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## **Purple Hibiscus**

by Chimamanda Adichie

Also known as: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Amanda N. Adichie

Birth: 1977 in Abba, Nigeria

Nationality: Nigerian

Source: Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2006.

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### **Sidelights**

*Purple Hibiscus*, the debut novel of Nigerian-born writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, was greeted with enthusiasm by many critics. This coming-of-age story, focusing on a Nigerian family torn between the orderly Western world enforced on them by their father and the native Igbo culture of their heritage, was shortlisted for the prestigious Orange Prize for Fiction in Great Britain. *Purple Hibiscus* was compared by several critics to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The book's "riveting opening paragraph," as John Hartl described it in the *New York Times*, is perhaps the clearest homage to Achebe: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere."

The story is told through the eyes of fifteen-year-old Kambili Achike. She and her older brother Jaja live a strict, regimented life; their father has minutely detailed schedules for them, laying out their activities for every moment of the day. He enforces this schedule, as well as a strict, fundamentalist version of Catholicism and the use of English at home within the family, through tyrannical violence frequently bordering on torture. Kambili is so traumatized by fear that she has difficulty speaking. Yet to the rest of the world, Eugene Achike is a hero, one of the few men in Nigeria brave enough to speak out publicly against the soldiers who have successfully carried out a coup against the former government. Kambili and Jaja get their first taste of freedom when they are allowed to visit their Aunty Ifeoma. This aunt is a university professor, and her crowded apartment is a haven of free thinking for Kambili and Jaja. Under Ifeoma's care, Kambili begins to blossom, just like the rare purple hibiscus in Ifeoma's garden that blooms on despite civil war and all the other difficulties of life.

Critical reaction to *Purple Hibiscus* was overwhelmingly positive. Although, as Heather Hewett noted in the *Women's Review of Books*, Adichie's coming-of-age narrative "feels familiar, in Adichie's hands it is not formulaic. She captivates her reader with alternating moments of suspense and horror, surprising us with unexpected twists and fresh ways of looking at the world. In particular," Hewett continued, "her lush, vivid descriptions linger long after the novel is over." Palm Beach Post reviewer Lauren Gold also praised Adichie's "strong, lyrical voice," commenting, "Every character has dimension; every description resonates like cello music." This is an "impressively mature debut," Lisa Gee declared on the Orange Prize for Fiction Web site: "a superb coming-of-age novel wherein it really means something to come of age."

Adichie explained to Eve Daniels in an interview posted on the Minnesota Public Radio Web site: "The 'war and hunger' kind of coverage Africa gets in the news distorts reality. Of course there are wars and there is hunger in many African countries, but there are also millions of normal people who are going

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about their lives, with gains and losses, love and pain, just like everyone else. I hope my fiction will enable Americans to see that human, and in many ways ordinary, lives of Nigerians.”

Adichie told CA: “I have been writing since I could spell. I did not have a conscious moment where something or someone got me interested in writing. What I think nurtured the innate desire to write was that I grew up surrounded by books in my parents house on a university campus.

“Chinua Achebe will always be the most important writer for me because his work influenced not so much my style as my writing philosophy: reading him emboldened me, gave me permission to write about things I knew well. I am influenced by everything I read. I read bad fiction and it influences me in such a way that I know what never to do. I read good fiction and it makes things flow for me, as it were. I generally prefer quiet, careful writing, story and style done well, literature that makes one think of that interesting word ‘art.’

“I write when it comes. I like lots of natural light or very bright artificial light. I do lots of revision and rewriting. I can spend days tweaking one sentence.

“Purple Hibiscus, my first novel, is my favorite book I have written. It has no competitors at the moment.”

### **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Born 1977, in Abba, Nigeria; father a statistics professor and university deputy vice chancellor, mother a university registrar. Education: Attended University of Nigeria and Drexel University; graduated from Connecticut State University (summa cum laude); attended Johns Hopkins University. Religion: Catholic  
Addresses: Agent: c/o Author Mail, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, P.O. Box 2225, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2225.

### **AWARDS**

O. Henry Award, 2003, for “American Embassy”; Orange Prize for Fiction shortlist, 2004, for Purple Hibiscus; awards from Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and British Broadcasting Corporation.

