

Preface

This anthology of essays brings together original critical comments on Nigerian literatures written in the 1970s and 1980s. I started sourcing for the materials in the early 1990s. Most of the essays had not been published at that time. Some were commissioned by me for the purpose of the anthology. Eight of the essays had been published in one form or the other and their sources are duly acknowledged.

My initial plan was to have the book in two volumes. This first volume contains materials dealing with Nigerian literatures from their earliest beginnings to the first decade after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The second volume will feature essays covering the period from 1970s to the present. This division is done for the purpose of editorial convenience. Some of the essays such as those by Chinua Achebe, J.P. Cark, Chukwuma Azuonye, and Karin Barber deal with contemporary literary traditions.

The 23 essays in this volume examine two distinct traditions of Nigerian literary heritage – the oral and the written. Achebe's essay in Chapter 1 serves as a prolegomena for the entire project. However, Chapters 2 to 11 represent the oral tradition while Chapters 12 to 23 focus on the tradition of letters. The chapters provide a historical perspective on the diversity and growth of Nigeria's literary culture over the ages.

The essays are organised around the thematic locus *radical*, an ideological label which helps to foreground the political imperative that informs the interpretation emphasised by the contributors. My critical bias in this respect has benefited from the robust debates and exchanges amongst Nigeria's literary scholars in the last quarter of the twentieth century. During the period there was a sharp divide between radical, neo-Marxist interpreters of African culture and literatures on the one hand and their conservative counterparts on the other. The epithet *radical* is also used in the classical Marxian sense to mean original, deep, and comprehensive.

The ideological debates were healthy for the growth of Nigeria's literatures and their evaluation in academic publications and the mass media. These public exchanges influenced the thematic and stylistic orientation of many writers and artists. Wole Soyinka's winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 intensified the discourse, especially with the rising tide of mass revolts against military juntas of the time. Soyinka himself was often a target of harsh

comments by some of the younger, more ultra-left critics. He was later to pay tribute to that tempestuous era with the publication of his book, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, (Ibadan, New Horn Press, 1988) In choosing the essays for this volume, I have placed premium on interpretations that draw attention to the political and ideological foundations of the materials examined.

The value of the critical discourse represented by the essays can be gauged by the fact that all the contributors were at one time or the other engaged in Nigeria's academic institutions. All the authors, except Abu Abarry and Karin Barber are Nigerian nationals. After editing the essays, I left the university system and became a practising journalist in Lagos (1991–2001). My attention was diverted from the book project during that decade and thus it suffered awful delay. I would like to urge the contributors to pardon me for this lapse. In the interval of a decade and a half, some of the authors would have published their works elsewhere.

I regret to point out that three of the distinguished contributors passed away during the period. These are Professor Samuel Omon Asein of the University of Ibadan, Professor Aderemi Bamikunle of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Dr. Tar Ahura, formerly the Provost of the College of Education, Katsina Ala, Benue State. The publication of their essays will serve as tribute to their contribution to the development of Nigerian literatures.

Notwithstanding the delay in the publication of the book, the essays will be useful to students and researchers on Nigerian literatures. It is noteworthy to observe the amount of work that has been done on Nigerian literary development in the past two decades. There is now ample material for a second volume and more. To invoke the words of Chinua Achebe on Nigerian literatures, it is morning yet on creation day.

G.G. Darah
Delta State University,
Abraka, 2007.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface

Introduction

Chapters

1. What has literature got to do with it? - *Chinua Achebe* 1
2. The semiotics of class and gender struggle in pre-colonial narrative systems
- *Ropo Sekoni* 13
3. Myth and the formation of social consciousness: the Bayajida of the Hausa -
Maikudi Karaye 25
4. Towards understanding Ndi Igbo and their cosmology - *Ichie P.A.*
Ezikeojiaku 35
5. ‘Once Upon a Kingdom...’: Benin in the Heroic traditions of Bendel State,
Nigeria - *Isidore Okpewho* 49
6. Principles of the Igbo oral epic: a study in traditional aesthetic and oral
literary criticism - *Chukwuma Azuonye* 75
7. Poetry of the Urhobo Dance Udje – *J.P. Clark* 105
8. Egalitarian ethos in Tiv folktales - *Tar Ahura* 11
9. Social and ethical values of story-telling among the Berom of Plateau State
- *Abu Abarry*
10. Feminism and oral literature: the example of Igbo birth-songs - *Afam*
Ebeogu
11. Children’s oral literature and socialization in Yoruba - *Akinwumi Isola*
12. Literature and society in Lagos (late 19th - early 20th Century) - *Samuel*
Omo Asein
13. Ideological orphanage: the intelligentsia and literary development in
Colonial Nigeria - *G. G. Darah*
14. The songs and poems of the Satiru Revolt c. 1894-1906 - *Abubakar Sokoto*
Mohammed

