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**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF
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FRENCH**



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'NÈGRES BLANCS'

The collocation 'nègres blancs' or some expression of the idea occurs in certain nineteenth-century texts I have come across with the implication that it is a white man who is reduced in some way to the level of the stereotypical black. The roles are reversed, however, in the phenomenon of blacks fondly aspiring to whiteness as a late twist of the colonialist knife, and the debate about this concept suddenly flourishes in the mid-twentieth century. Subsequent writers have taken the question a stage further. In presenting my interim findings and reflexions to date (which do not extend to north America), I am keen to learn of other instances of the use of the term, particularly in literature.

Current use of the phrase 'nègre blanc' or its equivalent in English or indigenous African languages suggests primarily that a black person is in some way aping the customs or attitudes of whites. Depending on speaker and circumstance, it might be neutrally descriptive or, more probably, a derogatory expression of the alienation affecting the person concerned. The process of colonialist acculturation, sometimes topped up by a sojourn in Europe, gives rise to perceptible differences in habits and expectations, and these in turn may be seen as snobbery vis-à-vis the indigenous community and condemned or ridiculed accordingly. Factually, for example, it was proper to refer to Senghor as 'un Français noir' (a variant of 'nègre blanc'), but the

phrase was more often used by his fellow blacks as a charge against him for espousing and indeed mastering French values, a fine irony for one of the leading proponents of Negritude. Such a sense of the term implies both the arrival at a particular stage in the history of colonialism and a simultaneous pride in the indigenous society born of an awareness of shared traditions and values (in certain sophisticated quarters revived by Negritude). Earlier uses of the phrase will, by definition, reflect the different assumptions and prejudices of the relevant period.

A secondary usage of the collocation relates, physiologically, to a reduced degree of melanine in pigmentation. Albinos form a category apart, as does the whitening of the skin for ritual purposes, but in general the paler the skin the greater the esteem. Hence miscegenation intended to produce offspring paler than the darker, less highly considered parent.¹ In the West Indies in particular, as Césaire and others have recorded in respect of Haiti, mulattoes formed a separate category from either blacks or whites and were as disdainful of the former as the latter were of them.² The frequency of reference in the Antilles to quadroons and octaroons is a measure of the importance attached to degrees of genetic admixture.

¹Cf. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Seuil, 1952, Coll. Points, 1975, p.94: '[...] mes frères, nègres comme moi [...] me rejettent. Eux sont presque blancs. Et puis ils vont épouser une Blanche. Ils auront des enfants légèrement bruns... Qui sait, petit à petit, peut-être...']

²Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture: la Révolution française et le problème colonial*, Paris: Club français du livre, 1960, Présence africaine, 1962, 1981. The book is significantly divided into three sections: 'La Fronde des grands blancs', 'La Révolte mulâtre' and 'La Révolution nègre'.

In Africa, where those of mixed race were and are less common, the gradation is more gradual, but soaps and similar products which lighten the skin, even when known to be dangerous because mercury-based, are in widespread use.

I have not come across the term 'nègre blanc' in my readings of early travel writing, documentation on slavery or the slave trade, or in related literature from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, but I cannot claim that, however extensive, they have been exhaustive. It may well be that I have been looking in the wrong place and should rather have been investigating metropolitan French writing not primarily concerned with such matters. This is suggested by such examples of the idea that I have found in nineteenth-century works and which prove to be exclusively 'albocentric'.

*
* *

The earliest occurrence of the term 'nègres blancs' that I have found is in Hugo's *Châtiments*, V, 7, 'Les Grands Corps de l'État' (dated 'Jersey. Juin 1853.' but actually written on 23 November 1852 and first published in 1853), from which I quote the first three verses of twelve:

Ces hommes passeront comme un ver sur le sable.
Qu'est-ce que tu ferais de leur sang méprisable?
Le dégoût rend clément.
Retenons la colère âpre, ardente, électrique.
Peuple, si tu m'en crois, tu prendras une trique
Au jour du châtiment.

