

Annotation of Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's "Language and Time in Postcolonial Experience", *Research in African Literatures* 39.1 (2008), pp. 24-47.

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The opening paragraphs of Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's article set the tone for the rest of the piece: they establish the high level of abstraction of the author's philosophical examination of language and time in the postcolonial – here, more specifically African – experience.

In the first section, Eze develops the idea that postcolonial African literature can be considered a process in which language is used as a means of "mending" time, that is, as a way of repairing traditions disrupted by colonisation. He contrasts this artistic approach, embodied in the works of Nigerian authors Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, with the discipline of history. Indeed, while historical science specialises in the recording of facts, creative writing endeavours to be a source of wisdom about the meaning of time. He then proceeds to uncover the specificity of Anglophone African literature by considering side by side the cases of Chinua Achebe and Jewish-Czech novelist Franz Kafka, neither of whom uses their mother tongue in their fiction. The distinctness of African writing, it is suggested, lies among other things in its national(istic) consciousness. The final part of the article – by far the most challenging for the reader – provides an analysis of the complex articulations between language, time and history in African literature, taking as a point of departure Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's book of essays *Decolonising the Mind*. In this section, Eze interrogates the reliability of language as a source of knowledge about the past, and further raises the paradox faced by writers and critics of African literature, whose task consists in decoding Africa's modern experience using frameworks that are largely influenced by colonial values dismissive of the continent's cultures. Having drawn attention to this

contradiction, the author concludes by arguing that the works of Ngugi and other African writers do not simply lament the disappearance of particular local traditions and languages, but are also expressions of loss in general and of the difficulty of transmitting individual and collective experience.

The complexity of Eze's essay at once reflects its strengths and its weaknesses. On the one hand, the article contains many insightful and sophisticated arguments but, on the other, its semantic density, syntactic convolution and poor editing render some of its passages all but inaccessible to literary critics with reasonable – but not expert – philosophical knowledge. Many researchers may eventually find the reading effort worthwhile, but those looking for an introduction to the questions of language and time in African literature will probably not find this piece suited to their purpose.