

Preface

HERE, at last, is the culmination of months of associations and liaisons between editors of the international Research Confederacy of African Literature and Culture, IRCALC, and contributing scholars to this important African journal project.

From the move to chart the widening frontiers of black literature, ten scholarly essays /reviews from South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Germany, Canada, the United States and Netherlands have been made available in this Journal of African Literature and Culture [JALC] 4, 2007, which focuses on the prose and dramatic fictions of Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone writers from across Africa and the African Diaspora.

We are particularly pleased that some of our CFP themes that give prominence to Oral Tradition and Aesthetics, History, Progress, Transition and Counter (Re)Inscriptions; Contemporary Modernity and Citizenship (Re)Definitions, etc., have been encapsulated in this journal issue. The papers presented here have thus been placed in three interactive phases of current critical discourses involving rejoinders from past-present concerns, oratorical strategies of narrative, and issues of cultural and contemporary modernity.

The first part of our critique tagged “Silent/Vocal Rejoinders” has the works Nigeria's Fémi Ôsófisan: *Tègònni: an African Antigone* (by Astrid van Weyenberg), South Africa's JM Coetzee: *Foe*, (by Abayomi Kehinde) and the South African novels of Neshani Andreas: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Bessie Head: *Maru*, and Yvonne Vera: *Under the Tongue* (by

Bettina Weiss) as probable models of African men and women writers' historic roles in challenging established inscriptions on identity be they “the jaundiced portrayal of Africa/Africans in Western canonical works” (Kehinde 33) or “androcentric texts ...(and) socio-cultural constructs” (Weiss 15) that limit their womanhood and essence. However, Weyenberg's paper on Òsófisan's rework of Sophocles's *Antigone* argues that Òsófisan's *Tègònni: an African Antigone* does not follow this tradition of counter discourse but, using Wetmore's “Black Dionysus” model, puts forward a text in which “familiarity is celebrated” and “(the use of) Greek material (becomes) ...as a convenient and familiar vehicle by which one might critique society” (75).

In “Traditional /Oratorical Strategies” the second part of the journal, we have two highly significant essays, one by the duo of Enongene Sone and Djockoua Toko using the examples of Cameroonian novelist, Camara Laye, and Nigerian writer, Chin Ce, to appreciate the place of orature and oratorical teaching strategies in African literature, while the other by Irene Marques reviews two stories from *Contos do Nascer da Terra (Stories of the Birth of the Land)*, the short fiction of the Lusophone writer from Mozambique, Mia Couto, in order to demonstrate how the African contemporary writer “recreates the traditional African holistic (choric/animistic) 'self' via the use of innovative language and narrative techniques” (101). The importance of the oral tradition in written literary narratives of Africa is ultimately restated by these studies.

Additional insights on the writings of Camara Laye, Chin Ce, Bessora, and other young writers of the African fictional tradition come in the third part aptly tagged “Cultural /Contemporary Modernity”. Here, Sarah Agbor of Cameroon

and Okuyade Ogaga of Nigeria investigate the relationship between literature and memory, and literature and political governance in Africa, respectively, in Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and Ce's *Children of Koloko*. These equally stress the argument that “African literature is hardly discussed outside contemporary history” (169).

The drama of Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Tess Onwueme: *The Missing Face* are re-examined by Kelly Secovnie in his idea of “cultural translation” between African-American women in search of identity among their African counterparts. Secovnie argues that “the reason for the lack of connection among groups in Africa and the Diaspora” can be traced to the unproven notion that “race ... or—in the Afrocentric scheme— a shared worldview, will automatically serve to draw disparate elements within the Diaspora to Africa” and thus advocates a “frank acknowledgement of difference” followed by the will to “understand the view of the other” and “renegotiate identity” as the structure for the widening of the frontier of African black heritage.

Writing on *53cm*, the semi-autobiographical novel of the Swiss-Gabonese writer, Bessora, Jennifer Westmoreland notes how the diasporic Francophone author, in an echo of earlier Leopold Senghor's themes of alienation under colonial French rule, employs post-modernist surrealist imagery “to articulate a sense of unbelonging or anxiety-filled, hybrid state of the female immigrant in Paris” (151).

Finally with Khaya Gqibitole's expose on ethno-lingual issues in South African (radio) drama as a concluding paper, it can hardly be disputed that JALC No. 4 2007 journal issue has most effectively inaugurated the widening trend in African

literary criticism that embraces formerly uncharted currents in African imaginative literatures. This move has always been predicated upon a literary awareness that is consistent in the collegiate vision of imaginative reconstruction of Africa in a way that departs from old attitudes thereby crystallizing in vaster terrains of literary expressions and appreciation.

IRCALC EDITORS
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