Ô de Soulouque-deux burlesque cantonnade!
Ô ducs de Trou-Bonbon, marquis de Cassonnade,
Souteneurs du larron,
Vous dont la Poésie, ou sublime ou mordante
Ne sait que faire, gueux, trop grotesques pour Dante,
Trop sanglants pour Scarron,

Ô jongleurs, noirs par l'âme et par la servitude,
Vous vous imaginez un lendemain trop rude,
Vous êtes trop tremblants,
Vous croyez qu'on en veut, dans l'exil où nous sommes,
À cette peau qui fait qu'on vous prend pour des hommes;
Calmez-vous, nègres blancs!

The invective is directed at Louis Napoleon's ministers, considered here to be no better than the parody of a parody. Louis Napoleon had, with Hugo's support, been elected president in December 1848, but lost that support when he led a *coup d'état* three years later. In December 1852, he was proclaimed emperor as Napoleon III. Justin Soulouque (1782-1867) was a nineteenth-century Bokassa: after becoming president of Haiti in 1847, he was proclaimed Emperor two years later as Faustin I in direct imitation of Napoleon I. 'Il s'était commandé à Paris une couronne, un trône et un costume impérial. [...] Il avait créé un ordre de Saint-Faustin, dont les titulaires avaient reçu des titres extravagants, tels que: duc de Trou-Bonbon, duc de Limonade, comte de Numéro-Deux.'³ In Soulouque's defence, it must be

³Pierre Albouy in his edition of Hugo's poems: *Œuvres poétiques*, Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, vol. II, 1967, pp.1044, 1063. For the text of the poem see p.123. Elsewhere in the collection, Louis Napoleon and Soulouque are linked no less disparagingly by Hugo:

said that these are not fanciful inventions of his but real place names in Haiti.⁴ Napoleon III, elsewhere nicknamed Napoleon-le-Petit by Hugo, is here called Soulouque II; and the idea that his henchmen (of whom several are named subsequently in the poem) are spiritually depraved and abjectly subservient ('noirs par l'âme et par la servitude') leads to the clinching phrase which ends the third verse: 'nègres blancs'. It is logically prepared by the use of the adjective 'noirs' and the reference to 'peau', making the inside black in a traditionally symbolic way while the outside remains physically white. Yet it is ironic that Hugo, a champion of the oppressed, should revert to a stereotype implicitly denying blacks human rights and dignity.

'Nègre / Blanc' also occurs in the enigmatic monosyllabic-lined poem 'Le Pauvre Diable', attributed to Baudelaire 'mis au défi dans un salon de faire un poème épique en vers d'un pied'.⁵ I quote the first four quatrains of eighteen:

Aujourd'hui, dans Paris, un prince de la pègre,
Un pied plat, copiant Faustin, singe d'un nègre,
[...] Chasse l'honneur [...]. (*Châtiments*, IV, 11: p.109)

⁴Haiti also sports a Marmelade; and there is a No 2 in Sierra Leone. Drafts of Hugo's poem include reference to 'marquis de Limonade' and 'comtes de Marmelade' (see *Œuvres poétiques*, II, 1061). It will be recalled that Hugo's first novel, *Bug-Jargal* (written 1818, published 1826), is set in Haiti, the eponymous hero being modelled on Toussaint Louverture.

⁵See Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1975, vol. I, p.217 and relevant note, p.1247. The text was first published posthumously, in 1878.

Père
Las!
Mère
Pas.

Erre
Sur
Terre...
Dur!...

Maigre
Flanc,
Nègre
Blanc,

Blême!
Pas
Même
Gras.

The form and style of the poem scarcely allow precise definition. The term here seems broadly to reiterate 'le pauvre diable' of the title, but nothing suggests that he is other than white. As with Hugo's use of the collocation therefore, the adjective has substantival force while the noun functions rather as an adjective.

This is also true of the most celebrated nineteenth-century use of the idea (though the collocation is not used as such) which occurs in the 'Mauvais sang' section of Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer* — which he referred to as his 'Livre nègre'⁶

⁶Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. A. Adam, Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1972, p.267.

