

ABSTRACT

This English summary seeks to present to the reader the main issues and findings of the PhD dissertation *The African Francophone Novel at the Era of Independences (1950-1960): The Construction of a New Ethos of Author*.

The dissertation is divided into two introductory chapters – a general introduction and another chapter dealing with the "Négritude" movement – and three chapters of literary analysis. **In a nutshell**, the purpose of the research is to show how two authors of African descent – Mongo Beti and Ousmane Sembène – develop a unique artistic identity (Singularité artistique) while building, in the text, the ethos of the new African writer, essentially different from the one that was promoted by writers of the "Négritude" movement. The thesis seeks to shed light on the discursive, argumentative and stylistic aspects that characterize the unique identity of the authors, as well as their work. If the materials that make up their work are used by African writers wishing to engage in the future of their people and their country, the artistic uniqueness that is reflected in their art does not depend at all on their African origins but in their original way of integrating "La république mondiale des lettres" through the position they occupy in the field of French literature, and in accordance with the social and literary discourse that structures the field.

In general, this study participates in the lively discussion that has been taking place in recent years about the status of African literature and its authors within the field of French literature. Various approaches exist side by side within such field, and they give the concept of "African literature" different, sometimes contradictory meanings. An essentialist approach, for example, is represented in the series CONTINENTS AFRICAINS published by GALLIMARD (2000). The series, edited by writer and translator Jean-Noël Schifano, is dedicated to the "écritures africaines" and supposes, out of necessity, a link between the identity of the author and the African identity of his texts. One could ask whether the term "African texts" refers to the African identity of the author or the African "materials" he has used in his work. Is the African identity of the author what defines the "African texts" as such, or are there perhaps formal or thematic aspects that define the "African-ness" of the literary text?

The Manifesto "*Pour une littérature-monde en français*" is also published by GALLIMARD (2007). The Manifesto strongly opposes the institutionalization of the term "African literature". Alain Mabanckou argues, for example, that "African Literature" is a category within the "Francophone Literature" – a concept made up in

order to create an artificial and hierarchical separation between French writers and other authors writing in the French language. Other writers, such as Abdourahman Waberi and, before him, Kossi Efoui strongly argue that literary discourse represents the voice of the author and reflects his artistic originality. In other words, the author does not represent the voice of the group or the collective identity to which he is reluctantly associated.

The very discussion on the issue of the identity of African authors demonstrates the importance given to the term "African writer/literature" in the field of literature and culture in France. The research of Thorsten Schüller (2011, 2015) sheds light on the various strategies developed by African writers to improve and establish their African identity in the text, based on a set of stereotypical images meant to shape the opinion of their readership. However, when their literary criticism gives the identity of the African author (an identity constructed by virtue of his interest in the African society on which he writes) its full weight, Schüller and others do not share their opinion on the variety of other identities that are constructed within the literary discourse which participate to the construction, in parallel, of the discursive identity (ethos) of the author. In its complexity, the latter goes far beyond the collective African identity that is attributed to the author and under which he writes.

Needless to say, this study is based on a long tradition of research on and around African francophone novels. The literary review presented in the introductory chapter is based on the distinction between two research traditions. The first one is rooted in the study of literature in France, and has developed alongside the very literature it seeks to explore; its roots are to be found in the colonial era. The roots of the second tradition are to be found later, in the English-speaking research world of the late 20th century, as a branch of the post-colonial school. Suffice to say, even if somewhat schematically, that these two traditions are mainly engaged in the ways in which literary discourse is drafted by the "occupied" as a way to negotiate with the "occupier". Among French authors, the works of Bernard Mouralis show how the African writer takes upon himself the task of talking about Africa through the African perspective of literary discourse, thus offering an alternative to the European perspective which had been the base of all literary discourse on Africa up until then. In a similar light, postcolonial criticism also emphasizes the way in which the writers of the empire "respond", with a counter-discourse, to the writers of the metropolis, thus challenging the hegemonic culture, the universal values it purports to represent, and the knowledge of the world it seeks to subordinate.

The two schools of thought emphasize the political aspects of the literary text. The literary discourse expresses the desire, on the part of the occupied, to come to a discussion with the occupier. The author in this context is perceived as someone who represents others – a speaker, the voice of the occupied. Literary discourse is seen as some sort of scene for the ideological confrontation between Africa and Europe.

Following these approaches, the doctoral dissertation presented above seeks to be attentive to other voices rising from the text. Our study seeks to show how such different voices are woven together into a personal, original voice that enables the author to position himself in the field of French literature as an author in the full sense of the word. In other words, this research seeks to give the utmost importance and attention to the ways in which the individual author acts to position himself in the research field as an original, creative writer who creates autonomously and seeks to circumvent preconfigured patterns, moving away from categories that may frame his work following some group or some predefined identity.

