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**Eric Touya De Marenne. Francophone Women Writers: Feminisms, Postcolonialisms, Cross-Cultures. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013. 195 pp.**

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**Abstract**

Review of Eric Touya De Marenne. *Francophone Women Writers: Feminisms, Postcolonialisms, Cross-Cultures*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013. 195 pp.

**Keywords**

book review, Eric Touya De Marenne, Francophone, women writers, feminism, postcolonial

Eric Touya De Marenne. *Francophone Women Writers: Feminisms, Postcolonialisms, Cross-Cultures*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013. 195 pp.

When one speaks of Francophone literature, whether authored by men or by women, it is almost always geographically specific: confined to areas of Africa and/or the Caribbean, Canada, Europe, and occasionally Southeast Asia. What makes Eric Touya de Marenne's *Francophone Women Writers* particularly notable and a welcome contribution to existing research is his decision to examine the works of women authors throughout the French-speaking world, irrespective of national or regional boundaries. While these writers might inhabit a variety of different cultures, identities, experiences, faiths, political perspectives, and classes, it is his belief that their work as a whole is distinctive and can be studied in a comprehensive manner.

His reasons for adopting such a heterogeneous approach are well-founded and respond to current trends in identity formation and the status of women, as he explains in the introduction. With globalization remapping the world as one composed of a community of international citizens, cross-cultural contact has had a major impact on meta-discourse and the interrelation between "Self" and "Other," asserts de Marenne. In this context, his stated aim is to reconsider critical thought about Francophone literature written by women in a pluralistic fashion that takes into account their common efforts to create an empowering counter-discourse and carve out new spaces of expression that subvert universal hegemonic standards. Hybridization is also seen to play a significant role in the fight against gender inequality, which he remarks is an important issue at a time when physical and sexual violence against women have been increasing. According to the author, the acknowledgement of the diversity of women's experiences as reflected in Francophone women's literature can positively impact their lives throughout the world by discouraging generalizations and presumptions that are characteristic of a more Eurocentric perspective. At the same time, it stresses the existence of a global community of women who are interconnected through their struggle to make themselves heard. This undercurrent of promoting the rights of women is present throughout de Marenne's book, giving it a sense of imperative that goes beyond the historical limits of the works included in his study.

Elsewhere in the introduction, the author raises fundamental debates among critics of Francophone literature and delineates the goals that he intends to achieve in the subsequent chapters, each of which contribute to the ongoing discussion. This portion of the book as well as the chapters themselves show evidence of meticulous research to support his arguments, with citations from a wealth of canonic figures in the fields of postcolonial, feminist, and cross-cultural theory that firmly legitimize his conclusions. He does, however, take care to separate himself from arguments based in binary thinking processes, preferring strategies that are deconstructionist and humanist in nature in order to account for a wide variety of voices whose identities and experiences shatter conventional boundaries. He argues convincingly upon the problematic aspects of feminist and postcolonial literary theory to view Francophone literature through European perspectives, calling for a broader conception of the diverse cultures behind them.

The body of the text is divided into five parallel chapters in which de Marenne examines the difficulties that women have encountered and their different responses to them as displayed in works by Francophone women writers. Within them are four to five sub-chapters, each of which is dedicated to an individual author with a brief biographical sketch and introduction to an excerpt from one of her writings that best exemplify these themes. With each chapter bringing together women from diverse backgrounds—be it their place of birth, cultural influences, ethnicity, age, education, or generation—it is possible to conclude that despite their differences, their universal experiences unite them. It is particularly interesting to note the incorporation of several authors whose work is largely unknown outside of their own countries, which reinforces de Marenne's goal to avoid privileging certain parts of the world or voices (i.e., the more recognized writers) over others. Placed side by side, they are equally valid.

