

Completing the Cycle: Stage to Page to Stage

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This presentation will engage the contemporary bridging of the divide between print / written literature and performed literature (orature), that increases the sharing of old and new works between audiences “traditionally” separated by access to one or the other of these two forms.

The term “orature” originally was coined by Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu as an alternative to “oral literature,” following the re-Africanisation of the curriculum that saw a shift in focus and the emphasis on African concerns, modes of discourse and content in the African academy in the sixties and seventies. While the term “orature” is primarily associated with the study of Literature, related scholarship in other disciplines (for example in oral tradition in History) has emphasised its importance in a number of other disciplines. Orature has since been re-conceptualized, with a shift in emphasis from articulated words as a defining characteristic to the idea of an interdisciplinary aesthetic system weaving together numerous genres in the performance of a concept. Much of the initial focus on studies in orature in the past century has been on the past. I will concentrate on new forms of orature emerging within the present, and argue the continuation of a long standing tradition that has emphasised the coexistence of both written /print discourse and performed discourse, side by side as complementary manifestations of text. I further argue that African canonical works must necessarily embrace this dual existence so that they may engage diverse audiences whose access may be limited to particular modes of discourse.