### **CAREER**

Writer; instructor at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

### **WRITINGS**

- (Under name Amanda N. Adichie) Decisions (poems), Minerva Press, 1998.
- (Under name Amanda N. Adichie) For Love of Biafra (play), Spectrum Books, 1998.
- Purple Hibiscus (novel), Algonquin Books (Chapel Hill, NC), 2003. (also available in audio download)
- Half of a Yellow Sun (novel), Knopf (New York, NY), 2006.

Contributor of short fiction to literary journals, including Iowa Review, Prism International, Calyx, and

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### **FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

#### **BOOKS**

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#### **PERIODICALS**

- Birmingham Post (Birmingham, England), May 22, 2004, Reena Gopal, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 53.
- Black Issues Book Review, September-October, 2003, Malcolm Venable, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 62; November, 2003, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 17.
- Booklist, September 15, 2003, Joanne Wilkinson, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 208.
- Bookwatch, April, 2004, James A. Cox and Diane C. Donovan, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 3.
- Capital Times (Madison, WI), November 21, 2003, Heather Lee Schroeder, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. A11.
- Commonweal, December 5, 2003, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 27.
- Daily Post (Liverpool, England), May 21, 2004, Emyr Williams, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 8.
- Daily Telegraph (London, England), March 6, 2004, Christopher Hope, review of *Purple Hibiscus*; April 27, 2004, Nigel Reynolds, "Young Nigerian Writer Eyes Top Fiction Award: The Orange Prize Shortlist Has a Few Surprises," p. 11.
- Evening Standard (London, England), April 30, 2004, Alison Roberts, review of *Purple Hibiscus* and interview, p. 22.
- Evening Times (Glasgow, Scotland), February 28, 2004, Sheila Hamilton, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 12.
- Guardian (London, England), April 27, 2004, John Ezard, "Debut Novel from Nigeria Storms Orange Shortlist," p. 9.
- Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 2003, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 973.
- Library Journal, August, 2003, Ellen R. Cohen, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 127.
- New Statesman, March 29, 2004, Michele Roberts, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 54.
- New York Times Book Review, November 23, 2003, John Hartl, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 24.
- Observer (London, England), March 21, 2004, Hephzibah Anderson, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 17.
- Palm Beach Post (West Palm Beach, FL), October 26, 2003, Lauren Gold, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, section 7, p. J.
- Publishers Weekly, August 18, 2003, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 53.
- San Francisco Chronicle, September 14, 2003, Sandip Roy, review of *Purple Hibiscus*.
- School Library Journal, December, 2003, Molly Connally, review of *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 176.
- Sentinel Poetry, November, 2003, Ike Anya, "In the Footsteps of Chinua Achebe: Enter Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie," p. 11.
- Socialist Review, July, 2004, Liv Lewitschnik, review of *Purple Hibiscus*.

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- Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN), October 19, 2003, John Habich, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. E1.
- Sunday Times (London, England), February 29, 2004, Lindsay Duguid, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. 52.
- Times (London, England), March 16, 2004, Jack Malvern, "First-Time Authors Lead Fresh Assault on Orange Prize," p. 11.
- Times Literary Supplement, April 9, 2004, Ranti Williams, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. 23.
- Voice of Youth Advocates, February, 2004, Jamie S. Hansen, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. 482.
- Washington Post Book World, January 4, 2004, Bill Broun, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. 8.
- Women's Review of Books, July, 2004, Heather Hewett, review of Purple Hibiscus, p. 9.

#### **ONLINE**

The Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Website: <http://www.ulg.ac.be/facphl/uer/d-german/L3/cnaindex.html>

- Curled up with a Good Book Web site, <http://www.curledup.com/> (November 3, 2004), review of Purple Hibiscus.
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- Nigerian Village Square Web site, <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare1.com/> (November 3, 2004), Wale Adebani, "Nigerian Identity Is Burdensome" (interview).
- Orange Prize for Fiction Web site, <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/> (November 3, 2004), "Shortlisted Author: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie"; Lisa Gee, review of Purple Hibiscus.
- Random House Web site, <http://www.randomhouse.com/> (November 3, 2004), "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie."
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