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REFERENCES

Claire DUCOURNAU. — *La fabrique des classiques africains : Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne (1960-2012)*. Paris, CNRS Éditions (« Culture et société »), 2017, 442 p., index.

- 1 Largely sourced from her 2012 EHESS doctoral thesis, Claire Ducournau's *La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone* is a well-researched socio-literary inquiry into the structural conditions that shape the production, reception, and legitimation of sub-Saharan African artistic creations of French expression. While the study's underlying anti-hegemonic and postcolonial temper pits it against the institutionalized, largely Paris-centric, modes and norms of according visibility and recognition to such subaltern texts, it rigorously interrogates these material and deterministic social forces by means of a mixed research approach deploying, to good effect, quantitative and qualitative instruments: statistics, interviews, and documentary analysis.
- 2 The inquiry commences with the circumstances surrounding the change of the original title of Tierno Monénembo's narrative, *Les crapauds*, to *Les crapauds-brousse* (1979) to satisfy the exoticizing designs and metropolitan imperatives of a major Paris-based publishing house, Le Seuil, without the consent of the author. The transformation and subsequent promotion of *Les crapauds-brousse* into an "African classic" reflect the (neo-) colonial politics of publication, commercialization, and recognition that marginalizes literary productions from sub-Saharan Francophone Africa. The god-fatherly and vertical relationship between Le Seuil and Monénembo sets the tone for this sociological and literary inquiry that seeks to establish that Francophone African

classic as a function of “literary and transnational patrimonialization” (p. 12). Of particular significance then is Ducournau’s choice, as the epigraph of the entire book, of an excerpt from Monénembo’s 1998 interview with Françoise Cevaër on the preponderant role of the contemporary publisher as the promoter of books and the molder of literature.

- 3 The other paratextual element of interest is the title as its operative word, “fabrique,” portends the material sociological conditions that overarch the publication and labelling of the African magnum opus in the Francophone world. The use and privileged position of the word in the title serve to conjure and foreground negative connotations and invocations of commodification and deception, patronage and cliquish sacerdotal manipulation. The conjoined expression *la fabrique des classiques africains* allows for the configuration of the overwhelming social and market drivers that determine the fortunes of African literary works.
- 4 As the social history of Francophone African letters, Ducournau’s study necessarily explores the intricate and sometimes asymmetrical relationship between two key players in the publication chain: cultural intermediaries (publishers, critics, journalists, literary agents, sponsors of awards) and writers. To this end, she resorts to a statistical analysis of collective and individual biographies of 404 sub-Saharan Francophone African writers active between 1983 and 2008, with particular focus on 151 of them; multi-sited and longitudinal ethnographic analysis of interviews conducted between 2006 and 2016, involving 80 anonymized respondents; an engagement with various texts, archives, and literary works.
- 5 The study has three major components, a prologue (pp. 31-83), Part One (pp. 85-254), and Part Two (pp. 255-392), framed with an introduction, a conclusion, appendices and index of names (but not of concepts or institutions).
- 6 The prologue is dedicated to the polemical literary manifesto, “Pour une littérature-monde en français,” signed by 45 French-speaking authors and published in March 2007. Inspired by the English model, World Literature, and Goethe’s *Weltliteratur*, the signatories sought to replace the term Francophone Literature with World Literature in French, on account of the latter’s perceived intrinsic colonial properties, its ghettoization of literary works from Africa vis-à-vis those from the French center, and its suppression of borderless creativity. If the proponents of the manifesto were two French writers, Jean Rouad and Michel Le Bris (who first coined the neologism at the 1992 artistic festival, Étonnants Voyageurs), the anti-Establishment credo also had signatories such as Maryse Condé, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Koffi Kwahulé, Ananda Devi, Abdourahman Ali Waberi, and Alain Mabanckou, all of whom had had cause to complain about the confinement of their writings to the periphery. Transcontinental and transnational in character, not just by reason of its Anglo-German inspiration but also on account of its Bamako affiliation and the geo-cultural diversity of its signatories (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and North America), the manifesto, in consequence of its anti-imperialist posture, assumes a postcolonial tenor. However, as the “hidden texts” of anonymized Malian respondents stress, far from being inclusive, the construct of “littérature-monde” is skewed, in its practice and application, in favor of metropolitan France (French-based key players, intrusive influence of the Paris-based publishing house, Gallimard, French canons and precepts), to the detriment of endogenous writings, expectations, and norms emanating from the margins. While Ducournau’s inquiry appears to distance itself from the manifesto, insofar as she