— where the personal pronouns manifestly (and necessarily for the effect sought) relate to whites:

Je suis une bête, un nègre. Mais je puis être sauvé. Vous êtes de faux nègres, vous maniaques, féroces, avarés. Marchand, tu es nègre; magistrat, tu es nègre; général, tu es nègre; empereur, vieille démangeaison, tu es nègre: tu as bu une liqueur non taxée, de la fabrique de Satan. [...] J'entre au vrai royaume des enfants de Cham.⁷

Commentaries abound.⁸ Attention has notably been drawn to two related documents in which the collocation does figure. The first is a letter written by Rimbaud from Harar to his mother and sister on 25 February 1890: 'Les gens du Harar ne sont ni plus bêtes, ni plus canailles que les nègres blancs des pays

⁷Rimbaud, p.97. Adam's note, p.957 ('Les magistrats et les généraux sont de faux nègres en ce sens que ce sont des nègres déguisés en blancs.') is singularly unilluminating. There is no question of Rimbaud anticipating here the members of the court in Genet's *Les Nègres*. Rimbaud is no less dismissive of 'nègres stupides' (*Œuvres complètes*, p.611) than most of his contemporaries. Colonialist writers of the period were sometimes, of course, excessive in the opposite direction, fanning the flames of (often erotic) fantasy: see Hugh Ridley, *Images of Imperialist Rule*, London: Croom Helm; New York: St Martin's, 1983.

⁸Apart from the numerous critical editions, see notably Michel Courtois, 'Le Mythe du nègre chez Rimbaud', *Littérature*, 11 (octobre 1973), pp.85-101; Margaret Davies, 'Une Saison en enfer' d'Arthur Rimbaud: analyse du texte, Paris: Minard, Archives des Lettres Modernes 155, 1975, esp. pp.31-33; J. A. Ferguson, "'Noirs inconnus": The Identity and Function of the Negro in Rimbaud's Poetry and Correspondence', *French Studies*, XXXIX, 1 (Jan. 1985), 43-58; Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en enfer*, édition critique par Pierre Brunel, Paris: Corti, 1987, esp. pp.224-25; Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1985, chapter on Rimbaud; Yoshikazu Nakaji, *Combat spirituel ou immense dérision? Essai d'analyse textuelle d'Une Saison en enfer*, Paris: Corti, 1987, pp.57-59.

dits civilisés [...]'.⁹ The second is when Verlaine, in *Dédicaces*, laments the death of his friend in a sonnet:

À Arthur Rimbaud,
d'après un dessin de sa sœur le représentant en costume oriental

Des climats perdus me tanneront.
A. Rimbaud: *La Saison en enfer*. [sic]

Toi mort, mort, mort! Mais mort du moins tel que tu veux,
En nègre blanc, en sauvage splendidement
Civilisé, civilisant négligemment...
Ah, mort! Vivant plutôt en moi de mille feux [...].¹⁰

Verlaine's gloss on the term 'nègre blanc' as he understands it ('en sauvage splendidement / Civilisé') would appear to be the first occasion on which noun and adjective have their normal role, yet Rimbaud, the white man, is unambiguously the subject of the portrait and the yardstick for measuring civilised behaviour remains firmly European.

Of the episode in *Une Saison en enfer*, Suzanne Bernard notes in her edition of Rimbaud: 'De faux nègres, c'est-à-dire des nègres déguisés en blancs',¹¹

⁹*Œuvres complètes*, p.612. Cf. p.656, where Rimbaud complains to his mother of 'la rage continuelle au milieu de nègres aussi bêtes que canailles' (letter of 20 February 1891).

¹⁰Verlaine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec, Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1954, p.432, but (see p.1085) with the original title and epigraph restored from the first publication of the text in *La Plume* (15 février 1893), the fact that Rimbaud was portrayed in Oriental costume being significant. The second line is often quoted out of context, with a consequent distortion of meaning. Alain Borer suggests without further comment that in Europe Rimbaud was considered a 'nègre blanc': see *Rimbaud d'Arabie: supplément au voyage, essai*, Paris: Seuil, 1991, p.67.

¹¹I can see no strict sense in which Rimbaud evokes 'des nègres déguisés en blancs'. See note 7 above.

plus nègres, plus méchants que les véritables. [...] Le sarcasme de Rimbaud rejoint ici le scepticisme exprimé par Montaigne dans son chapitre sur les Cannibales...'.¹² Margaret Davies, acknowledging the 'Christian' dimension, none the less concentrates on the social features of the text.¹³ Pierre Brunel comes to rather different conclusions in distinguishing three types of *nègre* as represented by Rimbaud, to the second of which he attributes the title 'nègre blanc':

1. Le nègre païen.

C'est celui du «vrai royaume des enfants de Cham», donc celui qui a encore toute sa pureté originelle. Il peut être sauvé, ou plus exactement il ne peut être damné parce qu'il a les yeux fermés à la lumière des chrétiens.

