

Book Reviews

A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

By ERNEST N. EMENYONU, ED.

James Currey, Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2017, 300 pp.

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A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu, is a welcome contribution to the study of today's most globally recognized African author. Although a great deal has been written about Adichie, this is the first book of essays dedicated exclusively to her work. The volume's seventeen chapters take a number of different critical approaches to her fiction, including sociological, psychoanalytic, and formal. Importantly, the book boasts a diverse set of contributors from across the globe, a third of whom are based at institutions in Africa. In terms of its structure, the *Companion* proceeds more or less chronologically through Adichie's oeuvre, from *Purple Hibiscus* to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Thing around Your Neck*, and *Americanah*. Having said that, the volume may prove particularly useful to critics and teachers of *Purple Hibiscus*, to which six essays are dedicated. Gender is also a prominent theme in the *Companion*—addressed even in chapters for which it is not the primary focus—thus providing a nuanced picture of this issue in Adichie's work across the book as a whole.

It is fitting that Emenyonu begins his introduction with a discussion of Adichie's 2013 TED Talk "We Should All Be Feminists," and not only because of the collection's strong focus on gender. It also signals the volume's broader philosophy of situating Adichie's literary work in relation to her social activism, much of which has been broadcast via popular platforms, from TED to numerous interviews and even a Beyoncé song. In this way, Emenyonu likens Adichie's role as a modern writer to Igbo traditional storytellers, for whom art and social purpose are inseparable: "For Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, story telling in whatever genre, is not just art; it is art with a purpose, art with social responsibility" (12). This underlying tenet runs through many of the essays in the collection, a number of which read Adichie's novels in relation to particular social and political issues, from changing notions of African motherhood to the impact of the Biafran war on ordinary people, especially women.

Although the volume's emphasis falls primarily on the relationship between Adichie's creative work and its larger sociopolitical context, several essays do also address questions of genre, situating Adichie's fiction within global and local categories, from the "migrant Bildungsroman" (Mary Jane Adrone) to "Nigerian war narratives" (Carol Ijeoma Njoku). This is where I found the *Companion* at its most interesting and insightful, when culturally situated analyses met with attention to literary form, particularly in moments when contributors placed Adichie within the

context of the broader Nigerian literary landscape, from Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa to less canonical authors. For example, Christina Cruz-Gutierrez's "‘Hairitage’ Matters" considers the trope of hair in *Americanah* in relation to questions of diaspora, gender, social media, and the "third wave hair movement"—all while putting the novel in conversation with two of Adichie's short stories and interpreting these works in light of other contemporary female Nigerian authors. Essays such as this could provide useful secondary material in graduate and even undergraduate literature courses, where *Americanah* is frequently taught.

Although the volume would be strengthened by greater attention to the relationship between literary form and content, as well as the inclusion of more essays that endeavor to read comparatively across Adichie's oeuvre, it will nonetheless be of interest to scholars and students in a range of fields. Emenyonu positions the collection as a continuing "conversation," and indeed its strength lies in the diversity of voices it includes.

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Post-Mandarin Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam

By BEN TRAN

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In *Post-Mandarin Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam*, Ben Tran explores how European literary tropes associated with modernism were adapted by Vietnamese literati to consciously craft a gendered national subjectivity under late French colonialism. This is a significant contribution to our understanding of a Vietnamese social and intellectual world at a moment of transition from Confucian to European social and intellectual habits. Tran's innovation is a focus on gender that places masculine anxieties of modernizing change at the very heart of an emergent Vietnamese national consciousness. Taking Benedict Anderson's formulations of print capitalism as a foundational condition of possibility for a modern national subjectivity—in dialogue with philosopher Jacques Rancière—Tran explores how the narrative modalities that emerged in the 1930s invoked gender in the formation of this subjectivity through the prosaic enunciation of everyday life in which feminine concerns were dominant. Women in these narrations are not only a mime for colonial subjugation—as prostitutes and *m tây* (women who marry a Westerner)—but also as a locus of a contested modern autonomy and a new reading public that challenged Confucian norms of masculine address: "[w]omen are excluded from yet revealingly frame the process of modernization" (87).