
Carrie Noland. *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print: Aesthetic Subjectivity, Diaspora, and the Lyric Regime*. Columbia UP, 2015. Pp. 344. US\$60.

In *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print*, Carrie Noland studies how Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Léon-Gontran Damas (French Guiana), and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) deploy experimental poetics to enunciate forms of aesthetic subjectivity through the medium of print. In Noland's eyes, it is crucial that Negritude poets exploit the textual resources of the "typosphere" or, as she describes, "that uniquely modern (post-Gutenberg) world in which paper and typeface are the matter of words," such that poets write with an awareness that their poems will appear in print (1). Negritude poets take full advantage of the entire range of the typosphere, from experimenting with internal textual dynamics including the smallest unit of the letter, typography and space on the page, cadence and rhythm, lexical layerings, neologisms, and rhetorical figures to publishing their poems in small magazines and revues and, eventually, anthologies and book collections. In doing so, they become full participants within what she calls the "lyric regime" of Western European

letters, necessarily transforming it in the process (3). This term is related to Jacques Rancière's notion of the "aesthetic regime," which designates the historical period after Romanticism when writing was uprooted from its initial context of articulation to address an unknown, even anonymous readership (Rancière 146–49). In the lyric regime, poems in print "threaten to bury the living author [and his or her experience and intentionality] under the disembodied architecture of his printed words" (Noland 2). The modern predicament in which lyric voice becomes disembodied or depersonalized because of its appearance first and foremost in print places peculiar demands upon Negritude writers, who aspire to both speak on behalf of otherwise silenced or invisible African communities and create forms of pan-African solidarity, even as they work within the French language and avant-garde forms and reflect on their divided relation to their purported communities. In these ways, Negritude poets simultaneously extend the literary culture of the printed poem because of the lyric regime (and its attendant emphasis on the disembodied lyric voice as mediated through impersonal marks on the page) and make "percussive and palpable" (5) the shared historical experiences of slavery and colonialism, which become remediated and re-embodied through modernist representations of race in print culture.

Noland directly engages ongoing debates on lyric voice, especially in the wake of poststructuralism's evacuation and disembodiment of lyric subjectivity in the 1970s and 80s. Since then, scholars have linked poets to texts in ways that retain some relation to authorial intention, however qualified. Instead, Noland offers a refreshing contribution by resetting the question over how "voice" appears through the materiality of textual mediation positioned at the intersection of race, poetics, and print and so, according to Noland, "voice" is not reducible to "oral culture" or "race-specific rhythm" (136–37). Throughout, Noland pursues a dialectical argument over how, on the one hand, Negritude authors' "racial identification" textually marks the lyric production of "voice" and, on the other, how the institutional mechanisms of modernist print (including the selection, editing, publication, and circulation of texts for French readerships) condition aesthetic representations of race (8).

Negritude poets flaunt the mediated fabric and texture of lyric voice. By working within the typosphere, Negritude poets "address and bolster a diasporic community through textual means" (2), simultaneously insisting on the blackness of their experience and political commitments while "developing a highly idiosyncratic style" (3) of experimental poetics connecting them with "other text-based poets [such as Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Guillaume Apollinaire, Charles Baudelaire, and Louis Aragon], most of

whom have no direct link to Africa or the Caribbean” (3). But while “voice” itself is a highly textual affair, it is nonetheless inseparable from the sensuous, embodied experience of empirical authors converting themselves into words, organized and spatialized on the page and subsequently rearticulated in the mouths and bodies of readers.

This complex process of mediation and remediation is what Noland means by “aesthetic subjectivity,” a term she adopts from Theodor Adorno. It refers to a subjectivity “suspended, lyrically, in place and time” (Adorno 167) and capable of conveying the historical experiences of authors, printed poems, and readerships far beyond the times and places of poetic production and reception. By referring to Adorno’s model of aesthetics and politics (9), Noland reconciles what may initially appear to be incompatible schools of criticism—lyric studies and the Black Atlantic, francophone avant-garde poetics and global modernisms, formalist and materialist approaches—to provide a more refined history of the mid-century diasporic culture of Negritude.