Like all artists, writers of African origin work in the field of French literature in light of the uniqueness myth (*singularité*), whose roots go back to the 19th century (Nathalie Heinich 2005). An expression of originality and uniqueness is a fundamental condition for the recognition of the artist as an artist. However, the myth alone does not provide the methodological tools needed to systematically and scientifically understand how the artist, and in this case the writer, structures his singularity *within* the literary discourse he generates. The Field theory of Pierre Bourdieu is a starting point for understanding that the uniqueness of the author is not an absolute value (*singularité absolue*) but rather a relative value (*singularité relative*) – the uniqueness of the piece of art is always formed *in relation to* other works, to the literary genres and the discursive traditions against which it is formed, as well as in a dialectic way (Jérôme Meizoz 2007).

How, then, can one scientifically explore the ways in which the author constructs his uniqueness within literary discourse? Instead of analyzing the literary text through the lens of the extra-textual African identity of the author, our research seeks to understand how the author's identity is built *within* the text. In other words, our study is interested in the author's ethos, namely, the image of the author as it is constructed within the literary discourse that is developed in his work (Ruth Amossy 2000, 2010). The issues of the author and the image of the author are widely discussed in the introductory chapter, based on the interest they raise in the study of literature throughout the 20th century and beyond. Let us briefly mention the main points.

In her research on the "Myth of uniqueness", Nathalie Heinich (2005) shows how the latter is shaped in light of the image that is attributed to the artist – the writer and the painter – during the 19th century. Heinich emphasizes the power of literature in the creation of social myths. Heinich studies, in her book, literary works that put the French bourgeois society at their center, thus influencing its development and emergence. The studies of José Luis Diaz (2007) show how the myth of the uniqueness of an artist is developed through unique sceneries (scenographies auctoriales) – such sceneries testify to the importance the author attributes not only to the product but also to the creative process: the artistic creation is perceived as a vocation. In his research on the development of the status of the writer in society, Paul Bénichou (1993) shows how the character of the author is driven by an inner voice towards the fulfillment of his vocation as a writer and as an artist. He traces the roots of this image to the 18th century. Alain Viala (1985) tries to trace the roots of the social phenomenon called "writer" as well. He places the birth of the 17th-century-writer on the background of the famous battle between the modern and the classic (*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*). Viala's work shows how the autonomy of the literary field develops in tandem with the development of social ideals. The ideal of originality (originalité) as well as the ideal of creativity (inventivité) are not only the basis to the myth of uniqueness, but give the status of author a symbolic meaning too. Finally, the symbolic, institutional and legal recognition (copyright) gives the author the authority to engage in professional writing. Writing gives the writer autonomy in relation to other social factors on which he has been depending until now (employers, for example). "The Birth of the Writer" foreshadows the establishment of the literary field as an autonomous field (Bourdieu).

Alain Viala's research also shows how writers position themselves in the field in light of their artistic choices. In the process of analyzing their work, a separation between the author's character – whose name appears on the cover of the book – and the character he builds as a writer in the literary field is required. Viala develops the concept of "Posture" in order to distinguish the different ways of positioning in the field. Jérôme Meizoz borrows from Viala the concept of posture. Instead of using the term "posture" as a component of the ethos of the author (as Viala does), Meizoz sees the author's ethos as a component of the writer's "posture". Meizoz actually differentiates between the image of the writer as it is built outside the literary work (interviews, official speeches, journalistic texts, etc.) and the novelist's image as formulated by the author in the work itself. In other words, the writer's posture is a derivative of an array of images, both textual and non-textual.

Either way, both Meizoz and Viala add an important element to the French school of sociological literary research, and to literary discourse analysis. Following Dominique Maingueneau, the perception of literature as discourse (discours) generally seeks to understand how the author uses language. It attaches great importance to 1/ the social context that enables the literary work as well as its publication/reception in the literary field. 2/ the status of the author and the author's position in the field of literature. 3/ the genres that make up discourse. 4/ the role of the reader in the work of art as well as the question of speakers and recipients (who is talking to whom? When? Where?) 5/ conditions and ways of distributing the work of art.

In her article "What is an author?", Michele Bokhobza Kahan (2009) explains how the concepts of literature as discourse, and the author as the image (ethos) of the perceived source of such discourse, make it virtually impossible to get around the great controversy that crossed the field of literary criticism during the 20th century between those, following Roland Barthes and wishing to separate the existence of the literary text from the entity which created it, who declared the "death of the author", and those (such as Kate Hamburger and Anne Banfield), representing a stream in narratology, who view the speaker as the author's character. For Hamburger and Banfield, the voice of the speaker in literary discourse is the voice of the author, in the same way the voice of the speaker in the text does indeed express the voice of the author in historical discourse.

