Tender for contributions. The Power, knowledge and Boundaries of writing in Africa
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THE POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND BOUNDARIES OF WRITING IN AFRICA

It is difficult to study the situation and dynamics of African writing without facing questions having to do with its status, extension and identity. These questions still give rise to Euro- and Afro-centric misunderstandings.

It has been said, and resaid, that Africa is the continent of the spoken word, of "oral literature". This implies that anything else is para-literature in this prefix's sense, namely that the African writer can only write outside or against his mother tongue and culture, his native and foreign publics, other literatures . . .

A conflict-ridden literary field has emerged, where lines of cleavage—négritude, tigritude, Creoleness, Africanicity, ethno- or bio-graphy; social or magic realism—are largely determined by processes of appropriation and legitimation that are subject to the former colonial powers and young nationalisms. Since the "paratext" is the strategic place where these issues can be detected, close attention should be paid to publishing houses, places of publication, literary awards, etc.

African literature also bears knowledge for understanding power, history and memory, and requires to be considered in its specificity. The text must be freed from the following double-bind: if it is a monument whose "authenticity" is directly guaranteed by its source—the author (lat. auctor)—, its "message" is both made sacred by the literary history inherited from the West and also reduced to commonplaces; if it is a firsthand document, it bears no other meaning or knowledge than what can be discovered in it by the social sciences that normally study supposedly naive material.

Thus, a more relevant approach should be taken, based on literary anthropology, which considers the literary text to be one subject's symbolic interpretation of the "collective representations" prevailing in a sociocultural zone. To measure the dialogical tension between the one end of the chain (the enunciator) and the other (the enunciatee), writing must be taken in its broadest acceptation: literature of all sorts, for all kinds of publics, in all kinds of media, minor and major, and even "shadow" literature (drafts, texts that are unpublished or published by authors themselves, diaries, correspondence, etc.).

Shifting of our perspective thus raises questions about "geoliterature". When discussing African literature, should we continue overlooking the "white" literature of northern and southern Africans, who often use the same non-African languages for writing? Although there is a black literature, do regional, national, or even ethnic boundaries define its topological identity? Or does it extend to "Extreme Africa", to the Caribbean, Madagascar, the Americas or even Europe, so as to include writing that is an exile, a métissage or a reverse exoticism?

This special issue should examine the porous boundaries between power and knowledge, recollection and oblivion, collective and individual actions. It should inquire into the aesthetic, social and political meanings of writing and reading in contemporary Africa.

Papers should be submitted to the journal (c/o Bernard Mouralis) before 30 March 1994.

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