

**Contemporary
African Literature:
New Approaches**

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
AFRICAN WORLD SERIES
Toyin Falola, Series Editor

*Africa, Empire and Globalization:
Essays in Honor of A. G. Hopkins*
Toyin Falola, editor, and Emily Brownell, editor

African Entrepreneurship in Jos, Central Nigeria, 1902–1985
S.U. Fwatshak

*An African Music and Dance Curriculum Model:
Performing Arts in Education*
Modesto Amegago

*Authority Stealing:
Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics
in Post-Military Nigeria*
Wale Adebaniwi

*The Bukusu of Kenya:
Folktales, Culture and Social Identities*
Namulundah Florence

Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches
Tanure Ojaide

*Contesting Islam in Africa:
Homegrown Wahhabism and Muslim Identity in Northern Ghana, 1920–2010*
Abdulai Iddrisu

*Democracy in Africa:
Political Changes and Challenges*
Saliba Sarsar, editor, and Julius O. Adekunle, editor

*Diaspora and Imagined Nationality:
USA-Africa Dialogue and Cyberframing Nigerian Nationhood*
Koleade Odutola

*Food Crop Production, Hunger, and Rural Poverty in
Nigeria's Benue Area, 1920–1995*

Mike Odugbo Odey

*Globalization: The Politics of Global Economic Relations
and International Business*

N. Oluwafemi Mimiko

In Search of African Diasporas: Testimonies and Encounters

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza

*Intercourse and Crosscurrents in the Atlantic World:
Calabar-British Experience, 17th–20th Centuries*

David Lishilinimle Imbua

Perspectives on Feminism in Africa

'Lai Olurode, editor

*Pioneer, Patriot, and Nigerian Nationalist:
A Biography of the Reverend M. D. Opara, 1915–1965*

Felix Ekechi

The Tiv and Their Southern Neighbours, 1890–1990

Emmanuel Chiahemba Ayangaôr

*The Women's War of 1929:
A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria*

Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock

*The Yoruba Frontier:
A Regional History of Community Formation,
Experience, and Changes in West Africa*

Aribidesi Usman

Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches

Tanure Ojaide

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

Copyright © 2012
Tanure Ojaide
All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ojaide, Tanure, 1948-
Contemporary African literature : new approaches / Tanure Ojaide.
p. cm. -- (African world series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-61163-029-9 (alk. paper)
1. African literature--History and criticism. 2. Literature and society--Africa. I. Title. II. Series: Carolina Academic Press African world series.

PL8010.O3296 2011
809.896--dc23

2011036969

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Series Editor's Preface	ix
Preface	xi
1 • Examining Canonization in Modern African Literature	3
2 • Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature	31
3 • African Literature, Globalization, and the Quest for Peace	41
4 • Deploying Modern African Literature Towards the Environment and Human Rights	65
5 • Language and Literature in Conflict Management in Africa	85
6 • I No Go Sidon Look: Writing in Pidgin English	109
7 • Deploying Masculinity in African Oral Poetic Performance: The Man in Udje Dance Songs	123
8 • Poetry in Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects	141
9 • African Literature and the Scholar-Poet Tradition	155
10 • African Literary Aesthetics: Continuity and Change	167
Index	193

Series Editor's Preface

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin

Preface

Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches is the result of several years of reassessing African literature from multiple perspectives, including the interdisciplinary, ethical, and scholar-poet traditions. While literature generally has always been informed by other disciplines, more than ever before it now carries so many issues that were once thought to be far from it. African literature is unique in the sense of expressing the African condition. The African condition today involves globalization, conflict management, environmental and ecological concerns, and human rights, among many other issues. This book tackles many of these issues and does not consider them as “extra-literary” but valid materials for literary creations and so intrinsic to the literature. Other issues such as masculinity and the use of Pidgin English are also related to literature and have their separate chapters.

