

PUBLISHING AFRICA IN FRENCH: LITERARY INSTITUTIONS AND DECOLONISATION 1945–1967 BY RUTH BUSH

Publishing Africa in French: Literary Institutions and Decolonisation 1945–1967, Ruth Bush. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. £80.00. ISBN: 9781781381953.

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What was the nature of African publishing in the post-war decades of decolonisation in France? Ruth Bush's volume provides a thorough answer to this question by examining the literary structures which promoted and mediated Francophone African literature between the years 1945–1967. In her introduction, the author notes a series of issues related to authorial authenticity, literary value, and autonomy, and while investigating their impact on the publication of African literature in France, Bush suggests that the history of this process helps elucidate wider shifts in the French literary imaginary. The originality of Bush's volume lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between African literature in French and the material history of its publication. Bush notes her book is both 'a contribution to the cultural history of France in the post-war period' and 'a critical analysis of the global dynamics of French and African literary history' (4). This two-fold aim situates the volume in a third-space—often neglected by critical writing—in which African texts are read in relation to the context of their publication, a process that is marked by the emergence of anticolonial movements and the institutionalisation of the notion of 'francophonie' in post-war France.

In her introduction, Bush also explains that her book takes an archival approach to the study of Francophone African literature and, to this end, she brings together a wide range of primary sources, including bibliographies, library catalogues, readers' reports, translations, and correspondence from the publishing field. Working against the 'disciplinary reluctance to engage intellectually with the material aspects of physical books' (14), Bush uses the theory of book history to pinpoint how notions of opposition and resistance are grounded in, and shaped by, the structures of publishing, and the relationships between writers, publishers, and readers.

The book investigates two distinct areas of African literature in French: 'Institutions' and 'Mediations'. It begins by examining the anthologies and collections of the 1940s which served as 'proto-manifestos for literature in French from beyond metropolitan borders' (31). Bush shows that these publications, shaped by connections and struggles in the literary field, delivered ambivalent and often paradoxical calls for (trans)national responsibility within the Union Française and wider African autonomy. By looking at prefaces, editorial exchange and correspondence, Bush reveals the tension between transnational connections of African literature emerging from distant territories and racial particularism associated with the *Négritude* movement. This tension eventually entails an ambivalence regarding the way African literature is perceived and understood at this time by metropolitan readership. Bush then considers the creation of *Présence Africaine*, a journal and publishing house founded by Senegalese writer and editor Alioune Diop in 1947. Her reading of *Présence Africaine*'s publishing catalogue in the 1950s reveals a blend of political and cultural aims, and highlights the ability of the publishing house to adapt to the changing context within the field. This is fruitfully contrasted with the experience of similar *éditeurs engagés* (including Minuit, Maspero, and the Heinemann African Writers Series), which allows the reader to grasp the specificity of the publisher as a unique yet connected hub for critical reflection on issues pertaining to the African continent. A subsequent examination of the main literary prizes specific to post-war African writing in French awarded by the ANEMOM (Association

Nationale des Ecrivains de la Mer et de l'Outre-Mer) argues that this institution 'sought to preserve certain aspects of France's colonial imaginary' (93). Bush notes that the association maintained overseas writing at a distance from the metropole and displayed 'an incipient colonial nostalgia' (110) among its metropolitan readership. The ambivalence of ANEMOM, however, lies in its dual role as a vehicle that strengthened the cultural hegemony of the centre, and promoted new voices and transnational contacts in Africa.

Bush then examines notions of authenticity and authorship in the volume's second part. She argues that, in the early post-war period, publishers played a fundamental role in shaping literary representations and understandings of 'African authorial subjectivity' (118). By focusing on the case of two novels—Christine Garnier's *Va-t'en avec les tiens!* (1951) and Abdoulaye Sadij's *Maïmouna* (1952/1958)—Bush shows how African authorship was the object of unstable and contrasting constructions, which were denounced in Mongo Beti's 1955 essay 'Afrique noire, littérature rose'. The publication process of both novels suggests that authorial authenticity was shaped by the political and ideological position of readers, which uncovers a quest for institutional legitimacy. This is followed by an investigation into the post-1960 publishing history of Francophone African fiction. Bush focuses on the way African novels challenged generic and linguistic norms but were 'only gradually and unevenly accepted by metropolitan publishers' (149). Drawing on readers' reports and editorial correspondence from publishers' archives, she discusses the mediation of style and content with the aim of resituating fiction in the wider context of publishing. Here again, the chapter focuses on the trajectory of two novels—Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961) and Malick Fall's forgotten work *La Plaie* (1967)—showing how editors at Le Seuil, driven by preconceived narrative and stylistic expectations of African novels, sought to revise both manuscripts and redirect the writers towards what constitute 'normative definitions of literary value and legitimacy' (151). In her reading of Fall's novel, Bush admits however that 'without manuscripts, it is difficult to assess how far the editors' comments altered the published text' (172). This lack of complete and fully reliable archival sources does not hinder the overall project but rather points to the necessity of shifting the perspective by combining material investigation and historical account with close-reading and textual analysis, which Bush does intermittently throughout the volume. Bush finally explores the role of translation in mediating African literature during the period of decolonisation. Following on from previous sections, the author's argument hinges on the idea that translation also depends 'on material conditions, shaped by the prestige of the translated author and, at times, the translator' (182). By discussing the trajectories of three novels published in the 1950s and translated from English into French—Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Abrahams' *A Wreath for Udomo*—Bush shows how the translator (respectively Raymond Queneau, Michel Ligny, Pierre Singer) works as a literary and cultural mediator whose name and visibility affects the text's reception. It could be argued in these two final sections that notions of literary value, authorial subjectivity, and authenticity need to be corroborated by, and foregrounded in, the works themselves, with the risk of the historical and material approach obfuscating the 'literariness' of the texts. In this respect, the understandable choice to focus on few texts presents the impossibility of extrapolating any specific conclusions to frame a generalised view on African publishing. A case in point is that North African literature is completely dismissed in a volume entitled *Publishing Africa in French*, although more specific references to 'Sub-Saharan Africa' are used irregularly throughout the volume.

Overall, Bush's book is a valuable contribution to the history of publishing African literature in France and beyond, a field that has received little attention. The author's active engagement with often-neglected editorial material, and her efforts to uncover the hidden relationships between publishers, writers, and other mediators, eventually help 'restore an

informed historical awareness of the material conditions' (26) faced by African writers in France. Bush not only sheds light on a crucial period in the publication of African writings in France, but also invites readers to consider the complex historical context and material conditions faced by African writers in the era of decolonisation. Moreover, Bush revives a sense of socio-historical investigation and invites readings of some less-known or forgotten texts. In doing so, *Publishing Africa in French* provides new perspectives for the study of African literature beyond the Francophone context, and paves the way for scholarship to engage with other lines of research, such as the history of literary reception and the material conditions of educational publishing. More importantly, the volume provides a valuable toolkit for scholars working on Francophone African literature who seek to enlarge, nuance, or counterbalance their understandings of literary texts.