Throughout her book, Noland attends to literary form while also considering how the pressures of print culture shape Negritude writing. She begins with an analysis of the initial publication of Césaire’s landmark *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939) in Chapter 1. By tracking the early publication history of *Cahier* in the French journal *Volontés* (which was devoted to high modernist experimentation and published a version of James Joyce’s “Work in Progress”), Noland demonstrates how Césaire recasts aesthetic subjectivity through “writing as a process of perpetual unfolding that can also serve as a model of selfhood in general and Negritude in particular” (59). In Chapter 2, Noland switches emphasis by turning to the question of empirical subjectivity, or how Césaire’s real-life experiences as a political representative and spokesperson (winning the election in Martinique in 1945) inform his casting of “voice” in his play *Et les chiens se taisaient*, which was composed and revised over fifteen years, between 1941–56. Drawing on Peggy Phelan’s performance theory, Noland revises prevailing perceptions that the Negritude movement aligns with any straightforward representative political message(s): through lyric oratorio, Césaire stages the irreducible multiplicity of voices within any subject (empirical or aesthetic) as they merge in harmony and dissonance (94–95). Noland’s subsequent two chapters explore the interrelation of performance, voice, and text in the work of Damas, arguably the most experimental of the Negritude poets. If Negritude writing is typically analyzed in terms of musicality, rhythm, and the phenomenalization of voice, Damas’ resolute commitments to graphemic marks, typeface, lineation, and layout (as in his 1936 collection, *Pigments*) require readers to reconsider how a raced “soundscape” becomes visible and audible within

a highly manipulated textual space and “rhetorical field” (26). In the final two chapters, Noland returns once more to Césaire, now to take up his unstinting effort to forge pan-African solidarity and his relentless commitment to poetic innovation. In Chapter 5, she reads *Cahier* in the context of the Aragon Affair—Louis Aragon’s 1932 decision to split from Surrealism and devote himself to what he thought to be a more politically committed socialist realism. For Noland, Césaire’s poem engages and reframes the political in aesthetic terms by combining journalistic, political, surrealist, and lyric discourses. And in her final chapter, she traces how Césaire absorbs increasingly rarefied words drawn from a wide array of sources (zoological, botanical, Arawak, Greek, and so forth) to write a creolized Caribbean landscape. We can see Césaire’s propensity for archaisms in his late poem “Calendrier lagunaire” (1982), which is engraved on the poet’s tombstone. In an especially brilliant reading, Noland concludes: “The unyielding substance of his words provides an ‘espace inexploité’ (‘unexploited space’), serving as a block to full comprehension, forcing gaps and producing wounds. In the end, it is these wounds in the fabric of meaning that outline a place in which to dwell” (230). This, then, is a creolized model of aesthetic subjectivity that would retrieve and memorialize the invisible but still-present losses from colonialism and neocolonialism, inviting readers to participate in the endless work of mourning and thereby opening a space of intersubjective attachment through the crossing of cultures, histories, geographies, and languages.

Over the course of her book, Noland produces a critical method for reading poems as a complex interweaving of “the empirical author and her intentionality; the ‘ears’ and ‘eyes’ of the text, animated by a writer at a particular moment in the history of the genre and the medium; and the contemporary reader who lends the poem her own voice” (234). The back-and-forth exchanges she describes, in turn, open onto more nuanced ways for thinking about the politics of poetry. In her eyes, the politics of poetry is not reducible to the author’s purported beliefs, nor to the presumed ideology of a given text, nor even to the political disposition of a reader. Citing Rancière, Noland claims that Negritude poetry “ushered in a new ‘distribution of the sensible’ insofar as it permitted subaltern subjects, the offspring of slaves, to be ‘heard as speaking subjects’” (241). By inserting themselves into a “lyric regime” via the medium of print, Negritude poets made significant contributions to “develop[ing] their own way of harnessing the resistant force that the printed word harbors in its material being” (241), a force which continues to resonate in ethnic American, postcolonial, and francophone poetics. But this is not all. The demands experimental poems place upon readers remind us that our own interpretations are necessarily provisional and incomplete: that the en-

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gendering of subjectivity, whether the “I” of a lyric poem or of an individual in “the world,” is always multiple, in process, and “unbound,” with more yet to come (241).

This book compels us to ask how ethnic and minority poets continue to exploit the medium of print to resist the unfreedom of racialization and invent forms of collectivity—that is, “aesthetic subjectivity”—as they are materialized through the collaborative labors uniting authors, poems, and readers alike. Noland has furnished an important contribution to studies of Negritude, interwar Black Internationalism, and francophone poetics, advancing the work of Christopher Miller, J. Michael Dash, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Gary Wilder. While Noland focuses squarely on the triumvirate of Césaire, Damas, and Senghor (who features throughout, but does not have a chapter-length study devoted to him), her analysis has far-reaching consequences, especially for scholars invested in modern and contemporary poetry, diasporic cultural production, and broader questions about the interrelation between aesthetics and politics. Noland cannot but inspire her readers to become better close readers, better historicists, and far more attentive to the centrality of print culture in mediating poetic voice, even as we necessarily re-enunciate poets and poems through the circumstances and exigencies of the present.

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Works Cited

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