The book is conceived under the premise that literature is a cultural production, a point repeated in many chapters. With this premise comes the acceptance of a utilitarian function of literature as of the other artistic creations of African peoples. Thus, it is the belief of the author of this book that literary criticism has an ethical function and so relates that ethical function to how literature can affect the society and its readers for the better. The chapters on globalization, environment, human rights, quest for peace, masculinity, conflict resolution, and a few others are written from the viewpoint that literature should sharpen the consciousness of its people and readers for a better world. For instance, the writer and literary critic should defend their culture in an age of globalization and inscribe it into the cultures of the world. Similarly, in a world in peril environmentally and ecologically, it is the writer’s duty (as of the literary critic’s) to sensitize the public to be ecologically lit-

erate and work towards a balanced relationship between humans and non-human lives of the universe. Of course, for peace and harmony in our respective communities, societies, and the entire world, there should be the promotion of human rights. Majority populations should be sensitive to the feelings of minorities as the powerful should do towards the weak, the rich to the poor, and there should be fairness and justice and avoiding of exploitation and oppression of all kinds. Also, as in oral literature, masculinity should be redefined to express sensitivity to the female gender and the promotion of those virtues that make a man a sensitive and compassionate human being.

This book carries the scholar-poet perspective, which is discussed in one of the chapters. The author is not only a creative writer who has written many collections of poetry, novels, and short stories but also a literary scholar who has been studying and writing on traditional and modern African literatures. It is from the vantage points of both the creative writer and the literary scholar that I write this book. The reader should not therefore be surprised when I illustrate a point with my own poetry or fiction. More importantly, as a scholar-poet, I shift from the creative writer to the literary scholar and back and forth with the insights I have gained over several decades in the respective fields of creative writing and literary scholarship. I attempt to harness the skills of both careers that have coalesced into one mission in the book: a perspective that combines the craft and insights of the writer and the critic at the same time studying African creative works critically.

I conceived the different chapters of this book in such a way that I have done a practice run on them in various avenues. I deliberately proposed to speak on some of the topics as a keynote speaker or lead paper presenter in some conferences as with the chapters on globalization and the quest for peace, the environment and human rights, poetry in Northern Nigeria, and language, literature, and conflict resolution and management in Africa. On an occasion, I chose to make a presentation on my use of Pidgin English in my creative works. I already published the chapter on migration, globalization, and recent African literature in *World Literature Today*. Similarly, the essay on canonization in modern African

literature was published in the online issue of the *Asiatic: Journal of the Department of Language and Literature* at the International Islamic University of Malaysia after being presented as a lecture to students and faculty. I also presented a variant of the globalization and modern African literature chapter at an international conference on Asia-Pacific Cultures and Literatures in Kuala Lumpur, where it represented the African perspective. The chapter on masculinity has just appeared as an invited chapter in a book on masculinity, *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, edited by Helen Mugambi and Tuzyline J. Allan. The chapters might have been conceived for different literary outlets but are meant to complement each other.

I have placed in the book a chapter on an issue which has always been in modern/written African literature but not discussed in that light: the scholar-poet tradition. I intend it to be a call to look at modern African literature, especially the poetry, and see the impact that having one leg in creative writing and the other in the academy is having on the literature produced by such a writer. Do Africans in general and scholars and students of the literature in particular identify with what they read from their writers? If they do not, what is the cause and how can this problem be remedied? I do not posit any solutions in response to this issue in African literature but mean to provide food for thought for those involved in this literature: the writers and the readers.

The book begins with canonization in modern African literature and ends with African literary aesthetics: continuity and change. No matter the issues or topics discussed in modern African literature, one will at the end come to the crux of the matter, which these two chapters represent. To me they complement each other in the affirmation of literature being a cultural production and African literature possessing those qualities that define it as such. That is why I trace response to oral poetic performances as of the *udje* and *ijala* and the continuation into modern works in English, French, or Portuguese, among others. Modern African literature is the natural inheritor of traditional African literature and though there is hybridity, the literature seems to work best when it carries the old traditions in a new manner. I have always argued that if

there is no dispute about the existence of a Western literary canon, there should be none when one talks of the African literary canon, especially if one agrees that literature is a cultural production. This I have done again in this book. The complementing final chapter on literary aesthetics reinforces the first chapter as African literary works that do not address in some relevant way the African condition, as Chinua Achebe also sees it, will be deemed irrelevant.

It is my hope that these topics and approaches will generate a new form of criticism of African literature in general and also inspire writers to know the traditions from which they write as they affirm their own individuality while not forgetting the Africanity of their works. If the book generates interest among scholars and students as well as writers, then it has fulfilled its primary objective.

Tanure Ojaide
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
November 2011