

eternity which neither the flood of time nor place has eroded. *World on the Brinks* has the distinction of being one of the earliest poetry anthologies published on the subject of the Covid-19 pandemic, not only in Nigeria but in the globe. It is an anthology we should all own and read closely.

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Evelyn N. Urama (ed). *The Writer in the Mirror: Conversations with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*.

Ibadan: University Press PLC & Purple Shelves Limited, 2021, 490 pp. ₦7,000
 ISBN 9789789408498, paperback.

The Writer in the Mirror: Conversations with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, edited by Evelyn N. Urama, serves as both a celebration of Professor Akachi Ezeigbo as well as an importance source offering greater insight into both her life and works. Ezeigbo notes in one of the interviews that 'Adimora', her maiden name, precedes 'Ezeigbo' in the hyphenated version of her surname, reserved for her creative writing. This variation of her name served as a way of honouring her late father who had encouraged her in her creative writing and details like these, which are scattered across this anthology of interviews, shed light on Ezeigbo's family dynamics, personal history, and heritage. This collection of forty-two interviews, conducted over approximately thirty years, enables its readers to gain greater insight into both Ezeigbo's evolving positions, as well as her definitive stance on a number of issues. It provides a series of vignettes into her life and works, allowing readers to develop a clearer sense of the motivations and inspirations around her creative and scholarly writing. Ezeigbo is very much a scholar with a public platform, and many of the interviews included in this book were originally published in Nigerian newspapers, revealing the important position Ezeigbo occupies as a public intellectual.

Evelyn N. Urama's introduction to the collection sets out the multiple accomplishments of Professor Akachi Ezeigbo as an academic and as a creative writer. Drawing attention to some of the highpoints

in her illustrious career, such as her winning the NLNG prize for literature, her international fellowships in the UK and Germany, and her induction into the Nigerian Academy of Letters, Urama sets out the trajectory of Ezeigbo's rise to prominence. The introduction notes that as 'interest in her [Ezeigbo's] works continues to grow around the world, researchers are bound to look for materials to make new points about her works or validate old ones' (xxiv).

The editor thus positions this collection as an important tool in burgeoning scholarship on Ezeigbo, providing a useful resource for current and future researchers. The collection features two forewords, one by Professor Stephanie Newell of Yale University and the second by Ezeigbo's former colleague at the University of Lagos, Dr Patrick Oloko. The invitation extended to these two well-respected scholars, who both know Ezeigbo in a personal and professional capacity, and their careful consideration of the important space that Ezeigbo occupies, signals to Ezeigbo's standing with the scholarly community in Nigeria and abroad. The inclusion of selected photographs provides a glimpse into Ezeigbo's personal and professional life, showing images of her with family members as well as photos of Ezeigbo participating in international conferences and amongst colleagues in Nigeria. The book also includes a series of useful bibliographies which detail Ezeigbo's publications, as well as selected scholarship on her work.

We learn from the introduction that Akachi Ezeigbo played an important role in the curation of this collection, handing over newspaper clippings as well as 'journals and other sources' to Evelyn Urama following Urama's suggestion for a published volume of interviews. As such, Ezeigbo has had significant input in the shaping of this collection, having played the role of archivist in building up a library of materials.

Given the range of publications from which *The Writer in the Mirror* sources its interviews, the tone of the contributions ranges from the journalistic to the scholarly, with variety showing in the lengths, focus, and styles of the interviews. Akachi Ezeigbo's revelation that her early aspiration had been to pursue a career in journalism sheds light on the good relationship she has fostered with Nigerian newspapers, apparent in the number of interviews she has granted the press over the years. It is worth noting that the majority of the collection's interviews are conducted by Nigerians based within the country or abroad, often for a Nigerian audience, shaping the dynamics of the interview.

