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La Fabrique des classiques africains: écrivains d'Afrique subsaharienne francophone. Par CLAIRE DUCOURNAU. (Culture et société.) Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017. 442 pp.

What makes an African classic? Claire Ducournau brings a sociological perspective to bear on a subject that generates a wide-reaching interrogation of the operations of the French literary system in the postcolonial era. A quarter of a century of African writing and publishing in French constitute the primary material from which this ambitious and meticulously researched first book is devised. Based on doctoral work completed at EHESS in Paris, the study deftly combines two disciplines — sociology and literary criticism — in ways that are innovative in the context of French scholarship in this field. Although ‘field’ is not a term Ducournau espouses, arguing in favour of locating her subject matter in terms of *espace* rather than *champ*, again marking a conceptual and even a philosophical shift away from the traditions of defining literature from Africa written in French from within the intellectual architecture that has traditionally accommodated the French canon. Indeed, this study of 151 ‘auteurs’ selected from a population of over four hundred writers is in a sense about the ones that got away, that exist, in part, outside that world, by dint of either creating geographically remote literary structures — publishing houses emerged in francophone Africa as the postcolonial era dawned in 1960 —, or by navigating the metropolitan literary system. The work is divided into two sections: the first presents a history of the African novel as it emerged across the continent, intersecting with local languages and multiple creative cultures, to lay claim to a new *espace littéraire*. The second part addresses the arguably more challenging issues of how a work emerges as worthy of ‘consecration’ as a classic. When Pierre Bourdieu was theorizing the making of a literary ‘classic’ over a quarter of a century ago, durability was key to the process of being consecrated, alongside the pre-existing culture-bound criteria that characterize the authorial and editorial élite and determine fitness

to enter the French literary pantheon. Ducournau reveals a slightly different if no less gladiatorial trajectory along which the African *auteur* writing in French obviates the obstacles on his or her way towards literary canonization. Productive relationships with publishers, high media profiles, strong sales figures, all achieved over relatively short periods of time can result in a work finding its way onto reading lists in universities across the African continent and beyond. The impact of media recognition in France in the making of a classic is one of many factors analysed in the narrative and represented in numerical data throughout this carefully argued work. A series of thirty tables and graphs punctuate its four-hundred-plus pages enabling the author to encapsulate visually a history of cultural productivity in novel-writing that has transformed African writing since the era of Senghor, and the primacy of poetry as the vehicle of Negritude. The value of locating research at the interface of the traditional unitary disciplines that frame our academic identities is all the more evident in this scholarly, interdisciplinary, and highly recommended first work.

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