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Translating Mariama Bâ: representation of African women and reception of Une Si Longue Lettre

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Abstract

African literature by female African writers occupies a unique space in the literary sphere. Authors like Mariama Bâ produce work that succeeds in amplifying women's marginalised voices and contributing to real, positive narratives about women and about Africa. Works of this calibre educate, dispel false truths and foster scholarship about Africa by Africans.

The present research is a comparative analysis of the French Senegalese novel *Une Si Longue Lettre* written by Mariama Bâ and translated into English by Modupe Bodé-Thomas as *So Long a Letter*. This research is carried out as a case study that makes use of and takes the form of a product oriented study as a part of Descriptive Translation Studies, as theorised by Gideon Toury. It is concerned with the reception of such a text by English speaking audiences in the Global North. The questions about reception and the privileging of Western views are analysed and answered through a thorough paratextual and metatextual analysis. In the same way, the question surrounding the depiction of African women is answered through a close reading of the texts themselves and through the reading of other scholars and critics who have written extensively about the subject. In this way, the answers to all these questions feed into one another. Drawing from the analysis, the reception of this novel by English speakers in Europe and America is a largely positive one. The diversity and versatility of the subject matter in the novel, makes the novel suitable to be taught and discussed in a variety of settings and for different purposes. Its accolades contribute to this reception as well.