The Writer in the Mirror is organized into six sections according to the following themes: Profile, Career Development, Gender Issues,

International Scholarship, Literature and Society and Celebrated Literary Icons. As with any attempt at cataloguing, the discussion points featured in interviews placed in different sections overlap and inform each. Since many interviewers begin with questions that attempt to situate Ezeigbo's creative writing and scholarship within her familial context, there is a significant amount of repeated biographical material, and so the question arises as to whether this collection would have benefitted from publishing abridged versions of the interviews. Recurrent themes which emerge across this collection include the importance of one's mother tongue, literature and the socialization of children, the Nigeria–Biafra war and feminism in Nigeria. Conversations range from the personal, which discuss her identity and role as a mother, wife, and daughter, to those that engage specifically with her writing. Collectively these interviews provide a portrait of Ezeigbo over time, bringing us into our contemporary moment with discussions on the impact of the Covid-9 pandemic on creative writers.

The first interview in the collection seeks to set out the dynamics of Ezeigbo's family home as she grew up: it introduces her parents, her role and responsibilities as their first born, and discusses the strong-women role models in her life – her mother and her two grandmothers. The Nigeria–Biafra war forms a part of the narrative of Ezeigbo's childhood and this interview provides the first glimpse into a conflict which deeply affected her. Ezeigbo has published both scholarly and creative works on the war, notably *Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War* (1991) and *Roses and Bullets* (2011). In an interview with Maik Nwosu a year after *Fact and Fiction* was published, Ezeigbo speaks to the personal toll the war had had on her, saying 'It was a truly brutalising experience. [...] I could not forget the war even after it ended. At the back of my mind was the desire to write about the war.' (337) *Fact and Fiction* was Ezeigbo's first monograph, a revised version of her doctoral thesis. On the subject of war, Ezeigbo had also written the children's book *The Buried Treasure* (1992) and co-edited 'The Literatures of War', a special issue of the *Journal of African Languages and Cultures* (1991). Given the compulsion that Ezeigbo expresses to write about the war, it is unsurprising that this subject emerges frequently across the interviews, as it has become an important aspect of both her scholarship and her creative writing.

As a creative writer, what is apparent is the range that Ezeigbo has shown in her writing. In one interview she notes that I may choose to write about a subject that happened decades ago, as I did in my historical novel, *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Or I may choose to write

about something very contemporary as I did in the novel, *Trafficked*, based on human trafficking which is a current scourge in our society. I wrote about the Nigerian Civil War also known as the Biafran War which was fought between 1967 and 1970 in my novel, *Roses and Bullets* (145)

She sheds light on her philanthropic endeavours in funding a number of creative writing prizes for emerging Nigerian writers, whilst working with young writers to develop their craft.

Ezeigbo's writing has been shaped by her feminism, and the interviews in this collection illuminate her efforts to develop a feminist framework which has its roots in Igbo philosophy. In an interview with Uchekukwu Agbo in 2020, Ezeigbo notes that her coinage of 'snail-sense feminism [...] posits that dialogue and negotiation are superior to aggression, confrontation and fighting'. The name 'hinges on the Igbo proverb which states that a snail crawls over thorns, boulders and rocks with a well lubricated tongue, by negotiating with the obstacles it encounters on its way, and will arrive at its destination unharmed.' (61). Ezeigbo published the monograph *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model* (2012), which provides a more expansive discussion of this concept, but in reading Ezeigbo's engagement with 'snail-sense feminism' vis-à-vis stories from her life (such as the challenges she faced when passed over for promotion), the resolve she has shown in her calm perseverance provides insight into how her own experiences have shaped her critical standpoint on women in society.

Whilst African women writers largely dominate the African literary landscape, Africa-based women writers are under-represented in the scholarship on contemporary writing. *The Writer in the Mirror* is a useful resource in the study of an important woman in both the literary and scholarly spheres. This collection adds to existing substantial publications which spotlight Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and her works, which includes *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues & Perspectives* (2008) edited by Patrick Oloko, *Emerging Perspectives on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo* (2017) edited by Blessing Diala-Ogamba and Rose Sackeyfio; and the biography *Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature* (2017) by Ezechi Onyerionwu.

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