strategically positions the 52-page section, after the introduction, not as a separate part but as the subtending prelude to the two parts, it can be argued that the study shares in the vision of the signatories of the manifesto regarding the stigmatization of Francophone African Literature and the imperative of its rehabilitation, de-provincialization, and mainstreaming. To that extent, the manifesto becomes the implied larger manifestation, the thesis statement that amplifies the book's overarching axiological goal of the revalorization of African Literature.

- 7 Part One focuses on the mechanisms and modes of recognition of Francophone African writers since 1960, the landmark year in which most of their countries of origin gained independence. To the general trend of increased publication of African creative works in France is added the proliferation of publishing houses in Africa, with Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Mali, and Senegal cited as illustrative of this development. Léopold Sédar Senghor's remarkable cooption as a member of the French Academy in 1983 remains unique to date as no other writer from sub-Saharan Africa has, since that epoch-making moment, been accorded such honor. If, in consequence of Senghor's consecration as one of the 40 Immortals his literary works were marketed, taught, offered as test pieces, and rendered more visible in the French socio-cultural space, it also, directly or indirectly, influenced the proliferation of publishing houses, such as Sepia and Dapper, with special interest in Africa.
- 8 Beyond the role of publishing houses in the legitimation of Francophone African works, Ducournau's study highlights the contribution of literary awards to the recognition and canonization of such creations. Of particular importance, in this regard, is the French-based Association des écrivains de langue française (ADELF). Initially known at as the Société des romanciers et auteurs coloniaux français (SRACF) instituted in 1924, it eventually metamorphosized into ADELFF in 1971. One of its earlier avatars, Association des écrivains de la mer et de l'outre-mer, started awarding annually the Grand Prix littéraire d'Afrique noire to post-independence Francophone sub-Saharan African writers, but never shed off its assimilationist and metropolitan reflexes even when it morphed into ADELFF under the leadership of the famous Africanist, Robert Cornevin, known for his insistence on the positive projection, in a Francophone creation, of the French language as universal and worthy of praise (pp. 188-189).
- 9 Co-existing with ADELFF's Grand Prix littéraire d'Afrique noire are other literary award schemes, such as those of prix Tropiques, Radio France Internationale (RFI), Elle, Inter, Goncourt des lycéens, and prix Léopold Sédar Senghor, all based in Paris. Whereas mention is made of other prizes not hosted by the French capital (prix Sony Labou Tansi, Limoges, France; prix Ahmadou Kourouma, Geneva, Switzerland; prix des cinq continents de la Francophonie, Bayreuth, Germany), such is the author's interest in Europe-centered prizes, that she devotes only one short paragraph to awards based in Francophone Africa and neglects to name even one of them or any of their prize winners. This lopsidedness apart, Ducournau's one-paragraph invocation of the Noma award (1979-2009), instituted by Shoichi Noma but linked also to the Paris-based UNESCO, provides useful insights into the shortcomings of the ADELFF scheme given the latter's unique focus on African-published books, receptiveness to African languages, choice of worthy jurists, recognition of deserving authors ignored by Cornevin's project.
- 10 Ducournau next focuses her inquiry on two eminent Parisian literary journals, *Le magazine littéraire* and *La quinzaine littéraire*, which, since their establishment in 1966,

have elected to virtually ignore works by sub-Saharan Francophone African wordsmiths. Between 1966 and 2006, *Le magazine littéraire*, for example, dedicated only one of its special issues collectively to Africa (“L’Afrique noire d’expression française”), and that was in May 1983, the very year Senghor was admitted into the French Academy. This neglect becomes all the more puzzling as non-French writers had had the honor of being frequently featured in the same periodical: German (19 times), American (15 times), Russian (9 times), British (8 times), Italian (6 times), Latin American (6 times), Spanish (4 times). Ducournau further observes that if *Le magazine littéraire* has, over the same forty-year period, dedicated special issues to Jean-Paul Sartre, Sigmund Freud, and Marguerite Duras seven, four and three times respectively, no Black writer (whether from Africa, the Americas, France, or elsewhere) has ever been the subject of any such issue. During the period under review, the number of pages of the journal that make any reference to African Literature does not cumulatively go beyond 0.4 %. The same trend of invisibility and racial discrimination vis-à-vis African writers, Ducournau notes, is discernible in the publication record of *La quinzaine littéraire*.

