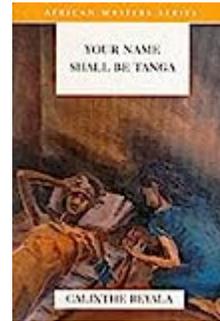




**Calixthe Beyala.** *Your Name Shall Be Tanga.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996. 137 pp. \$10.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-435-90950-5.



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With this second novel, Calixthe Beyala's thematics and style mature. *Your Name Shall be Tanga* (1988) applies the same rich and complex narrative strategies that made the author's first novel, *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, a success. These narrative strategies include non-linearity and story fragmentation, flashbacks, a mixing of standard and street languages, frequent switching back and forth from past to present tenses, and the multiplicity of voices. While some of the themes from the first novel are repeated (victimization of women, poverty, sexuality, prostitution, violence of everyday life, history or lack thereof, and survival), the story seems more focused and the language, though still vivid, becomes less obscure. *Your Name Shall be Tanga* centers mainly on the themes of female survival and empowerment via female solidarity.

The novel tells the story of a young girl, appropriately called the girlchild-woman (in French "la femme-fillette"), for after her father's death, she is forced by her mother to prostitute herself at a very young age, in order to feed the family. The narrative begins with the girl lying near death in a prison cell which she shares with a European woman, Anna-Claude. Anna-Claude had been arrested for getting involved in anti-governmental activities with her students. Anna-Claude persuades the girl, whom she decides to call Tanga, to tell her history so that

it can survive after her death. Because Tanga is unable to speak, Anna-Claude proposes that they hold hands so that Tanga's history may pass into her cellmate's body.

*Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is a novel that particularly privileges children's voices. Children of Africa, as Beyala has remarked in an interview, have been violated, neglected and forgotten (Matateyou). Some passages of the novel seem, in fact, directly addressed to the youth: "So, it is for the child—for all these children who are born adult and will never know how to measure the harshness of their destiny; these children who are widowers of their childhood, to whom even time no longer makes any promises" (p. 46).

The novel is critical of men and women alike. It denounces chauvinist, woman-objectifying, unfaithful, and abusive men. For instance, Tanga's father is depicted as a violent, unfaithful man who rapes his own daughter. Tanga's story condemns women's own participation in perpetuating female victimization, castigating women who turn little girls into girlchild-women instead of protecting them. Tanga tries unsuccessfully to protect children from this destiny.

Through the heroine, the novel attempts to offer a solution to women's victimization by proposing the sharing of history. History opens the possibility of solidar-

ity among women. The act of telling her story transforms the woman from a mere objectified being to the subject of her own history. Tanga, like every other exploited girlchild-woman, desires to control her own story/history.

Through Anna-Claude, the novel calls for a true internationalization of women's solidarity, a theme that Beyala explores further in her later novels. To make the solidarity true and real, the European woman must not only listen to and tell the story of the dying Tanga but also enter her body and channel that story. However, one may question Anna-Claude's usefulness in carrying Tanga's story for two reasons. First, her character is considered insane by people in Europe and in the imaginary Iningue, where the story is set. Second, Anna-Claude has been arrested along with her young students for her political involvement at Iningue. Will the people of Iningue listen to Tanga's story coming from this crazy, foreign woman who interferes with local politics? Although the focus of the story is on Tanga's past, the choice of such a character (Anna-Claude) somewhat complicates the end of the narrative.

Although controversy regarding plagiarism surrounds Calixthe Beyala, the author has certainly managed to transform Francophone African women's writings by vigorously erasing silences found in some women's texts. By choosing complexity over simplicity and fragmentation over linearity, Beyala complicates what the reader expects from African literature, particularly African women's literature. Readers will appreciate

the author's artistic efforts in these two novels.

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