2. Le nègre blanc, ou le faux nègre

Il est faux parce qu'il ne peut pas, il ne peut plus être païen. Il est voué à l'enfer, il y croit. Il a «bu d'une liqueur non taxée, de la fabrique de Satan», c'est-à-dire la croyance même à l'enfer, ce «poison» dont il est plusieurs fois question dans la Saison. La «fièvre» est le feu de l'enfer, le «cancer» représente les tortures de l'enfer et la vision d'anthropophagie, — ou mieux, d'anthropo-cuisson —, se superpose aisément à celle d'un «Enfer» où [«]damnés sont bouillus» (Villon).

3. Le nouveau nègre

Il n'est autre que le Blanc qui s'embarque pour l'Afrique. Il rêve de s'identifier avec cette humanité qu'il croit primitive, et pour cela il pratiquera tous les rites

¹²Rimbaud, *Œuvres*, (revised) ed. S. Bernard & A. Guyaux, Paris: Garnier, 1987, p.462, n.25.

¹³In her words (p.32), Rimbaud 'renverse l'accusation dont la société l'a accablé contre elle-même, à tel point que c'est elle qui souffre de tous les vices qu'il vient d'admettre et qui en est peut-être même leur cause.'

tribaux: il crie, il frappe sur un tambour, il danse, il mange de la chair humaine. [...] Faux nègre, cerné par les Blancs comme les colonisés eux-mêmes, comment échapperait-il à la civilisation chrétienne qu'il a voulu fuir?¹⁴

Bernard's understanding of Rimbaud's 'nègre blanc' has a broad socio-ethical leaning against Davies' social one, whereas Brunel's lies specifically within the moral context of Judeo-Christian mythology but seems to assume, as far as the 'faux nègre' is concerned, that he is genuinely black, whereas everything in the text suggests that he is white but tarred with the brush of conventional contempt for the negro. All rightly take some account of Rimbaud's awareness of and indeed participation in the processes of late nineteenth-century colonialism. It goes unmentioned, no doubt because such an assumption has now become an embarrassment, that Rimbaud is alluding to a stereotype of the black as a lesser breed, reduced by him as by so many others before and since to the state of 'une bête'. Again, however, this assumption is necessary to the argument presented by the poet, which relies for its effect on stereotypical attitudes both towards the 'nigger' and towards the pillars of bourgeois respectability represented (in ascending order of social importance) by the upholders of commerce, the law, the army and the empire.¹⁵ As Ferguson justly remarks, Rimbaud 'is

¹⁴Brunel, pp.224-25. The last category is amplified by Brunel but in a way not directly germane to the present purpose.

¹⁵Around the 1880s, the more fiery Irish nationalists (notably in the U.S.A.) were known as the 'black Irish', a label also given in a quite different, literally

less concerned to promote an edifying impression of the Ethiopian black than to criticize what he perceives as the hypocrisy of the white European. [...] In such a way, the term "nègre" assumes a dual connotative function, signifying not only opposition to Western life, but also the corruption and dissimulation which, in Rimbaud's view, exist at the heart of its value-system.¹⁶

Out of this chronological order, I have left the case of Madame de Duras's *Ourika* (1823) in which the eponymous heroine is a negress transported at an early age to an exclusively white world. Inadequacy of interpretation is compounded by self-contradiction in Fanoudh-Siefer's reading of the novella. After various dismissive remarks about the work's quality, he observes that 'l'Ourika de Mme de Duras n'a d'une négresse que la couleur', as if that were a minor problem in French society of the time.¹⁷ The extent of the critic's psycho-sociological misapprehension may be seen by his subsequent rhetorical question: 'Il est vrai qu'Ourika a grandi en France, élevée par des

accurate, context to the inhabitants of Montserrat in the West Indies resulting from interbreeding between Irish colonists and the indigenous population. As Eric Williams observes: 'Montserrat became largely an Irish colony, and the Irish brogue is still frequently heard today in many parts of the British West Indies.' *Capitalism and Slavery*, London: Deutsch, 1964, p. 13. First published 1944.

