



## **2025 THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERATURE AND THE NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM: FINAL REPORT**

Submitted by the Panel of Judges

October 8, 2025

### **NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERATURE**

In April 2025, we were constituted as the panel of judges for the 2025 The Nigeria Prize for Literature and The Nigeria Prize for Literary criticism. Our primary mandate was to adjudicate the entries and determine a winner for the 2 Prizes in a transparent manner. Our judgments were solely based on excellence in the evaluation of the creativity, integrity of writing, vision, depth of thematic engagement, social relevance, and general contributions to literature.

Two hundred and fifty-two entries were received but were pruned to 149 after an initial sift that eliminated entries inconsistent with the basic requirements of quality, genre, and date of publication, among others.

Our first duty was to determine the top 50 novels. This was followed by the task of determining the top 25 and then the longlist of 11. The following 11 books made the longlist:

1. *Petrichor* by Ayo Oyeku
2. *Sanya* by Oyin Olugbile
3. *The Middle Daughter* by Chika Unigwe
4. *The Road to The Country* by Chigozie Obioma
5. *This Motherless Land* by Nikki May
6. *Water Baby* by Chioma Okereke
7. *When We Were Fire Flies* by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim
8. *Fine Dreams* by Linda Masi
9. *Leave My Bones in Saskatoon* by Michael Afenfia
10. *An Unusual Grief* by Yewande Omotoso



11. *New York My Village* by Uwem Akpan

After a thorough assessment process, we shortlisted the following three books:

- *The Road to the Country* by Chigozie Obioma
- *Sanya* by Oyin Olugbile
- *This Motherless Land* by Nikki May

### General Impressions and Observations

We were impressed by the quality of the shortlisted books written by three writers with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The books, all published in Nigeria by Masobe Publishers (*Sanya* and *The Road to the Country*) and Narrative Landscape (*This Motherless Land*), indicate an improvement in the quality of local publishing.

A few other general observations are worthy of note:

1. Two of the shortlisted books are authored by women, indicating gender diversity.
2. One of the books is a debut work of its author, while the other two writers are more established, indicating the diversity of writing experiences in the contest.
3. The three authors are Nigerians in the diaspora, indicating the increasing international appeal of the prize. As judges, we agreed that this does not indicate that home-based Nigerian writers are inferior in skill and competence. Indeed, a number of the initial submissions were by home-based writers which showed great skill and are good works.
4. Familial themes seem to be consistent across the three books, exploring complex relationships, conflicts and dynamic experiences within family units. This points to a cultural leaning observed in Nigerian society and among Nigerian writers, regardless of their location.

The following criteria were used to assess the shortlisted books:

| Criteria |                  | Description                                        | Score |
|----------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1        | Originality      | Unique presentation of perspectives and ideas      | 15    |
| 2        | Characterization | Character development (dynamic), use of character, | 15    |



|   |                          |                                                                                                                                                   |     |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
|   |                          | relevant, engaging, appropriate, practical, and consistent                                                                                        |     |
| 3 | Language                 | 1. Should be English language (American or British - spelling consistency)<br>2. Clarity and consistency of style<br>3. Free of grammatical error | 15  |
| 4 | Plot                     | Plot development, logicity of narrative techniques, suspense, readability, strong connection of subplots, clarity                                 | 15  |
| 5 | Theme                    | Identification and the projection of the central theme(s)<br>Tolerance of sub-theme(s)                                                            | 10  |
| 6 | Quality of production    | Quality of print, binding, flushing, pagination, graphics and general book production                                                             | 10  |
| 7 | Setting                  | The ability of the writer to establish a vivid description of the setting                                                                         | 10  |
| 8 | Socio-cultural relevance | Acceptability/connection to Nigeria                                                                                                               | 10  |
|   |                          |                                                                                                                                                   |     |
|   |                          |                                                                                                                                                   |     |
|   |                          |                                                                                                                                                   | 100 |

Based on the above criteria, each of the shortlisted books was scrutinised with a view to the minute details to separate the books that are undoubtedly brilliant works.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE SHORTLISTED BOOKS



### ***This Motherless Land* by Nikki May**

May's book is beautifully simple, both in style and plot. The author excels at evoking complex emotions, exploring human nature, and engaging the reader through the protagonists as they navigate life. Only those who have experienced the cultures of Nigeria and England can truly see the differences and similarities between them. May makes the reader feel and live the intersections of both cultures, as outstanding writers often do successfully.

