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LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND THE ARTS

Charles Novia. *Nollywood till November: Memoirs of a Nollywood Insider*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2012. 152 pp. \$23.99. Cloth. \$14.95. Paper.

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African Studies Review / Volume 56 / Issue 01 / April 2013, pp 205 - 206

DOI: 10.1017/asr.2013.28, Published online: 20 May 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0002020613000280

How to cite this article:

Jonathan Haynes (2013). African Studies Review, 56, pp 205-206 doi:10.1017/asr.2013.28

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Africa is most often rendered either in the abstract, acontextual language of “DALYs” (disability-adjusted life years) or trite, depoliticized narratives of scientific heroism. Instead of—or at least in addition to—these vehicles, students and practitioners of global health should be reading *Improvising Medicine*, in which African cancer is made visible and the clinical science of oncology is never divorced from the moral labor and political conditions of care.

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doi:10.1017/S0002020613000279

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Charles Novia. *Nollywood till November: Memoirs of a Nollywood Insider*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2012. 152 pp. \$23.99. Cloth. \$14.95. Paper.

Novia’s title is a bit obscure (November is the name of his production company), but his subtitle is not: this is a valuable insider’s account of the Nigerian film industry by an important writer/director/producer. Novia chronicles his movie-making career from his first film in 2000 until 2007, with accounts—not exhaustive, but lively—of the major events in the history of Nollywood during this period, which he either witnessed first hand or participated in: the attempt to form a cooperative of independent producers as an alternative to the stranglehold of the notorious Idumota marketers, the large Nollywood delegation that came to the U.S. as part of an attempt to organize the American market, the “marketers’ strike,” the actors’ ban, and “Project Nollywood,” the first important experiment in investment in Nollywood by a formal capitalist organization (EcoBank). Toward the end of the book Novia comments on the major current development in Nollywood, which he calls “neo-Nollywood”: films made to be screened in the new multiplex cinemas being built in upscale shopping malls.

Novia was a child actor on television in Benin City, got a degree in dramatic arts from the University of Nigeria-Nsukka, and spent four years in training at the Nigeria Television Authority before entering Nollywood. His youthful formal academic experience and association with the legitimate stage are central to his sense of his own identity and always inform how he sees the artistic and commercial scene that he has come to dominate.

He is undoubtedly a film auteur: his movies are completely his own from the moment of conception (“my muse hit me,” is the phrase he typically uses) to the point that he hands them over to a marketer. He brands each film as “A Charles Novia Think,” and he himself has the air of an intellectual, bespectacled and often visibly cogitating. But his position within the world of Nigerian performing arts is not on the border between Nollywood and the large community of Nigerian intellectuals—he does not care what

they think or share their attitudes and posture. (That border is singularly underpopulated.) He is in the center of Nollywood culture, noted for his romantic comedies, romantic dramas, and Christian films; his films occasionally are remakes of Hollywood films or appear to be so because his imagination runs in the same directions.

Like other Nollywood independent producer/directors he is indignant about his enforced relationship with the marketers who largely control the industry, whom he brands as “stark illiterates” (8). But the Nollywood mode of production—cheap and very fast—which is the consequence of a market structured by piracy and overproduction is not a problem for Novia. In fact, it seems congenial. His muse is always “hitting” him and he has enormous facility in realizing his visions, shooting a movie a month while he produces new scripts. His talents are the exemplary Nollywood talents; the whole system is in sync with him; and so his imagination flows onto the screen in a rapid series of productions that have brought him money and fame.

His book has the same rapid character: it is a breezy, pleasant read, full of exclamation marks, the prose unlabored and apparently not revised with much care. Toward the end the book turns into a jumble of reflections and autobiographical fragments Novia posted on Facebook around the occasion of his fortieth birthday.

This memoir also reflects Nollywood values in the amount of time it spends discussing actors and casting decisions. Novia is always very conscious of where actors are in their careers and of what he is doing for them. Often he uses them in more than one film; his own career is linked with those of Norbert Young, Stella Damasus Aboderin, Segun Arinze, Kate Henshaw Nuttal, Desmond Elliott, and Grace Amah. The stars come out! Fans will enjoy the glimpses of Ramsey Nouah, Omotola, RMD, Genevieve, and the rest. By principle and disposition Novia is far from being a gossip, but the actors blend into his social life in Surulere, the Lagos neighborhood to which he found he had to move when he entered the film business because that is where the independent producers and directors are concentrated. Much of the considerable interest of his book springs from his location in the midst of this bubbling creative community.

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doi:10.1017/S0002020613000280

Alex Perullo. *Live from Dar es Salaam: Popular Music and Tanzania's Music Economy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011. African Expressive Cultures Series. xxxii + 459 pp. Map. Photographs. Appendixes. Notes. References. Discography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. \$27.95. Paper.

A number of studies of contemporary music of Tanzania focus on a single music genre such as taarab, hip-hop, church choir music, or gospel music.