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*Suzanne Césaire: Archéologie littéraire et artistique
d'une mémoire empêchée* par Anny-Dominique Curtius (review)

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Book Reviews

Anny-Dominique Curtius. *Suzanne Césaire: Archéologie littéraire et artistique d'une mémoire empêchée*. Paris: Karthala, 2020. Pp. 396. 30 euros.

Anny-Dominique Curtius's monograph aims to create a more capacious framework for understanding Suzanne Césaire's life and intellectual legacy. Curtius amply meets this goal by analyzing Césaire's theoretical and creative writings, as well as by examining the cultural, historical, visual, and interpersonal sources behind the paradoxical silence and mythologization that surround her. At the heart of the text is the notion of "ressouvenance," the often-contradictory acts of remembrance, manipulation, and celebration that, on the one hand, exoticize Césaire as the enigmatic wife of the celebrated poet and politician Aimé Césaire, and, on the other hand, honor and deepen the impact of her work by weaving it into contemporary literature and visual arts. Indeed, the tensions between light and shadow, voice and silence, remembrance and erasure form the foundation of Curtius's investigation into Césaire and her role as a pillar of the literary review *Tropiques*. She situates *Tropiques* and more specifically Césaire's essay "Le grand camouflage" (1945) as watershed contributions to contemporary French Caribbean aesthetics and political consciousness that, crucially for Curtius, also point to the manifold ways in which Césaire's work and personal identity have been (re)appropriated to stage, subvert, and unwittingly reinforce gendered and colonial hierarchies as well as her 'secondary' position behind her former intellectual and romantic partner.

Throughout her robust introduction and five substantial chapters, Curtius examines poems, personal correspondences, plays, documentaries, essays, and photographs to create a far-reaching study of not just Césaire's life and writings, but also the historical, social, and political contexts they respond to and continue to reflect. Through close readings of visual representations of Césaire (chapter 1), her influence on poets such as André Breton, René Étiemble, Ernest Pépin, Jean Morisset, and Césaire's daughter, Ina Césaire (chapter 2), her role in Aimé Césaire's poetic, political and personal life through the words of the poet theoretician himself (chapter 3), the works of playwrights Daniel Maximin and Hassane Kassi Kouyaté and documentarist Huguette Bellmare and how they reconfigure and give new voice to Césaire's writings (chapter 4), and Césaire's prescient grasp of her role as an ambiguous emblem of doudouism and the stakes of representation in the colonial context of the French Caribbean (chapter 5), the book is far more than a biographically-inflected survey of Césaire's work; it is an erudite inquiry into the historical, theoretical, and socio-political forces that shaped her life, her writing, and the world around her.

This book offers compelling incursions into multiple scholarly approaches to the Caribbean Basin, such as ecocriticism, feminism, doudouism, colonialism, representation, memory, and History. As such, it promises to appeal to longtime readers of Suzanne Césaire and French Caribbean cultural expression as well as newcomers to her writing and the field. This is in no small part due to Curtius's ability to infuse close readings of works by and about Césaire with an impressive span of theories by Roland Barthes, Bertolt Brecht, Bill Nichols, and Diana Taylor, to name only a few. Above all, the book balances paying homage to and shedding critical light on Césaire's work and thus serves to position her in the prominent place in French Caribbean Studies that she has long warranted.

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