¹⁶Ferguson, pp.47, 54. Cf. Courtois (p.85): 'Toute une clé de la démarche de Rimbaud aboutit au Nègre comme figure privilégiée de l'altérité voulue, ou même la seule altérité possible mais en même temps interdite'.

¹⁷Léon Fanoudh-Siefer, *Le Mythe du nègre et de l'Afrique noire dans la littérature française (de 1800 à la 2^e guerre mondiale)*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1968, p.27.

Français, mais peut-on admettre facilement de l'entendre parler, comme les grandes dames du XVIII^e siècle, une langue précieuse qui suppose une mentalité, une tournure d'esprit non africaine?' There is in such a comment a disturbingly racist implication that by nature the black is genetically so different from the white that nurture and environment from early childhood should have no effect. It is precisely because Ourika has nothing but the colour of an African about her that she is condemned to sterility and dismay in Europe, both a return to Africa and marriage in France being practically and sociologically impossible for her. Being made aware that she is a 'white black' is thus the key to Ourika's dilemma, yet it is a situation not of her choosing but imposed upon her. Being black in reality, her position is different from all the other 'nègres blancs' we have traced in nineteenth-century writings, a fact which aligns her case with those of the mid-twentieth century and so gives the tale an exceptionally modern ring. What is remarkable is that one of the leading aristocrats of the day, the Duchesse de Duras, seemingly the very personification of conservative white values, should have shown such extraordinary psychological penetration in projecting upon Ourika's character the anguish of a dilemma caused, as Césaire was to recognise, by colour alone.¹⁸

¹⁸See Claire de Durfort, duchesse de Duras, *Ourika*, ed. Roger Little, Seyssel: Champ vallon (forthcoming). As for Césaire's reaction, mediated through the characters of *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, see my note 'A Further Unacknowledged Quotation in Césaire: Echoes of *Ourika*', *French Studies Bulletin*, forthcoming.

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Among those French writers who took an interest in 'black' affairs in the first half of the twentieth century, it may be that embarrassment inclined them away from any truck with the concept of 'nègres blancs'. I find no trace of the concept in Cendrars or Breton, for example. The solemn stirrings of Negritude in the 1930s sought to affirm pride in the Afro-Caribbean heritage and in being black. It brought on to the world stage the notion that blackness might be a valid standpoint for independent identity, an equal and legitimate criterion for judgement, the mark of a civilisation parallel rather than inferior to one which had dominated by force of technology and arms. 'Que les Nègres se nègrent', declaims Archibald in Genet's *Les Nègres*.¹⁹ In context, however, this means less that they should fulfil themselves as human beings who happen to be black than that they should conform as completely as possible to the image of them projected by the whites. Being black should in theory require no sanction from the white world, any more than whites depend for their being-in-the-world on black criteria. Yet both Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin and others have testified to their self-awareness as blacks being created

¹⁹*Les Nègres*, Paris: Gallimard, Coll. Folio, 1980, p.60. First published 1959. Earlier in the play (pp.30-31), Archibald says: 'Le tragique sera dans la couleur noire! C'est elle que vous chérez, rejoindrez, mériterez. C'est elle qu'il faudra gagner.' This too is less a pæan to Negritude than the recognition of a self-fulfilling white view of blacks.

in contradistinction to whites.²⁰ The analysis proposed by Octave Mannoni in *Prospéro et Caliban: psychologie de la colonisation* (1950), however, seems to correspond to a situation in which the advent of Negritude was superfluous because the natives had never lost their sense of identity and self-esteem, and that such a hypothetical loss was part of an elaborate and convenient white fiction.²¹ Most commentators would rather side with Sartre who saw Negritude as a 'prise de conscience' or with Mudimbe who encapsulates it as 'cette extraordinaire protestation contre la réification du Nègre'.²²

In *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), Fanon probed the psycho-sociological role of skin pigmentation to the point where a few years later Genet could ask in *Les Nègres* (1959) the amusing but searching question: 'Mais, qu'est-ce que c'est donc

²⁰See Fanon, *Peau noire...*, p.93: 'Je suis sur-déterminé de l'extérieur. Je ne suis pas l'esclave de «l'idée» que les autres ont de moi, mais de mon apparaître. [...] Déjà les regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis fixé. [...] Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n'est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais un nouveau type d'homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi!' For Baldwin, see J. P. Little, *Genet: 'Les Nègres'*, London: Grant & Cutler, Critical Guides to French Texts 80, 1990, p.20: 'Je n'étais pas un Noir, jusqu'à ce que l'Europe vienne me chercher dans mon village. J'avais la seule civilisation qu'un être humain puisse avoir: celle de mon village. La violence de ma rencontre avec l'Europe a fait de moi un Noir [...].'