- 11 If the first part was on cultural agents, the concentration in the second part of the study is on the trajectory of writers. By means of variables such as writers’ entry to the literary scene, dominant literary figures, and defining moments, Ducournau identifies four generations of Francophone African writers:
- 12 1945-1968: Ahmadou Kourouma and Yambo Ouologuem
1969-1979: Sony Labou Tansi, Mariama Bâ, and Tierno Monémbo
1980-1986: Ken Bugul, Boris Diop, and Véronique Tadjou
1987-2016: Calixthe Beyala, Patrice Nganang, and Alain Mabanckou
- 13 The sources of data collected are principally colonial, public and private archives, press releases, university documentary sources and references, databases, and virtual libraries such as Weblitaf, BnF, UNESCO’s *Index Translationum* and Sudoc (p. 262). Discernible in the prosopography are recurrent patterns, differences between and within cohorts as well as areas of convergence and divergence.
- 14 The author’s focus on the collective profiles of writers and how they attain or lose literary recognition does not preclude an interest in the impact of the new media (television and Internet) on the individual trajectories of a trio of Western-based high profile African writers: Calixthe Beyala, Alain Mabanckou, and Fatou Diome. Far from being demoralized by the countless accusations of plagiarism levelled against her, Beyala has rather leveraged them as well as her many televised interviews, presentation of radio/television programs, aggressive participation in mediatized debates, her duels with prominent media figures, and her website to ensure her phenomenal rise to fame: professional status as a writer; literary awards from ADEL, French Academy, Agence française de développement, UNICEF; knighthood (Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur) by presidential decree in 2010. Similarly, the “peopolization” (p. 359) of the press and modern communication tools via the adept construction of weblogs, highly mediatized interviews, active participation in the media space as producer of TV and radio programs, social media, YouTube, meetings with readers, and well-organized marketing is at the heart of Mabanckou’s meteoric rise to literary stardom. To these factors should be added his weekly contribution to the ubiquitous journal *Jeune Afrique*, his work as a university professor (therefore, literary critic, purveyor of knowledge, molder of opinion, etc.) in an American university, and his

constant nomadic literary experimentations. In addition to awards from ADEL, Renaudot, French Academy, Principality of Monaco, and RFO de la Francophonie, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was named a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur by France in 2010, and invited by the prestigious Collège de France to chair artistic creation for the 2015-2016 academic year. Similar media visibility and mobility explain the success story of Diome, another Franco-African writer, as a literary celebrity, her initial migration and integration difficulties in France notwithstanding. Clearly then, Part Two of the study shows how various writers, either collectively or individually, respond, successfully or unsuccessfully, to the limitations, resources, and challenges inherent to their milieus and era. Self-assertive and self-advertising, three Afropean writers, Beyala, Mabanckou, and Diome, in particular, have strategically positioned themselves and their writings, to derive maximum benefits from social forces and market determinants, and this, despite inevitable constraints.

- 15 Without a doubt, Ducournau's *La fabrique des classiques africains: Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone* is a richly documented social history, which will be appreciated by most students of African letters. It is hoped that the revised edition will ensure the correction and deletion of misprints, wrong percentages, and erroneous labelling¹.
- 16 The subtitle, *Écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone*, may suggest a sequel on, for example sub-Saharan African Anglophone writers (to whom much reference is made in the current study), as a challenge to other researchers to take up or as a future project to be undertaken by the author herself, with the possibility of a composite synthesis on Europhone African writers, involving Lusophone and Hispanophone classics as well.

NOTES

1. Typos (p. 360: entre; p. 376: Caine Prize); wrong percentages (p. 375: 28 % +73 %; p. 387: 65 % +34 %; p. 93: the addition of 1990 [Column 2] % figures is 101 % [instead of 100 %]; p. 280: the addition of the Frequency [Column 2] % is 99 % [instead of 100 %]); Table of contents (p. 440: Chapter 3 is labelled Chapter 4).