



ILLUMINATIONS

Great Writers *on* Writing

Chinua Achebe

“What is the nature of this purpose? I don’t think anyone can say for certain. All that we do know is that judging from the evidence of man’s fiction-making in all places and at all times he must surely have an inescapable need for that activity. No one has yet come upon the slightest evidence that any human group now or in the past managed to dispense with the need to make fictions.

Given the great gulf between being and knowing, between his essence and existence, man has no choice really but to make and believe in some fiction or other. Perhaps the ultimate judgement on a man is not whether he acquiesces to a fiction but rather what *kind* of fiction will persuade him into that acquiescence, that willing suspension of disbelief...

One thing that worries one above all else in the frenetic materialism that pervades our contemporary life is that as a species we may be losing the Open Sesame to the *mundo* of fiction—that ability to say “Let us pretend” like grace before our act; and to say “Our revels now are ended” like a benediction when we have finished—and *yet* to draw from this insubstantial pageant essential insights and wisdom for making our way in the real world.