Kuwabong, Dannabang
Reseña de "The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature" de Irele F. Abiola and Simon Gikandi (eds.)
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"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (p. 84).

The author’s enthusiasm for the topic is obvious throughout the book and he indeed illustrates the church as a continuous tradition that has strived in just about every aspects of the Jamaican society. Even though the Reverend Dick encourages the church to work with other segments of the society, the main drawbacks in his conclusions are a failure to take into account the contributions of other religious formations in Jamaica. There is also a tendency to directly and indirectly attack secular culture in Jamaica, as well as offering rather didactic pontification of Christian values. Offering much useful historical background on the Church, the book serves less well in providing an analytical assessment of social conditions that may direct the Church to better engage the multifaceted problems that Jamaica is faced with today. As the book explores just about every aspect in the Jamaica society, discourse around sexuality is given very little attention.

In summary, Reverend Devon Dick’s book *Rebellion to Riot: The Jamaican Church in Nation Building* is a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue the Jamaican society has regarding the church and its role in the wider society. The book also serves as a good groundwork for historising the church’s role in the various institutions in Jamaica.

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The *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature, Volumes 1 & 2*, edited by Irele F. Abiola and Simon Gikandi, is a monumental addition to the study of the pan-Afri-
can world of literature. The volumes exhume undercurrents of experiential historical similarities, emblazoned by cultural continuities and contiguities, not only in the relationships between the consequences of European/Christian colonization of Africa and the Caribbean from the 15th century to the present, but also demonstrates similar comparative experiences generated by Arab/Islamic invasion of Africa from the 8th century to the present. The volumes weave a complex tapestry of interrelationships, reversals and progressions of fortunes in the socio-political and cultural histories in the three geophysical locations that provided the nurturing atmospheres for the evolution and development of a pan-African literary consciousness. Most impressively, the volumes show the connectivity between oral and scribal forms of the literatures of this pan-African world.

The topics in Volume 1 include issues that deal first with oral literatures. This section is covered by Liz Gunner’s sweeping panoramic view of the importance of pre-Arab and pre-European African oratures and how they functioned as social discourse. This panoramic view is followed by Kwesi Yankah’s discussion of the folktale genre in Akan society, while Sabrah Webber’s “Arab and Berber oral Traditions of North Africa” give a lush tapestry of oral forms in the Maghreb Lupenga Mphande’s exciting discussion of “Heroic praise poetry of South Africa,” as “central to any delineation of Southern African Literature” (p. 71) with political, biographical, and national ethnic functions is very instructive. On a more literary level, Isidore Okpehwo’s combative and Marxist defense of the epic tradition in Africa debunks the idea that Africa has no epic tradition. From a pan-African perspective, Maureen Warner-Lewis’s “The Oral Tradition in the African Diaspora” African American song forms of blues, gospel, and Caribbean dance hall deejay performance, hip-hop, banter and other oratorical devices to West African griot and other oratorical forms.

Second, the volume looks at the beginning of scribal traditions beginning with Ferguson’s “The Literature of Slaver and Abolition,” and Kandé’s “Africa and the European Renaissance.”
Kandé gives us biographical sketches of Juan Latino and Anton Welheim Amo and the roles these two played in shaping the direction of European cultural renaissance. Tejumola Olaniyan’s “Festivals, ritual and Drama in Africa,” blends the oral and the scribal traditions while engaging an anti-imperialist, cross-genre and cross-gender approaches to illustrate the multiple and complex interconnectedness between festivals, rituals, theater, and literary drama. Olaniyan’s position is complemented by Keith Q. Warner’s chapter, “Carnival and the folk origins of West Indian Drama,” in which he discusses the theatrical/dramaturgic nature of Carnival as an African-Caribbean, especially Trinidadian contribution to a new pan-African world of the theatrical performance and dramatic literature. Gikandi in “African literature and the colonial factor,” problematizes the development of African literature in European languages by demonstrating the ambiguous relationship between African writers and their colonial education which decries any simplistic or monolithic historical analysis. In Daniel Kunene, we encounter the paradoxical history of African language literatures in South Africa in their relationship with African and European colonial cultures while Alan Ricard invites us to reconceptualize our definitions of what constitutes writing, with diagrammatic history to show that Africa never lacked systems of writing prior to Arab and European penetration of the continent. Ricard’s position is supported convincingly by Teodros Kiros’ chapter on flourishing literature of pre-Arab and pre-European contact Ethiopia. Concomitantly, Farida Abu-Haidar in “African Literature in Arabic” while focusing on the development of literature in Arabic by non-Arab Africans, also indirectly extends Kiros’ position. Consistent with this frame of argumentation Daniel P. Kunene’s “African-language literatures of southern Africa,” Alamin M. Mazrui’s “The Swahili literary tradition: an intercultural heritage,” Ousseina Alidou’s “The emergence of written Hausa literature,” Karen Barber’s “Literature in Yorùbá: poetry and prose; traveling theater and modern drama,” and finally, Ampie Coetzee’s “Literature in Afrikaans,” Ann Biersteker in
“Gikuyu literature: development from early Christian writings to Ngũgĩ’s later novels” all examine the crucial roles Islamic or Christian missionary education played in creating an early script for African languages and literatures. The ideological importance ending Volume 1 with a validation of African languages literary and creative mediums cannot be lost to us.

