

**Annotation of Madelaine Hron's "Ora na-azu nwa: The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels", *Research in African Literatures* 39.2 (2008), pp. 27-48.**

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In this stimulating article, Madelaine Hron examines the figure of the child in the works of several young authors belonging to the so-called "third generation" of Nigerian writers. Focusing on three *Bildungsromane* – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) – Hron contends that the presence of child protagonists in Nigerian works of fiction is part and parcel of these books' narrative strategy, and that they should not be dismissed as children's literature, despite what some reviewers have suggested. The critic's main argument, outlined in her interesting introduction, instils new life into Homi Bhabha's slightly hackneyed concepts of hybridity and mimicry. According to Hron, childhood constitutes a "hybrid" space of possibility and resistance in which the young subject "mimics" adult behaviour to destabilising effect. This in-betweenness and ambivalence, she continues, allows Nigerian novelists to present their (mostly Western) audience with thought-provoking perspectives on complex issues such as multiculturalism and war.

Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry find more conventional applications in Hron's examination of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* – an analysis which does, however, contain original elements, such as the connection established between the trope of food and the young heroine's relationship with her violent father in the novel. The section devoted to Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* also discusses hybridity, most notably embodied in the book's Nigerian-English protagonist, and underlines how the writer explores her eight-year-old character's sense of cultural alienation through the introduction of paranormal elements and the theme of

mental illness. Finally, the analysis of Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* concentrates on the various ways in which the narrator, a child soldier, renders his traumatic experience in language. Based on her findings, the scholar concludes that the novels of "third-generation" authors – several of which, she notices, feature child protagonists and are set during the Nigerian civil war – might in future fruitfully be approached from the more global perspective of human rights.

Although one may occasionally disagree with Hron's readings of the novels (for example, when she describes some of the narrator's statements in *Purple Hibiscus* as "comic"), her essay deserves to be praised for its impressive scope and, above all, for its privileging of substance over jargon. Combining an accessible writing style with often astute textual observations, this article should hold interest to all concerned with Nigerian fiction, whether undergraduates or specialists in the field.