15. Style and ideology in Fagunwa and Okediji - *Karin Barber*
16. Abubakar Imam and the conservative conscience - *Abba Aliyu Sani*
17. The life and works of Sa'adu Zungur - *Dandatti Abdulkadir*
18. Twilight in the homestead: the drama of Ene Henshaw - *Aderemi Bamikunle*
19. The impact of the newspaper and the cinema on Onitsha Market literature - *Emmanuel Obiechina*
20. Cultural imperialism and publishing in Northern Nigeria: 1903-1960 - *Abba Aliyu Sani*
21. The indigenous publisher and the future of culture in Nigeria - *Kole Omotoso*
22. Domestication of an opiate: western paraesthetics and growth of the Ekwensi tradition - *Femi Osofisan*
23. The retrospective stage: some reflections on the mythopoeic tradition at Ibadan – *Omafume Onoge and G.G. Darah*

Bibliography

Index

Contributors

Abarry, Abu is at the Department of African-American Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, United States of America. He was formerly at the University of Jos, Nigeria.

Abdulkadir, Dantatti was the Vice-Chancellor of Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. He is a Professor of Hausa literature and folklore and was the President of the Nigerian Folklore Society.

Achebe, Chinua is Africa's foremost novelist and man of letters. His *Things Fall Apart* novel (1958) inaugurated the vigorous tradition of African fiction. An erudite essayist and poet, Achebe is acknowledged world-wide as the most distinguished African voice of colonial and post-colonial discourse.

Ahura, Tar was a radical scholar of theatre and drama. He was a leading researcher on indigenous theatrical forms and idiom, particularly of the Tiv nationality of Nigeria. He was the Provost of the Benue State College of Education, Katsina-Ala.

Asein, Sam was Professor of literature at the Department of English, University of Ibadan. The literature of apartheid South Africa was one of his major areas; he did his doctorate degree on the works of Alex La Guma.

Azuonye, Chukwuma is Professor and Chair of the Department of Black Studies/Africana Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston, United States of America. He is a leading scholar of Igbo folklore and oral literature.

Bamikunle, Aderemi was a Professor of English at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. African drama was one of his fields of inquiry.

Barber, Karin is a Professor in Birmingham University, United Kingdom. She was a lecturer in the Department of African Languages and Literatures at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Clark, J.P. is Nigeria's poet laureate and one of Africa's most outstanding dramatists and literary theorists. His deep understanding and creative use of Ijaw and Urhobo folk traditions have earned him international recognition as a gifted playwright, translator and essayist.

- Darah, G.G.** is Professor of oral literature and folklore at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He is former President of the Nigerian Folklore Society and chair of the editorial boards of the *Daily Times* and *The Guardian* newspapers in Nigeria.
- Ebeogu, Afam** is Professor in Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria and a former editor of the *Journal of Nigerian Folklore*.
- Ezikeojiaku, Ichie**, a leading scholar Igbo culture and language, is a lecturer in the Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria.
- Karaye, Maikudi** of the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University, Kano, is an expert in Hausa oral traditions and literature.
- Isola, Akinwumi**, a Nigerian national laureate of literature and major playwright in Yoruba, was of the Department of African Languages and Literatures, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
- Mohammed, Sokoto**, formerly of the Department of Sociology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, was Senior Research Fellow at the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Jos, Nigeria.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel** was former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He was a Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Kansas at Lawrence, and Harvard University, Cambridge, in the United States of America. He was also a Research Fellow at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research.
- Okpewho, Isidore** is the Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Africana Studies, English, and Comparative Literature, Binghamton University, State of New York, New York. He is former President of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa.
- Omotoso, Kole** is a novelist, playwright and essayist. He is former President of the Association of Nigerian Authors. He was of the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Since the 1990s, he has been in South Africa and was lately in the University of Cape Town.
- Onoge Omafume**, Professor of Socio-Anthropology, former Executive Director of the Centre for Advanced Social Science, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, pioneered the teaching of Marxist courses on Sociology of Literature at the University of Ibadan.
- Osofisan, Femi** is a Professor of drama and theatre at the University of Ibadan. He is a radical and prolific playwright, producer, and translator. He is former President of the Association of Nigerian Authors and General Manager of the National Theatre, Lagos.

Sani, Abba Aliyu, is Professor and former Head, Department of English at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. He was Secretary of the Nigerian Folklore Society.

Sekoni, Ropo is of the Department of English and Mass Communication, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. An authority on trickster tales and narrative systems, Sekoni was at one time in the Department of Literature in English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.