Most of Volume 2 deals with the history of European colonial enterprise and subsequent Christian education and the roles these played in the evolution and development of African literatures in European languages. Simon Gikandi sets the pace here with a discussion of the role played by Makere University in the development of nationalist cultural writing in former British East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia and Uganda. Following Gikandi, Flora Vei-Wild and Anthony Chennells examine the influence of travelogues on the rise and development of literature in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, while Dan Izevbaye’s academic rigmarole in “West African Literature in English: beginnings to the mid-seventies” focuses on the debates on the appropriate theoretical constructs and ideological frames for reading of Pan-African literary and critical productions. In “South African Literature in English,” David Atwell explores the contradictions within white South African community as to how to define their writing, and documents the complexity of South African racialist histories, the struggles against apartheid, the rise of black men and women writers, and the critical enterprise started in Drum, which links us to Milton Krieger’s “The Formative journals and institutions,” and expands our knowledge about the pioneering criticisms and local European style institutions and literary journals that have carved the path of African literature criticism.

Mildred Mortimer, in “African literature in French: sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period” focuses on the development of Francophone African literature as originating from the reactive resistance to the French educational system of assimilation. Mortimer, like Warner-Lewis, sees connections between the roles of the writers and of traditional griots in society. Mortimer
progresses interstitially to merge with Patricia Geesey’s “North African Literature in French,” which compares the roles of Arab and Berber ethnic nationalities with French settlers among them was Albert Camus, to the development of Francophone-Maghreb literature. In Bénédicte Mauguière’s “Francophone literatures of the Indian Ocean” we are piloted through diversities of the cultural and racial geographies and linguistic polyphony that define the literary modules in these islands. For instance, The Malagasy Republic’s boom of religio-magico writings in Arabic came to a static pace when after the French conquest when French then became substituted as the linguistic and literary medium. Also, Mauritius like most Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago, and mainland Guyana, experienced multiple waves of Dutch, French, and finally the British settler occupation who later complicated the racial, literary, historical, and cultural creolization by introducing indentured laborers from India.

It is often forgotten that Spain also had imperial designs in Africa. Hence, N’Gom’s discussion of Hispanic Africa is instructive. Like Atwell, N’Gom reviews the problem of nomenclature and the role played by the Spanish colonists in Equatorial Guinea who refused to publish work by native African writers, complicated further during the dictatorship of Sassou Nguema. We are then eased into Russell G. Hamilton’s “African Literature in Portuguese” from Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Sao Tomé. Hamilton traces the tortuous path of the writers in these nations after World War II toward achieving a solid national and pan-Lusophone African literature. While at this point, the discussions shifts to focus on contemporary literary history. In “Popular Literature in Africa,” Ode S. Ogede critically examines the term “popular literature” as it relates to Africa. He shows how the interpretive panic created by this genre in Africa originates in its deterritorialized and often transgressive blending of several other genres, and canvasses then for a critical openness as suggested by Karen Barber where critics can conduct productive debates towards achieving meaningful definitions of the genre in Africa.
Nick Nesbitt’s “Caribbean Literature in French: Origins and Development,” shifts the essay away from Africa to the Caribbean and United States of America. Nesbitt focuses on the cartographic ruptures and movements of peoples and in the transformational resolutions resulting from the intersecting of Europeans brutality and Africans enslavement which helped create the Négritude movement defined by concepts of Creolité. Cuba, The Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico have produced what Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert labels as “Caribbean literature in Spanish.” This literature began with Spanish collection of facts, folklore, fauna, and cultures of the Native Taíno, and derivative writing by the settlers. Paravisini insinuates that the late abolition of slavery in the Spanish Caribbean also created a rapid rise in Afro-Hispanic consciousness in the twentieth century Hispanic Caribbean literature. Elaine Savory’s “Anglophone Caribbean Literature” argues that the rich literature of the Anglophone Caribbean originates from the brutal history of slavery and colonization which has given that literature a more combative tone in which exile, the question of home, gender, sexuality, authenticity, mimicry, ancestral Africa as against Europe, orature as against scribal, among others become major themes. Abiola Irele’s “The Harlem Renaissance and the Négritude Movements” completes the triangle of pan-African literary history of the modern period. The assessment of African American intellectual production at the turn of the twentieth century, and its links to Négritude gives testimony to the relationship of the ideals and experiences shared by the three groups.

The polemics of the post-colonialism both as a lived experience and as cultural theory is taken up in Michael Dash’s “Postcolonial Caribbean identities,” which recapitulates the historical debates governing Caribbean identities, and the role played by reactive writing against racist travelogues by itinerant English writers such as Froude and Trollope. The last chapters recapitulate the themes of neo-colonial disillusionment in the post independence period. However, the final chapter, by Ato Quayson, not only signals the rise of younger scholars, but also the direction to which African
and Caribbean literary discourse is heading. Quayson cautions us of the dangers in engaging Euro-American abstract terminologies such as modern and postmodern to categorize African literatures without showing how these attest to the historical realities and experience of Africans.

In conclusion, I highly commend the editors and the various contributors to the two Volumes. But let me point out a few issues. First, where is the discussion of the literatures in Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, St. Lucian Creole, and Papiemento? Second, I find it a bit troubling that the ancient writings of ancient Egypt, Kush, and Axum were not discussed, considering the wealth of material out there. Third, to edit a 906 pages book about African and Caribbean literary history without including the vast contributions of Indo-Caribbean peoples or other Caribbean minorities is to me, a gross omission or lack of insight. Merits include, without gainsay, the way in which the authors have been able to weave an intricate pattern of pan-African connectivity. The Volumes will contribute immensely to an acceptance of African, Caribbean, and African American literatures as major world class literatures. The extensive bibliographies definitely will benefit graduate students and seasoned scholars alike. The editors have succeeded in also condensing a lot into a little a space. The chapters are linked thematically and geographically into symmetries of historical contiguities. I recommend the volumes for all serious scholars and intellectual bibbers after pan-African literary studies.

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