While there is some slight overlap between chapters, with the issues de Marenne establishes that the authors combat through their writing based upon similar constructs (such as power/knowledge, binarism, subalternity, and phallogentrism), they remain distinct. In chapter 1, "Feminisms: Resistance and Heteroglossia," he discusses the ways in which Mariama Bâ, Nina Bouraoui, Joyce Mansour, Amélie Nothomb, and Anne Hébert expose and question masculine subjugation through a feminine process of representation that fractures the power structure which represses them. Chapter 2, "Postcolonialisms: Politics and Power," examines works by Assia Djebar, Déwé Gorodé, Werewere-Liking Gnepo, Marie-Célie Agnant, and Marie Chauvet, in which power is not exclusive to the hands of the male but those of the colonizer and racism is revealed as a product of its hegemonic discourse. In chapter 3, "Cross-Cultures: Nomadic Identities," de Marenne studies authors Mayotte Capécia, Maryse Condé, Kim Lefèvre, Gabrielle Roy, and Isabelle Eberhardt, whose tales depict characters (the majority of whom are autobiographical) with hybrid, ambiguous cultural identities that deny the exclusionary concept of ethnocentricity. Marginalization and resistance to domination continue to be central themes in chapter 4, "Counter-Discourses: *Alterity* and the Family Order," which describes efforts by Calixthe Beyala, Andrée Chedid, Ying Chen, Ananda Devi, and Marie NDiaye to respond to the oppression of women within the patriarchal family system by giving a voice to the silenced. Finally, in chapter 5, "Beyond Borders: Transcendent Spaces," de Marenne demonstrates how Vénus Khoury-Ghata, S. Corinna Bille, Véronique Tadjo, and Gabrielle Roy speak out against masculine and imperialistic subjugation with a language external to dominant discourses that opens a space for the subjectivity that has been denied them. De Marenne's choice of texts and authors to illustrate each of the five themes is, for the most part, well made, with Capécia, Eberhardt, Liking, Chauvet, and Bâ among the most pertinent.

De Marenne's atypical approach to his study of Francophone women writers extends to the manner in which he has chosen to analyze their work. He departs from the conventional method of providing a comprehensive explanation of his thesis interspersed by brief excerpts from the work in question by briefly summarizing the entire text and, in a few sentences, establishing in which way the lengthy (three to nine pages) passage that follows illustrates the focus of the chapter. In the absence of a guiding hand to indicate how to interpret the piece and which specific elements to anticipate, it is left up to the readers to draw their own conclusions. While this approach might seem off-putting and

destabilizing to those who are more accustomed to a traditional style, the effect is to shift the locus of power from the critic to the works themselves. Rather than positioning himself as the primary conduit through which one is to learn about Francophone women writers and using their words as support for his arguments, it is the community of women themselves and not the Western observer who engage in a direct dialogue with the reader. This deconstruction of postcolonial literary criticism falls in line with one of de Marenne's goals for his study, which he states "intends to bring to light their [female authors and characters'] uniqueness by 'returning to the scene of writing,' whereby the text opens itself to the breaking down of boundaries, and the emergence of new subjectivities" (5).

Nonetheless, a deeper analytical process to indicate precisely in which way the works exemplify the chapter themes both collectively and individually would have been welcome. When one considers the amount of diversity displayed by the authors included in each chapter, it would have been interesting to see a greater insistence on the manner in which the issues that women face transcend boundaries, particularly geographical ones, since one of the primary objectives of this book is to assemble works from throughout the Francophone world. While the inclusion of large excerpts gives this book a distinct value in comparison to others that provide isolated scenes or stanzas to serve as examples to theoretical arguments and do not represent the wealth of the piece in its entirety, the fact that more than half of the book is comprised by non-original content is disappointing.

In all, *Francophone Women Writers* is a fascinating examination of works by a wide range of female authors from throughout the French-speaking world, presented in a way that will prove insightful to those who have not considered that such a diverse collection of literature can serve as the subject of comparative study. With the abundance of pieces in translation assembled in one place for what might be the first time, it has the potential of introducing their work to an audience of non-Francophone readers. This book would be especially valuable to students, who can use the selections as a basis for further analysis and discussion.

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