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Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, *Deux agents littéraires dans le siècle américain. William et Jenny Bradley, passeurs culturels transatlantiques*. Lyon: ENS Éditions / Institut d'Histoire du Livre, 2023. 290 pp. Notes, figures, references, and index. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9-79-1036206283; €14.99 (eb). ISBN 9-1036206290.

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Academics may be surprised to learn about the historical role played by literary agents. Laurence Cossu-Beaumont's carefully crafted, well-researched monograph provides critical perspective on these much-overlooked figures, especially in the middle two-thirds of the twentieth century. As representatives for French as well as American authors, William Aspenwall Bradley (1878-1939) and his wife Jenny Serruys Bradley (1886-1983) were at the forefront of transatlantic cultural mediation. Cossu-Beaumont's work effectively shows how and why this development mattered to both countries: "L'histoire littéraire et culturelle de ce 'siècle américain' est d'un succès incontesté de la littérature américaine en France, et aussi celle d'un lien particulier entre les deux nations,...qui forgèrent, autour de la littérature, une conversation transatlantique riche et ininterrompue" (p. 22).

Passeurs or intermediaries were not exclusively literary, of course. They also existed in art, music, and the academy, for instance. But the literary agent, representing authors to publishers in two or more countries, was largely the Bradleys' creation. And it was extensive. The agency brought original works of American writers in translation to France (they made such arrangements for Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, Margaret Mitchell, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Dashiell Hammett, among others) and original works of French authors in translation to the US (among them were Colette, Blaise Cendrars, André Gide, Paul Valéry, François Mauriac, André Malraux, Antoine Saint-Exupéry, Jules Romains, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir). The agency also arranged for their translators, such as Victor Lloná, Bernard Fay, Régis Michaud, and Maurice-Edgar Coindreau in particular.

The sources for this study are as impressive as the authors. Thanks to Jenny Bradley in her final years, the voluminous papers of the William A. Bradley Agency from 1923 to 1983 are now housed in the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) at the University of Texas, Austin. There are also materials in the libraries of Columbia University and the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine. The documentation is thorough, far more detailed and better organized than what the authors, much less their translators, saved for posterity. At the HRC alone, "le fonds comporte 245 boîtes d'archives, lesquelles renferment essentiellement des correspondances avec

auteurs, éditeurs et autres agents littéraires, mais aussi des contrats, relevés de compte et coupures de presse littéraires relatives à des publications ou événements littéraires” (p. 25), defining a veritable business empire centered in Paris but connecting two cultural worlds.

After framing her study in the relevant scholarship in the history of publishing and cultural exchange—seconded by a useful bibliographical preface by the venerable Jean-Yves Mollier—Cossu-Beaumont turns to the agency’s founders. Jenny’s family was originally from Belgium, but settled in Tourcoing where her industrialist father, Edmond, oversaw the family’s textile mills, enabling his youngest daughter to enjoy extensive study in Paris and London. Besides her facility in English, Jenny’s *haut bourgeois* background provided her the social networks vital to the success of the agency she established with her American husband. Bill’s privileged family made it possible for him to attend Columbia University where he developed lifelong relationships conducive to a career in publishing. He began as a “scout” for Harcourt, Brace and Howe in New York. Even before service overseas in World War I, Bill had a good command of French that served him well when he decided to make Paris his new home. The Bradleys’ examples help Cossu-Beaumont to debunk the popular myth of the Lost Generation.

By 1926, Bill had already created a profile worthy of the Légion d’Honneur, whose award citation noted his work “sans relâche à faciliter et organiser par tous les moyens possible l’échange littéraire entre son pays et la France et a, pour sa part, développé considérablement l’introduction des œuvres modernes et le marché des traductions françaises aux États Unis” (pp. 64-65). This achievement was in part the result of the Bradleys’ well-attended salon on the Île Saint-Louis and their assiduous participation in those maintained by Natalie Clifford Barney on the rue Jacob and Gertrude Stein on the rue de Fleurus, all filled with modernist authors in need of a publisher. The Bradleys had good working relations with editors from Macmillan, Harper, Dodd Mead, and Knopf (Alfred and Blanche were close friends as well as colleagues) among others in New York, as well as from Calmann-Lévy, Flammarion, Gallimard, and Grasset among still more in Paris. With such important connections, the Bradleys served their authors well.