But by imposing the full burden of responsibility on the author regarding the events in the plot axis, as their instigator as well as the one who put them all in writing, Hamburger and Banfield ignore the uniqueness of the literary text as a place of multiple polyphonic voices whose interweaving makes it often difficult to associate a specific voice to the source that has produced it (through a combined utterance).

Following the research path of Mikhaïl Bakhtine, Julia Kristeva, Oswald Ducrot and others, our study seeks to highlight the full complexity of the literary text while according their importance to the polyphonic and dialogic dimensions that build it. Our study shows how the various characters in the plot express social voices and discursive genres to create a whole set of social identities that are distinguished in the reading process by the reader.

To analyze these voices, our research makes use of linguistic tools that have been developed in light of narratology theories following the work of Gérard Genette. Let us mention, for example, the works of Alain Rabatel, which allow to examine the textual structure of a point of view and the way it makes it possible to attribute a voice to a character, even though, in practice, such character has not

spoken (point de vue). Works by Jean-Michel Adam illuminate the way the descriptions of nature in a novel take part in the design of the characters and the construction of the ploy. The works of Laurence Rosier allow us to distinguish between different expressions (discours rapporté), to associate voices to their source, and to better understand the relationship between the image that the speaker builds in discourse and the image that other characters/voices build for him. The works of Anne Herschberg Pierrot provide us with tools for the analysis of stylistic and rhetorical figures. The works of Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni provide us with tools to analyze the role of synonyms in the text on the ideological values they give to such text (modalisateurs axiologiques). The works of Oswald Ducrot emphasize the importance of implicit assumptions underlying each statement, the role they play in discourse, and how they affect the recipient. Other theoretical tools are used in this research, according to the discursive and stylistic characteristics of the analyzed text.

Finally, we shall mention the tools that have been used for the argumentative analysis of discourse. The literary works that make up the corpus often present a *mise-en-scène* of voices/characters in a polemic situation. On a first level, a character develops some arguments in order to convince another character on a particular thesis. On a second level, the speaker constructs a worldview that he addresses to the recipient (narrataire). On a third level, the author produces a literary discourse that he addresses to the reader on the other side of the literary communication (communication littéraire). In view of this, our research seeks to study the argumentative dimension of discourse and the way in which it has an indirect influence, often unintentional, on the recipient, as opposed to the cases in which the speaker is working with a clear *argumentative intention* on his recipient (ex. legal discourse). Either way, our study distinguishes between the different levels of interaction that structure discourse. Each level of interaction is analyzed with a distinct *voice*. It is the author who controls the totality of the voices and regulates the way in which all interactions are organized into a structured and clear literary discourse. In other words, the author is the character who speaks to the reader *in absentia*, through the theme, the style, the images, the argumentative dimension ... that shape literary discourse as a whole.

In preparation for a new ethos of the African author

In the 1950s, the Francophone African literature is characterized by prosaic works and brings along, in the field of French literature, the intellectual stream of the Négritude. Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti develop a different image of author from what had been common until then in the Négritude spirit. The "Pre-existing Ethos" (ethos préalable) of the "African author" is based on stereotypical representations that are common in social discourse and that play an important role in

the way the latter is received in the field of literature while defining the position of the author.

As we have seen in the previous section, in order to develop an original, unique literary discourse, the author must take into account the totality of the texts and genres of discourse regarding Africa that have been developed until then, and the attitude around which he wishes to position himself (Bernard Mouralis 1984). This research, we have already said, attaches the utmost importance to the interactive, dialogic dimension that structures literary discourse (like any other discourse). This methodological principle requires familiarity with the social discourse of the period and the entirety of the stereotypes that form it in relation to Africa and Africans. An original literature will be born through the ways in which authors use this stereotyped infrastructure while acting on it and changing it.

Therefore, our study deals with the question of how Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti affect their French readers in a different way than other writers of African descent had done until then in the spirit of Negritude. The identity of the "African writer" develops as a function of the influence he wishes to exert on the reader. Our study seeks to show how the "African writer" constructs his identity in literary discourse. The image or, more precisely, the ethos of the author takes on a certain meaning within a structured and institutionalized space – the literary field. The latter gives the author recognition in view of the position he occupies in the literary field as an "African writer." In other words, the African author's ethos crystallizes in light of the position of the "African writer" in the field of literature, on the basis of all the stereotypes associated with this complex identity – writer on the one hand, African on the other. In this perspective, our research studies the construction of the author's ethos according to the social and institutional conditions within which he is growing, according to which he is influencing the reader in the given period.

Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti can certainly construct an image that does not match the collective social representations generally attributed to the "African writer". But to do so, they need to develop a discursive ethos that does not match the previous ethos of the "African writer". In order to show how they do it, is not enough to say that they develop in their work an ethos that is different from the model of the "African writer" as it had been established in the field of French literature. It is also necessary to understand how the image of the "African writer" changes in the process of writing as well as its ability to influence the reader, the way it perceives and understands the text as well as the image that it builds in relation to the author.

By analyzing the various interactions on the array of images that the various characters construct in the discourse that they build (or those that are attributed to

them by other characters/voices, ex. a speaker), as well as by understanding the relationship that connects between one image and another, it is possible to show:

1 / How the array of images of all the participants in the story and in the plot indirectly construct the image of the author, whose name appears on the cover of the work.

2 / the interactions that take place between the construction of the author's image *in* his own work, and his image as an "African writer" as it develops out of his work in the field of French literature.

Our study therefore seeks to explore the literary author's image in a broad perspective, while paying close attention to the dynamic connections that exist between the biographical dimension (the author's life path), the textual dimension (his literary work) and the social circumstances through which the author is perceived (Michèle Bokobza Kahan). This way, our study joins the approach developed in France by the "sociocritique" school, which criticizes the artificial separation between text and context. Literary texts do not seek to reflect reality or to be a mirror *of* reality, but rather to develop a discourse *on* reality – language builds reality, it does not reflect it. The theoretical frameworks of discourse analysis and argumentation in discourse need to add an additional layer to the school developed in France by Claude Duchet and others. It is not enough to study and show the social value system that crosses and builds literary discourse; it is necessary to show how literary discourse tries to act on reality through the ways in which it tries to influence the reader directly (see "roman à these") or indirectly, through the argumentative dimension of a work.

Presentation and justification of the Corpus

In her monumental work, Claire Ducournau (2017) conducts a quantitative research on 151 African writers, men and women. Her study provides data on their personal paths (country of origin, ethnic affiliation, kinds of studies) as well as on the literary career of each one of them in view of their acceptance to the field of French literature. Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti are considered as the most famous African writers among those whose first works were published before 1960, the year in which political independence was given to seventeen African countries. Claire Ducournau closely monitors the various institutions (publishing houses, festivals, prizes, and so on), and follows the symbolic recognition that they give to works and authors within the conceptual framework they create and give meaning to. The literary establishment, claims Ducournau, sees the different literary

works as part of a defined, more or less homogenous corpus of works that it includes under the definition of "African literature".

The present study seeks to show how, contrary to those widespread opinions, the uniqueness of Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti far exceeds their desire to represent or reflect particularistic African values (*spécificité africaine*). Our study thus points to significant gaps between their literary work (the "materials" of which it is made) and the way it has been received in the field of French literature over the years. It is only a paradox that the writers who are most successful among African writers are the ones who totally reject the general tendency to read their texts on an African scale of values (*africanité*). How do Ousmane Sembène and Mongo Beti develop an artistic uniqueness then? This is the main question at the heart of this study.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with how the social-literary category named "African writer" forms in literary criticism. Literary criticism has institutionalized the "négritude" as a literary and cultural movement. This chapter seeks to bring to the surface the tensions existing within the "Negritude" movement, which undermine the image of a homogeneous movement. This chapter analyzes the tensions stemming from the desire to recruit writers for an ideological and artistic process of "negritude", when in fact they are the very ones undermining the central ideas of the movement itself.

The literary analyses presented in the second chapter and onwards wish to examine in this light the construction of the author's ethos and its uniqueness, in light of the construction of complex social identities in the literary discourse of each of the novels that make up the corpus. The second chapter is devoted to the study of the writer's representations in Ousmane Sembène's first novel "*Le Docker noir*" (1956). This chapter shows how Ousmane Sembène's uniqueness is built in light of the uniqueness of the author-in-becoming Diaw Falla, the central character, the tragic hero in the novel.

The third chapter is devoted to the most famous of Ousmane Sembène's novels, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960). This chapter shows how the author's artistic uniqueness is shaped in light of the mis-en-scene of the collective identity in the novel – the identity of the French Sudan railway workers during the great strike between October 1947 and March 1948.

The fourth and final chapter deals with the way in which Mongo Beti's artistic uniqueness is shaped through the representation of the tensions existing between individuals and society in two novels from the 50s – the first, "*Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*" (1956), and the second, *Mission Terminée* (1957).