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Ruth Bush. *Publishing Africa in French: Literary Institutions and Decolonization 1945-1967*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. xi + 224 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, appendices, and index. \$120.00 (hb.) ISBN 9781781381953.

Review by Tobias Warner, University of California, Davis.

In 1946, Paul Flammand, the director of Editions du Seuil, was hoping to publish Léopold Sédar Senghor's second collection of poetry, *Hosties noires*. But Flammand had to overcome a problem facing much of the postwar publishing industry in France: a shortage of paper. Flammand successfully appealed to the French colonial ministry for support by inviting the minister to see the publication of Senghor's poems as a "témoignage des résultats de la culture française diffusée parmi les Indigènes" (p. 1). This negotiation around the publication of Senghor's poems opens Ruth Bush's engaging study *Publishing African Literature in French: Literary Institutions and Decolonization 1945-67*. The story illustrates the complex and often unremarked forms of maneuvering that composed the backdrop of the emergence of a field of African writing of French expression in the years immediately before and after decolonization. By putting francophone literary texts in dialogue with the "material history" of their publication and reception, Bush pulls back the curtain on these decades to explore the construction and contestation of understandings of African literature during this important period. Across the book's six chapters, Bush carefully explores how a variety of literary institutions and mediators exerted an undeniable influence on the fabric of literary works, while unpacking the ways in which literary texts accommodated or resisted such forces.

Part one focuses on literary institutions. Chapter one explores the publication and reception histories of two early anthologies of African writing in French, edited by Léon Damas and Léopold Senghor, respectively, to explore why the latter went on to become a touchstone for the field. Chapter two examines the rise of *Présence Africaine* as a publishing house through a careful, empirical study of its catalogue—a very welcome supplement to the many homages made to this culturally and politically important institution. Chapter three investigates prize culture in the form of the Grand prix d'Afrique noire awarded by the Association nationale des écrivains de la mer et de l'outre-mer (ANEMOM). This was the main literary prize awarded to African writing in French in the post-war decades. As Bush shows, ANEMOM had deep roots in the colonial period and for decades played a significant role in consecrating African literary works in French.

Part two attends to traces of the agency of "literary mediators" on literary works: these figures include editors, *passseurs*, translators, printers and booksellers. Chapter four is a patient study of

how French publishers packaged literary representations of Africa in the era of decolonization, concentrating on Christine Garnier's *Va-t'en avec les tiens* and Abdoulaye Sadjì's *Maimouna*. Chapter five offers a fascinating analysis of the interplay between publishers and literary texts around normative constructions of literary value. The examples here are two Senegalese novels that were rejected by Le Seuil: Cheikh Hamidou Kane's widely-read *L'Aventure ambiguë* and Malick Fall's relatively under-studied *La Plaie*. Chapter six examines the divergent trajectories of French translations of three anglophone African literary works: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Peter Abraham's *A Wreath for Udomo*. The book also features useful appendices that help complete the picture of post-war publishing traced in the individual chapters.

Specialists of francophone postcolonial studies will appreciate Bush's fresh take on a well-studied era. A major point of interest will be the book's exploration of underexamined archives as well as its readings of literary works that have fallen outside the canon. Key resources in this respect are publishers' archives--at the Institut mémoire de l'édition contemporaine as well as the archives of *Présence Africaine*--where Bush examined editorial correspondence, confidential readers' reports, and publishers' requests for revision. This research allows Bush to offer a remarkable behind-the-scenes look at the emergence of African literature in French. Her analysis, both textual and archival, is nimble and insightful, building up its claims in a manner that is thorough but never plodding.

Scholars of twentieth-century literature in French will also find much to discuss in Bush's claim that the rise of francophone African literature both confirms and complicates Pascale Casanova's influential account of Parisian hegemony in world literary space. Bush argues that a closer focus on the interaction between African writers and Parisian literary institutions and mediators "provincializes" Paris (p. 210) to an extent and points the way toward a more "variegated and porous" picture of the city's place in the world republic of letters (pp. 218-19). This line of argument also leads Bush to call into question the very possibility of a clear distinction between French and African literature in this period--after an examination of the "institutional underpinnings" (p. 219) and "material circumstances" of textual production in this era, such a neat binary becomes impossible to sustain (p. 214).

Literary scholars of any background will admire this book for its methodological range. Bush tacks often between various approaches, notably postcolonial studies on the one hand and book history and the sociology of a literary field on the other. The motives behind this fluctuating analytic posture are helpfully spelled out in both the introduction and conclusion: Bush aims to explore how aspects of literary culture, including "language, authorship and literary craft" are bound up with the "material aspects of book production and reception" (p. 26). The methodological diversity of this study is described as an effort to "balance scale with attention to detail, to link quantitative scope to qualitative analysis" (p. 217). The use of archival and sociological approaches is also intended to correct what Bush describes as the "paralysis" of postcolonial criticism (p. 9). According to Bush, postcolonial critical projects that are too dependent on close textual analysis can become overly concerned with identifying and asserting forms of authorial agency that are presumed to be highly transparent. Bush suggests this may lead both to a certain amount of critical overconfidence as well as inattention to the many ways in which literary phenomena are mediated in and through literary institutions. Precisely which scholarly projects are paralyzed in these ways is left largely up to the reader to imagine--a gesture that is both diplomatic and just a touch vague. By avoiding personalizing

these criticisms, Bush carefully frames her intervention as a broad-minded critique of a discipline. This may invite grumbling about overgeneralization from some quarters. But ultimately this is a study that is more concerned with building bridges than burning them down. To this end, a particular highlight of the book is Bush's clear and cogent defense of her diverse theoretical toolkit. Presumably this portion of the introduction is for the benefit of scholars who may be skeptical of or unfamiliar with empirical and archival approaches to the study of literature. In any case it helpfully frames the book's project as conciliatory and inclusive: book history and sociology are presented as approaches that can accommodate rather than replace textual analysis.

One of the more exciting results of this synthesis is that Bush models ways to study the interplay between literary institutions and literary texts. The watchword here is what Bush calls "texture"—her substitute, it would seem, for what textualist paradigms commonly refer to as form or style. For example, her rather brilliant chapter on the novels of Kane and Fall combines research into publishers' archives and close readings of the novels themselves in order to explore "the ways in which particular effects of the literary field worked [themselves] into the texture" (p. 150) of these works and how "formal composition itself resists power structures of metropolitan literary institutions" (p.178). While the use of "texture" and its cognates risks sacrificing some precision, the choice ultimately has considerable analytic payoff precisely because of its allusiveness. Opting for a muddier term allows Bush to elegantly and persuasively yoke together an analysis of literary form and field. The "texture" of a work—how it speaks to or intervenes in the dynamics of a broader literary field—is where analytical scale is achieved, a helpful name for a site at which qualitative and quantitative approaches can be shaded into each other. Combining archival retrievals with methodological creativity, *Publishing Africa in French* offers an invigorating and necessary reappraisal of a critical period in French and francophone literature.

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