*This Motherless Land* leaves the reader with the impression that May might be exploring decoloniality, which aims to delink eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. Decoloniality challenges the widely accepted universality of Western knowledge and the perceived superiority of Western culture. May's story draws one's attention to the impact of colonialism on societies and cultures and how power dynamics continue to shape relationships between colonisers and the colonised. In *This Motherless Land*, Funke, the protagonist, loses her British mother in a fatal car accident and is taken to Somerset, England, to live with her British aunt and family. There, she is subjected to extreme racism and raised in an environment where her talents, knowledge, and character not only surprise but also offend her British family. May skillfully describes a clash of cultures through a story that is thrilling and touching. The familial themes are strong in this novel. Funke's relationships with her Nigerian father, British cousin Liv, and other characters are complex and dynamic, ensuring the reader stays glued to the pages of the novel. This is a novel with warmth and vibrancy. Through a story that spans two decades, it examines identity, culture, race, love and dealing with a family's generational wrongs. With time, it may prove to be one of the most fascinating retellings and reframing of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* set partially in Nigeria.

**STRENGTHS:** *This Motherless Land's* simple plot is captivating, moving, and fun, making the novel a page-turner. The intersection of two cultures gives the book a potentially broad and global appeal. The story is moving and relatable. In its unique way, the author expertly crisscrosses Nigerian and British cultures while exploring identity and race, making it challenging to find a novel with a similar approach. This highlights the book's exceptional quality.

**WEAKNESS:** While its themes are compelling, its language engaging, and the story moving, compared to its competing shortlisted novels, the plot of *This Motherless Land* may be somewhat lacking in multi-layered, engaging subplots. There is also



evidence of overwriting, and some parts could have been removed to make for a more concise and less wordy literary work.

### ***The Road to The Country* by Chigozie Obioma**

This almost fantasy-like novel possesses compelling creativity that drives home a story set against the backdrop of Nigeria's devastating civil war. Chigozie Obioma mixes mysticism with traditional African folk tales to tell a relevant contemporary tale. The writing quality is impressive. The plot is intriguing. The protagonist, Kunle, a law student born to a Yoruba father and an Igbo mother, embarks on a dangerous journey to the Biafran War front to seek his missing, crippled brother. It would ultimately become a journey with far-reaching consequences. At the front, the young man is conscripted into the Biafran Army, has countless near-death experiences in bloody battles, falls in love with a complex fellow soldier and is transformed into a man through pain, grief, losses, resurrection and deep friendships. Kunle's entire story in Chigozie's book is the vision of a Seer who saw Kunle's life before he was born. The Seer's fascination with Kunle as an 'abiku (a word derived from Yoruba language. **"Abi"** (born) and **"Ku"** (to die), which translates to "born to die")' appears to be exploited by the author to introduce the reader to Yoruba mysticism, worldview and spirituality. Noteworthy is Obioma's unique retelling of the Biafran story, which features a young Yoruba man from Akure, Ondo State, fighting alongside the Biafrans. This is a lesser-known aspect of the Biafran War story.

**STRENGTHS:** Obioma's plot is unique and gripping. His angles are original for retelling stories. His descriptions of scenes and experiences are top-class.

**WEAKNESS:** Significant editorial failings that reflect in occasional capitalisation errors and over-telling of certain war front stories. We had the impression that *The Road to the Country* could have been many pages shorter.

### ***Sanya* by Oyin Olugbile**

Oyin Olugbile's *Sanya* is an enchanting piece of literary work in many regards, particularly in its unorthodox depiction of Yoruba mythology, fantasy, culture and spirituality. From a plot perspective, *Sanya* is dynamic and multi-layered.



In Yoruba mythology, Sango is an Orisa and a force of nature associated with a cult and a priesthood and referred to as the god of thunder, lightning, fire, virility, dance, and justice. The ancestral Sango was the fourth king of the town of Oyo who was described as powerful, with a voice like thunder and a mouth that spewed fire when he spoke. Oyin Olugbile's *Sanya* is a bold retelling of the Sango mythology and legend. In the book, *Sanya*, the protagonist, is cast as a female with Sango's gifts and characteristics. She had been prophesied before her birth to become a mighty warrior and leader whose life would have an unprecedented impact on her world. Still, those who received the prophecy – Ajoke and Aganju, her parents – never imagined the foretold warrior king would be a girl. Olugbile then adds a spin to the *Sanya* story with a major character who would later determine the destiny of *Sanya*: her brother, Dada. Dada is born physically weak but with high intelligence and the gift of seeing into the future. In a world of Orisas, gods, and sorcerers, Olugbile's familial theme is manifested in the plots and subplots that take the reader along the life paths walked by these siblings, paths that lead them to a heartbreaking end.

**STRENGTHS:** Olugbile's mythology retelling approach is distinct and daring for casting Sango as a female and for the projection of Yoruba mythology through a story that captivates and meanders into a fantastical world. Olugbile achieves this through lucid and straightforward language, making for easy reading.

**WEAKNESS:** Editorial errors were observed in the novel, and certain narratives seemed oversimplified. Compared to the other competing shortlisted books, *Sanya* has a more mono-cultural focus that could limit its readership.

