

## INTRODUCTION

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The articles collected in this issue of the Journal are largely based on the presentations delivered at the Third International Annual Conference on the Role of Literature in a Global World, organized by the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature in November 2020. The special theme of the Conference was “Eastern African Literatures in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges, and Perspectives”. In full accordance with the conference’s special theme, its program featured presentations by about thirty participants from Africa and Europe. The fact that the Conference attracted participants from all over the world mirrored the importance of the issues raised by the gathering. The three days of the Conference were opened by keynote speakers, distinguished scholars and writers from Eastern Africa - Dominica Dipio from Makerere University, Mukoma wa Ngugi from Cornell University, Christopher Odhiambo from Moi University and Kithaka wa Mberia from the University of Nairobi.

The Conference participants were the leading specialists in Eastern African studies from such universities as Nairobi, Kenyatta, USIU, Meru and Chuka in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda, universities of Humboldt, Hamburg and Bayreuth in Germany, the University of Ghent in Belgium, the University of Vienna in Austria, Institute for World Literature in Russia.

The panels of the Conference covered various aspects of the present state of literature and related subjects in Eastern Africa in an attempt to establish how the region's literatures have grown, deviated from, or otherwise changed from its variants of earlier times. For example, one of the panels discussed new readings of Eastern African classics, such as the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as well as East African oral tradition. The themes of this panel are developed in this current issue of the Journal in the articles by Susanne Gehrman, who offers a new comparative interpretation of Ngugi wa Thiongo and Binyavanga Wainaina’s memoirs, and Inge Brinkman with “posthuman” interpretation of Gikuyu oral literature.

One of the panelists was engaging with topical issues of women's literature and introducing new names in Eastern African women's writing. This topic is reflected in the issue by Alina Rinkanya's article based on the works of one of the younger but renowned Kenyan author, Moraa

Gitaa. The researcher addresses issues relative to female perspectives as well as interrogates the cultural impediments to female agency.

Bearing in mind the growing importance of Swahili as a literary language in the East African region, Swahili literature was discussed in a separate panel. The general, or, as the author himself formulated it, “a bird's eye view” of the Swahili writing tradition is presented in this issue by the article of distinguished Kenyan writer and scholar of Swahili expression Kithaka wa Mberia. The article by Mikhail Gromov investigates how the problems of the younger generation are depicted in Kenyan Swahili women's prose in the current century.

One of the panels of the Conference was interrogating the issues related to the concept of identity, which demonstrates once again the importance of this notion in modern literary studies and, on a larger scale, humanities. The panel members discussed this concept in many aspects - investigating the contribution to the formation of identity of geographical spaces (for example, the Caribbean and Indian ocean), gender and nationhood, the acquisition of a new identity by East African writers of European origin, and the reflection of identity in traditional oral narratives. The findings of this discussion are formulated in this issue in the articles by Julius Mwangi Kanyari, who investigates the East African contribution to Caribbean identity, and Natalia Frolova, who traces the acquisition of Kenyan identity in the works of two distinguished Kenyan poets of European descent.

The participants of the panel on theatre and film presented theatrical and cinematic genres as part and parcel of literary and artistic space of the region, focusing on varied aspects, such as psychological aspects of drama, modern dramatic interpretations of folklore, theatre and film for justice and social development, popular comedy. A number of articles in this issue are based on these presentations - Wambua Kawive's research on the style of theatre for social justice in Kenya, Joseph Muleka's application of Freudian psychoanalysis to Kenyan drama and Pepetual Chiangong's analysis of *Lwanda Magere* by Kenyan playwright Okoiti Omtatah.

One of the most innovative contributions to the Conference's work was made by the participants of the panel on digital media. Eastern Africa is not an exception, and the participants of the panel are set to demonstrate these vibrant developments in the regional context, speaking about regional panels for digital literature, and various genres of digital writing in the region - from spoken word poetry (the article by Beatrice Ekesa) to online comedy (analysed by Miriam

Maranga Musonye) - examining the mutual role of the blogger and the reader as co-creators of digital literary works.

The editors of this issue of the Journal, who were also actively participating in the organization and the work of the Conference, express their hopes that such scientific forums prove their ultimate validity and importance for the purpose of researching and to a large extent guiding the literary processes in the region, which in the long run will seriously add up to its intellectual and social growth and prosperity. We hope that the articles published in this edition of the Journal will be captivating and inspiring for our readers.

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