It did not take long, however, for French publishers to feel threatened. This concern arose when the agency’s commissions, as much as 20 percent of sales, came at their expense. Despite the Great Depression, the Bradleys reached their pinnacle of literary influence in the early 1930s, much to the ire of Parisian colleagues who also resented the Bradley’s poaching of their authors. This first occurred when Bradley decided to bring Charles Seignobos’s *Evolution of the French People* out in French translation in 1932, which met with the immediate opposition of Armand Colin. Even more trouble arose when Bradleys’ co-agents sought to cut them out of deals the agency had previously negotiated, as happened when Madeleine Boyd and Marion Saunders betrayed them in 1931. Then, there were mercurial authors like Dreiser and Stein who looked to push their own deals with publishers.

Very soon after the agency reached its peak, rapidly growing competition with new international agents like Michel Hoffman after 1934, Bill’s unexpected death in 1939, and another world war that same year required a major shift in operations. Jenny moved to New York during the Occupation where she continued the agency’s business at a much-reduced pace. But her return to Paris in 1944 opened a new chapter in transatlantic exchange. For the next 39 years, Jenny managed the agency with old authors like Margaret Mitchell (and the successive editions of her *Autant en emporte le vent*) and Colette, but also new ones like Dashiell Hammett (in the Série Noire of detective novels) and Jean-Paul Sartre (*No Exit* in particular). Jenny also arranged for book-

club, movie, and television rights that considerably enhanced the agency's influence and bottom line. *Les Trente Glorieuses* were an auspicious period for much more than the French economy.

Cossu-Beaumont's work is inclusive in its attention to women and African American authors. Bill and Jenny played a particularly important role in the intense circle of female authors during and after the interwar period. Besides Colette, Stein, and Nin, there were Isadora Duncan, Anita Loos, Georgette LeBlanc, Janet Flanner, and Alice B. Toklas. The same is true of Bill's critical support for Claude McKay, providing generous advances and professional advice, at a crucial time in the writer's career. In addition to McKay and Baldwin (much later), the agency also represented Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Chester Himes. Indeed, the literary side to the Harlem Renaissance and its legacy would have passed almost unnoticed in France without the Bradley Agency's timely intervention.[1] The agency may well have also mitigated the worst of the anti-Americanism in France before and after World War II.

While Cossu-Beaumont expertly identifies the many contracts the agency negotiated, there are times when the transatlantic component disappears. This is most obvious in her accounts of the Bradleys' work with Irish and British authors like James Joyce, Ford Maddox Ford, and D.H. Lawrence. Here the English-speaking world seems conflated. The same imprecision arises in the absence of the intercultural role played by translators. Translation Studies as a field of inquiry notes the critically important function of translation's mediation of texts and the cultures they represent. As H.M. Parshley mangled the English version of Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*, for example, he inexplicably cut more than ten percent of the text.[2]

But Cossu-Beaumont's historical insights stand on their own merits in her well-executed study detailing the remarkable cultural traffic between two countries. Indeed, as this work documents well, thanks to the many publications brokered by the Bradley Agency, the American century in France was also something of the French century in the US.[3]

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), pp. 56-68 and pp. 190-213, documenting a community that was otherwise isolated from French literary culture.

[2] According to Elizabeth A. Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: What's Missing from *The Second Sex*" in *On Ne Naît Pas Femme, On Le Devient: The Life of a Sentence*, ed. Bonnie Mann and Martina Ferrari (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), pp. 59-70.

[3] See also Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, "They Paved the Atlantic with Books': William and Jenny Bradley, Literary Agents and Cultural *Passeurs* Across Borders," *Transatlantica*, no. 1 (2023) at <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.20686>

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