## **VERDICT**

After much careful assessments and deliberations, we concluded that very little separates the novels and each is a potential winner of the award. However, Oyin Olugbile's *Sanya* slightly takes the edge and is therefore our pick as the winner of the 2025 The Nigeria Prize for Literature.

## **2025 NIGERIA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM**



The initial entries for the Nigerian Prize for Literary Criticism were 34 but unfortunately most of them were either out of line with some of the basic requirements for entries or of poor quality. It is our opinion that the number of qualitative entries for this competition does not provide for a keen contest and is likely below what is possible. This raises questions about how much literary critics engage the prize in Nigeria.

From the initial submissions, we eventually shortlisted four entries having been satisfied with their quality and alignment with submission criteria. The four entries are below:

| S/N | Name                               | Titles of Submissions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | <b>Ekikereobong Aniekean Usoro</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Supernatural and Igbo Cosmology in Chigozie Obioma's An Orchestra of Minorities.</li> <li>- Contextualising Male Privileging in Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia's Son Of The House Within The African Weltanschauung.</li> <li>- All Art is Propaganda': The Politics of Gender (Mis)Representation in Kuku's and Ugonna's Dialogic Narratives</li> </ul> |
| 2   | <b>Okwudiri Anasiudu</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Afropolitan Identity And Afrodiasporic Otherness In Selected African Novels 2024.</li> <li>- Allegorical Conjectures in Helon Habila's Measuring Time 2025</li> <li>- Mimetic designs in Helon Habila's Oil on Water 2024</li> </ul>                                                                                                                       |
| 3   | <b>Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'A son who is a man:' receptive masculinity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart 2021.</li> <li>- "I choose life": Negation, Agency, and Utopian hope in Tayeb Salih's season of migration to the north 2022.</li> <li>- "Omelora": Orthodox and Disciplinary Masculinities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus 2022</li> </ul>                  |



|   |            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | Onyeka Ike | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contextualizing The Perspectives Of War In Flora Nwapa's Never Again And Chimamanda Adichie's Half Of A Yellow Sun 2021.</li> <li>- Interrogating Enfeebling Syndrome: Corruption And Abuse Of Public Office In Chimamanda Adichie's Trilogy.</li> <li>- Old Wine In A New Wineskin: Achebe's Okonwo A Character Archetype Of Adichie's Eugene Achike 2024</li> </ul> |
|---|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Criteria and Evaluation

The following evaluation criteria / scores were used to assess the entries:

| S/N | Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Score |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1   | Depth of analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15    |
| 2   | Language –<br>a. Appropriate use of technical terms and concepts<br>b. Clear and consistent style, free of grammatical error                                                                                           | 15    |
| 3   | Originality of thought – new/additional interpretation                                                                                                                                                                 | 15    |
| 4   | Literature review                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15    |
| 5   | Methodology                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 10    |
| 6   | Application of relevant theory                                                                                                                                                                                         | 15    |
| 7   | Publication in reputable journal – Local (University/Research/Research Institute/Learned Association)/international journals with an online version with peer review, editorial board and international advisory board | 15    |
|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 100   |



## Summaries and Conclusion

Having assessed the shortlisted entries, we deemed the overall entries of **Okwudiri Anasiudu** as the most outstanding especially with regards to the relevance of his topics, his originality, his use of theoretical frameworks, his application of appropriate methodologies and the quality of his conclusions.

Below is brief synopsis of his submitted papers:

### 1. **Afropolitan Identity and Afrodiasporic Otherness in Selected African Novels (2024)**

This is a study of the selected novels on the new Africa Diaspora. It sheds light of the Afropolitan identity and the rhetorics of Afrodiasporic otherness in a cultural contact situation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana*, Helon Habila's *Travellers*, and Yaa Gyasi's *Home Going*, Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.*, Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and *Taiye Selasi's Ghana Must Go*. Based on the theory of Critical Afropolitanism, the study calls attention to the hostile Afro-diasporic encounters, the peculiarities of existence, and the host communities' strategies to stifle the Afropolitan attempts at cultural negotiation, acculturation and belonging in the new diaspora.

### 2. **Allegorical Conjectures in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2025)**

This study is based on the concept of allegory is used by the writer to explore universal themes. Three allegorical conjectures were mapped out of Habila's *Measuring Time*: unmasking and subversion, departure/return and war, and counter discursivity.

### 3. **Mimetic designs in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2024)**

This paper focused on the factual reality of the Niger Delta region in the context of Habila's depictions. It argues that what is perceived as plausibility in the representation of reality in the selected novel is instead a stimulated appearance of reality suggested by the authors aesthetic choices. This is demonstrated with insights from the principle of mimesis accounting for aesthetic choices of metafictionality, the animist worldview, and metaphors.



### **The Judges**

- Dr. Saeedat Aliyu (Chairman)
- Professor Mbanefo Ogene
- Mr. Olakunle Kasumu