²¹The original title (Paris: Seuil, 1950) was simply *Psychologie de la colonisation*. This became the sub-title for the 1984 edition (Paris: Éditions universitaires) after *Prospéro et Caliban* was used as the title for the 1956 and 1964 English-language editions (New York & London: Praeger).

²²Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Orphée noir', in *Anthologie de la poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, ed. L. S. Senghor, Paris: P.U.F., 1969 (first published 1948), p.xi and V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'Odeur du père: essai sur des limites de la science et de la vie en Afrique noire*, Paris: Présence africaine, 1982, p.36.

un noir? Et d'abord, c'est de quelle couleur?'²³ To some extent, this had been anticipated by Sartre's enquiry in his seminal preface to Senghor's 1948 *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*: 'Qu'est-ce que la négritude? ... Est-ce une donnée de fait ou une valeur?' and by equally pertinent observations in Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* (1957). The black actors playing the Court in *Les Nègres* wear white masks, and the author requests, in the event of there being no white member of the audience, 'qu'on distribue au public noir à l'entrée de la salle des masques de Blancs'.²⁴ It is as if his starting-point were a dramatic realisation of the very title of Fanon's book *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Their fate, however, is to realise the hollowness of the ceremonial, not to be themselves. They embody the other; the mask remains a mask; the Court has not been tamed by becoming 'nègres blancs' in any sense beyond the surface mummery. They are as condemned to project the white man's stereotype of the black through the dramatic ritual conceived by a European as are Rimbaud's 'nègres blancs'. Both authors embody the rebellion of the 'outsider', and sympathy with those who live at society's margins is manifest in both. Yet just as Rimbaud was primarily concerned with European values and responses, so too

²³*Les Nègres*, p.15. See also J. P. Little, esp. pp.15-24. I am grateful to Dr Little for her comments on a draft of the present essay.

²⁴*Les Nègres*, p.15. Genet is precise in his requirements for 'la Cour' (p.20): 'Chaque acteur en sera un Noir masqué dont le masque est un visage de Blanc posé de telle façon qu'on voie une large bande noire autour, et même les cheveux crépus.'

is Genet, who declares roundly in his prefatory note: 'Cette pièce, je le répète, écrite par un Blanc, est destinée à un public de Blancs.'

Genet was to declare in 1975: 'Je suis peut-être un noir qui a les couleurs blanches ou roses, mais un noir.'²⁵ Such an approach involves a sophisticated and laudable, if ambiguous, colour-blindness on the one hand and, paradoxically on the other, a reversion to the 'albo-centric' nineteenth-century view — minus the psycho-sociological disdain — which equates white with black rather than the other way round. A further instance of this is found in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's comment that 'the Irish are perfect examples of white blacks'.²⁶

The far more usual frame of reference for the modern use of the term 'nègre blanc' or the related ideas of the 'sanction blanche' and the 'blanchissement du noir' as set out by Fanon is 'nigrocentric'.²⁷ Conor Cruise O'Brien, following Fanon in reverse in his use of the phrase 'white man in a black mask', sceptically

²⁵'La Fin dernière d'une révolte' (Jean Genet interviewed by Hubert Fichte, 19-21 December 1975), *Magazine littéraire*, 174 (juin 1981), p.26.

²⁶'Making the Millenium [sic]', *Graph* [Dublin], 1 (Oct. 1986), p.9. In this interview with Michael Cronin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill acknowledges her debt to Fanon as can be seen by setting the fragment quoted in context: 'Yes, we're a perfect example of the effects of colonialism. I remember reading *The Damned of the Earth* when I was about 18 or 19 and saying to myself, you don't have to go to Africa to see that. The Irish are perfect examples of white blacks, and I don't mean that in any racist sense. But ultimately the whole post-colonial thing is no excuse. We've been a self-determining entity for quite a while now and it's about time that we copped onto ourselves.'

