

***A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu (Boydell & Brewer, 2017)**

For a writer not yet in her forties, the publication of a *Companion* to her work might be considered as a canonising effort, driven both by the quality of her literary production and the quantity of academic investigations on it. If the author is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the allure of her status as a public intellectual should be added, as her belonging to mainstream transnational literature in English has often produced wider debates (mainly concerning her positions about African feminism and Afropolitanism) than the ones usually circulating in the academic sphere.

This *Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu, a renowned scholar in the field of Postcolonial African Studies, takes up this double challenge, avoiding both canonisation *tout court* and the reproduction of the most contingent aspects of the contemporary cultural debate, and contributing, thus, to a much-needed critical reassessment of her literary and intellectual production as a whole.

The seventeen essays included in the *Companion*, in fact, produce an ‘internal dialogue [...] enhanc[ing] the integrity’ of the volume, as explicitly defended by the editor in his introduction (7). Mainly coming from the Nigeria-US axis – recalling, thus, Adichie’s biographical background – but also from other countries around the world (United Kingdom, India and Spain, among others), these contributions build a complex and plural perspective on Adichie and her oeuvre. This polyphonic criticism aptly corresponds with the multiple identities being represented in Adichie’s works, within the typical attempt of diasporic literature to overcome the binary opposition between two countries and cultures, seeking, instead, multiple attachments. Also the treatment of gender issues is much more detailed (and enriching, for the reader) than the debate which followed the label of ‘Happy African Feminism’, coined by Adichie in the 2012 TED Talk ‘We Should All Be Feminists’.

This polyphony has unintended consequences, though. The high fluidity and readability of those articles which are more prone to divulgation is associated with more structured and academic essays, in an uneven mixture which might from time to time disorient the readership. Besides, the combination of different positions inevitably ends up developing some specific arguments to the detriment of others. For example, Emenyonu’s claim that ‘there is a sense in which it could be said that the great Nigerian war novel did not exist until Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*’ (7) seems to lack the discussion of the other ‘senses’ in which the Nigerian-Biafran conflict has been narrated since its conclusion, nearly fifty years ago. Emenyonu himself is a great contributor to this field, since, at least, his renowned and still very valuable essay *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (1978), but this and other references are not explicitly discussed with reference to Adichie’s novel.

Also Chikwendu Paschal Kizito Anyanwu’s argument that ‘Adichie, with the panoptic lens availed her by her historical location, goes beyond Achebe’s prophetic military coup [in his 1966

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novel *A Man of The People*] to narrate the consequent civil war' (140) does not seem to be completely satisfying. Adichie might show a fuller understanding of 'corruption in Nigerian politics' – as mentioned in the title of Anyanwu's essay – as this phenomenon both preceded and followed the conflict, marking several decades of Nigerian postcolonial history. However, this does not exclude the possibility that Adichie – who did not directly experience the conflict – might have a perspective on Nigerian-Biafran war which is at least as partial as the one enacted by Achebe, who was directly involved in it.

In addition to this, the internal dialogue between the seventeen essays, plus the introduction, is structured along a mainly chronological axis: after the first essay, in which Louisa Uchum Egbunike discusses Adichie's whole oeuvre in terms of 'orality, history and the production of knowledge' (15), six essays are devoted to Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), four to *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), two to *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and four to *Americanah* (2013). This choice inevitably turns out to be a selective one, as the exclusive focus on novels and short stories prevents the discussion of Adichie's 'minor' works, as aptly quoted in the very useful and exhaustive 'Appendix' (263-290) compiled by Daria Tunca: Adichie's collection of poems *Decisions* (1997), her play *For the Love of Biafra* (1998) and her essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014).

A fuller discussion of Adichie's literary antecedents would have also been of an interest: though a canonising move in itself, this analysis would have contributed to a deeper understanding of her transnational literary and cultural formation. While Adichie's self-declared and often evident reference to Chinua Achebe is often recalled, there are only some passing references to other writers, such as the Nigerian-born writer Buchi Emecheta – whose *Destination Biafra* (1982) can be aptly compared to Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, adding, thus, to the comparison actually made in the *Companion* by Iniobong Uko (59, 65) between Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Purple Hibiscus* – or the Guinean-born Francophone author Camara Laye (101-102, 171). Scant reference is also made to the Nigerian diasporic literature, whose female constituency is briefly recalled by Cristina Cruz-Gutiérrez: 'Chika Unigwe, Helen Oyeyemi, Sefi Atta, Promise Okekwe, Unoma Azuah and Diana Evans' (245). However, as Adichie's primary biographical and cultural attachment is the Nigerian American diaspora, reference to authors such as Chris Abani, Helon Habila or Anthonia Kalu cannot be avoided.

While these clarifications might have interested both the academic and non-academic reader, the choice being made in the *Companion* is nonetheless noteworthy, as it focuses on some important themes – multiple identities, gender, domesticity and transnationality – whose in-depth analysis helps to better position Adichie's whole oeuvre, shifting away, at the same time, from the intricacies of the contemporary cultural debate on Adichie's position within Afropolitanism and African feminism. Jessica Hume's contribution on domestic and food-related spaces (87-100), Silvana Carotenuto's reflections on Adichie's responsibility as a writer (169-184), or the analysis of 'hair politics' in *Americanah* by Cristina Cruz-Gutiérrez (245-62) are only some examples of the brilliant critical moves being made in the volume.

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In conclusion, despite some episodic absences, this *Companion* certainly stands as a relevant contribution to the discussion on the works being published by a writer who could be defined – in a formulaic, if oversimplified way – ‘very easy to chat about, very difficult to write on’.

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