986, p. 13.
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11111. Anthonio, Peju. *STEVELOLA NOTES, QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S THE VICTIMS*. Stevelola English Literature Aids, 14. Ibadan: Stevelola Publishers, 1985.
11112. Balogun, F. Odun. "Isidore Okpewho: THE VICTIMS." *OKIKE EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT*, 4 (1985), 4-12.
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See also 632.

See also 3743, 3827, 3837, 4363, 4488, 5505.

See also 6391, 6399, 6725, 6730, 6772, 6885, 6906, 6917, 7805, 8879.

## OKPI, KALU

### *Biography*

11117. Anon. "Kalu Okpi Wins Voice of Germany Award." *ANAR*, 1 (1985), 20.

## [ OKRI, BENJAMIN ]

### *Autobiography*

5840. Okri, Benjamin. "Fear of Flying." *WA*, 3 November 1980, pp. 2177-78.

### *Interviews*

11118. Awoyinfa, Michael. "Ben Okri: Precocious Novelist, Rejected at Home, Published Abroad, and Became the Cornerstone." *SUNDAY CONCORD*, 1 May 1983, p. 11.
11119. Iloegbunam, Chuks. "Conversation with Ben Okri." *GUARDIAN*, 26 October 1983, p. 14.
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11121. Sweetman, David. "[Interview with Ben Okri about His First Novel *FLOWERS AND SHADOWS*]." *BBCAA*, 345 (1980), 4-6.

See also 7815, 11522.

### *Criticism*

11122. Jeyifo, Biodun. "The Voice of a Lost Generation: The Novels of Ben Okri." *GUARDIAN*, 12 July 1986, p. 13.

See also 6913, 8879.

## OKWU, EDWARD C.

*Criticism*; See 453.

## OLADELE, FRANCIS

*Interview*: See 11123.

*Criticism*

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(Criticism)

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Edward Blishen, "ICA Guardian Conversations with Ben Okri" (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988);

Chuks Iloegbunam, "Conversation with Ben Okri" (Lagos: The Guardian, 26 October 1983); 14;

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Robert Fraser, "The Magic of the Jackals (A Review of Ben Okri's Songs of Enchantment) London: West Africa 12-18 April, 1993), 616;

Pico Iyer, "The Empire Writes Back", Time 8 February 1993, 46-51.

Patricia Morris, The Tiger Pounces (Ben Okri speaking to Morris about Wole Soyinka) Lagos: African Concord, 30 October 1986) 36-37;

Amanze Obi, "The Triumph of Insignificance" (Lagos: The Guardian, 10 Nov. 1991) All;

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Alex Tetteh-Larteh "(Interview with Alistair Niven and Ben Okri about Neil McEwan's African and the Novel). BBCA, 531 (1984), 1-6;

### Criticism

Harry Garuba, "Ben Okri: Animist Realism and the Famished Genre" (Lagos: The Guardian: 13 March 1993) 23;

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Biodun Jeyifo, "The Voice of a lost Generation. The Novels of Ben Okri" (Lagos: The Guardian 12 July 1986), 13;

Adebowale Maja-Pearce, A Mask Dancing, Nigerian Novelists of the Eighties (London: Hans Zell, 1992), 86-103;

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Chukwuma Ogwumeh, "Disenchantment and Disillusionment in Ben Okri's Flowers and Shadows, The Landscapes Within and Stars of the New Curfew" (Ibadan: Unpublished B.A. Project Essay, 1992);



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