

Literary Criticism Reevaluated: Challenging a Rigid Creative-Critical Dichotomy. By Ada Uzoamaka Azodo. London: GlobeEdit, 2026

How best can learners get the most out of their readings if not through analysis and interpretation of the works and authors they read (9)? How can Africans be sure whether they have gotten dry or not, since the rain started beating them, as noted by Chinua Achebe (29)? Ada Azodo's answer to these questions is literary criticism.

This is a concise, clear, well-researched overview of an immensely complex and important topic. Ada Azodo offers a particularly pertinent perspective on why literary criticism should be regarded as a genre, including the three major ones and lesser-known genres. Acknowledging the inevitable pitfalls and oversimplifications of such an undertaking, Azodo has nevertheless performed a valuable service for scholars, educators, and non-specialist literary researchers. Her book helpfully situated all historical epochs of literature (traditional, precolonial, colonial, contemporary) within a proper understanding of intertextuality. If widely read, it could significantly elevate the utility of current debates over integrating literary criticism as both a critical and creative form of literature.

The book is divided into eight chapters, following the historical periodization of literature from the early to the contemporary period. Each of these chronological sections is further divided into analytical categories that harness disparate currents into a single force. This allowed for an important distinction, since neither the actual presence of a novel, poem, or drama nor the varied interactions among these works (intertextuality) can speak for themselves without critical and creative literary analysis. Even the reader could be lost if he does not understand the text.

Two parallels (most times intertwined) thus form the core of the book. In the first question, current understandings of what literary criticism is and demonstrate what it truly is through the study of the literature of selected illustrious writers (4). Second, casting readers' minds on the distinguishing feature of literary criticism from original scholarly research is itself usually considered a form of literature with no gap (11). That requires both creative and critical thinking to benefit from understanding each other.

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Azodo's first chapter is laudably clear in recognizing that, as literary works proliferate, they are organized into strict genres and that their actions should not always be attributed to less critical motives. Emblematic genres such as the novel, drama, and poem are indeed indicative of African social experiences and history. But they are always executed by the authors who mainly explore their own ideas in their own times, necessitating reassessment. Reassessment in terms of the intergenerational connection between texts, deriving meaning from a text, and expectations of a reader who is either alien or indigenous to the culture represented. Creative literary critics have a lot to contribute here in deciphering the above. An example in chapter two acknowledged the limits of structuration by comparing Yeats, Chinua Achebe, and Chimamanda Adichie. Textual and conceptual boundary fragments exist across the three writings, and criticism is necessary to reveal the connections among biographical, historical, and new historical criticism that have metamorphosed (50). However, Azodo leaves this question unchecked: How do we trust literary criticism? This missed opportunity should be considered for a better conviction.

Appearance, belief, and myth nevertheless do matter. Azodo is careful to acknowledge that, in chapter 3, historical events, such as the colonization of Africa, can assume tremendous significance when they tie into and illustrate narrative or ideological claims about what happens in the present. Africa, as the mother of humanity and cradle of civilization, she argued, has for centuries occupied a place in African history. Therefore, creative criticism can help illuminate the futuristic gaze on Africa's future, as explored in the book through Okot Bitek's two poems (*Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*). Chapter 4 of Felwine Sarr's manifesto and metaphor for a new Africa has been critiqued for positioning readers to recognize the importance of his work in situating Africa within its own values rather than in relation to Europe.

In the fifth chapter, reading the novels of the Senegalese Mariama Bâ and the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, issues of globalization are identified but remain vague, and this is probably understandable without an explanation of how globalization shapes literary readings. These are some key aspects that literary criticism comes to tackle, elucidating how new expressions of identity and issues of literary creation and aesthetic response emerge through rereading (79).

The evolution of love and marriage in Igboland is duly addressed in chapter 6, as popular stereotypes are challenged in the conventional knowledge of Igbo womanhood. But it is ultimately the most recent manifestation of traditional Igbo love of care, respect, and responsibility, rather than a romantic relationship, that Azodo seems

more eager to explore (99). How does this roll through the years with a changing world filled with divorce, lack of extended family support, freedom to live, yearning for satisfaction beyond the person you are supposedly hooked up with? Its shadow lurks throughout the text, though analysis is, for the most part, left to the final chapter (chapter 8) on patriarchy in Flora Nwapa's and Bonne Garmus novels. Here, the notion of feminist literary criticism is invoked to combat gender discrimination and inequality and redistribute power between the sexes and genders (115). Mobility and transnationality in Chapter 7 are compelling observations that migrants' socio-economic and political issues push innovative transnational diasporic literature.

Therefore, literary criticism is worthy of recognition for authors and critics alike, in their shared love of literature and their shared responsibility to address society's concerns at any given time, in any space, and at any era. Azodo's perspective may be colored by her professional work as a long-term professor and researcher, but if she is correct that the perception of an unfounded divide between critical and creative writing requires prioritized examination, then this is indeed cause for concern.

When specialists examine African literature, their framing is usually reduced to thematic content, authorship, and identity of the writer, with an unclear basis of whether a literature should be classified based on the merit it possesses or identity of the author, or even because it treats an African subject, without breaking down the text to interpretations that unearth its complexities and finding deeper significance. Azodo's original contribution is thus telling of a complete story from start to finish with considerations not only for well-known literary genres such as novels, drama, children's literature, film, and poetry, but also how areas that never experience recognition are responsive in their laudable role connecting citizens to norms and truths of societies.

The art and craft of literary criticism provide further scope for comparison and reflection from other disciplines and methods to buttress ideas generated from a text. This is well-developed and accurately summarized for the most part, though some areas need further clarity. An area needing clarification is the distinction between the categories of African literature in the introduction, which does not adequately explain what they entail and instead dwells only on their characteristics. Then the idea of fruitlessness in discovering where a term is borrowed should be taken with a pinch of salt, because even though she posits the non-boundaries in African literature, careful attention to how a term evolved is crucial (28). I appreciate her ex-

planation of how authors who never read each other's work can end up using similar catchphrases, but this should not ultimately preclude the critique of borrowings. These results show no serious deficiencies, and the book remains useful for the field.

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