

Kiswahili Poetic Aesthetics: From the General Identities to the African Prodigy

Nabea, Wendo; Ngugi, Pamela, *Journal of Literary Studies*, 28:2, 83-98, 2012

This article assesses the evolving Kiswahili poetry aesthetics and argues that the art is an African prodigy. It evaluates the arguments of both the conservatives and the liberals in the debate and asserts that the identities which the two camps tend to front are tenuous considering that they straddle the general and the specific. Based on the constructionist theory, the article analyses the standpoints of the conservatives and the liberals in the debate and contends that they reveal three subsets of identities: the Swahili, the Africans and the universal. The article unearths the various methods that have been employed to ascribe Kiswahili poetry to such identities and argues that they mainly derive from some generalised and unstable postulations – facets such as historical epochs, orality and literacy, geography, language, literature, social class, religion and gender. By referring to the same facets, while also taking into account Kiswahili's poetry medium of dissemination, its authors and consumers, functionality, aesthetics and locality, the article asserts that the art is after all an African genius.