²⁷In *Peau noire...*, esp. chapters 2 ('La femme de couleur et le Blanc') and 3 ('L'homme de couleur et la Blanche').

posits two types, one a product of the colonial process, the other a suborned quisling, while recognising that gradations exist between the two: "White man in a black mask" may be a black man who has "internalized" white attitudes. Alternatively the black man may be the bought mask of the white man. There are intermediate cases; I believe Tshombe was one.'²⁸

One of Fanon's major preoccupations was the question of identity and self-definition, both for himself and on behalf of black people, following his realisation that his own self-image and the perception of him by whites failed scandalously to tally. 'That man is to the extent that he is recognized, that he can be for himself only when and as he is for another, raised the double question of the nature of this dependence and the relevance of the nature of the Other. Identity, or rather the consciousness of Self, was intimately linked with recognition.'²⁹ Fanon's debt to Hegel, and notably to the section on lordship and bondage in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, coincided with the importance given to the master-servant paradigm not simply with regard to the colonial relationship by Memmi and others but also more generally to all human relations, political and otherwise, by those who were centrally responsible

²⁸*Murderous Angels*, London: Hutchinson, 1969, p.xxix, footnote.

²⁹Irene L. Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*, London: Wildwood House, 1973, p.23. My paragraph draws more generally on chapter 2 of Grendzier's valuable study.

for creating the philosophical climate of the time: Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty...

The development of these points in relation to the concept of the 'nègre blanc' would warrant a book. It is neither necessary nor appropriate in present circumstances to dwell on so well-rehearsed an area of study as that which surrounds the writings of Fanon and contemporary philosophers. It is appropriate before concluding, however, to indicate the importance of the idea as a theme in Francophone writings by black authors from René Maran onwards. Exploring the confrontation of black and white is the dominant preoccupation of such novelists, for example, up to independence (and sometimes beyond). Titles such as *Un Nègre à Paris* (by Bernard Dadié, 1959) and *L'Aventure ambiguë* (by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, 1961) betoken a programme exploring the stresses of exposure to an alien culture with different (and generally increasing) degrees of sophistication. Samba Diallo's fatal dilemma in the latter novel is complicated by the specific clash between Islam and materialism, but his untenable position is clearly stated. It is one in which he cannot adopt the role of a 'nègre blanc' which, for all its integrative appearance, is in fact culturally and psychologically divisive. In a chapter significantly set in Paris, he declares:

Je ne suis pas un pays des Diallobé distinct, face à un Occident distinct, et appréciant d'une tête froide ce que je puis lui prendre et ce qu'il faut que je lui laisse en

contrepartie. Je suis devenu les deux. Il n'y a pas une tête lucide entre deux termes d'un choix. Il y a une nature étrange en détresse de n'être pas deux.³⁰

Similarly, though with no religious gulf to bridge and a less overtly philosophical stance, V. Y. Mudimbe's post-independence novel *L'Écart* (1979), makes the framework of exile chime with a forceful presentation of schizophrenia.

That colonisation should have produced schizoid reactions is scarcely surprising. For literary purposes, the confrontation involved offers a facilitating structural framework. Quality of analysis ranges from the crudest of what I have dubbed 'banana westerns' to the most sophisticated and subtle of explorations, and it might not unreasonably be said that almost all the 'black' Francophone novels of the period from 1948 to 1968 tackle this confrontation of black with white, and of Africa with Europe, to a greater or lesser degree. Since the appearance of Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* in 1968 — the fact of independence having made colonialist themes redundant — the white world has been shown to be irrelevant as a point of reference. This literary (as well as socio-political) assumption of responsibility, however compromised by neo-colonialist economic constraints, suggests that the term 'nègres blancs' will likewise lose its active force

³⁰Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Paris: Julliard, 1961, Coll. 10/18, 1971, p.164.

and become a phrase of the past. Only insofar as prejudice has an alarming capacity for survival will that be wishful thinking.

The occurrences of 'nègres blancs' which I have presented show it to be a shifting concept mirroring the attitudes and preoccupations of the different periods to the point where adjective first became noun and vice versa before resuming their more usual grammatical role. It would be interesting to know whether other instances of the collocation exist and, if so, whether they conform to the pattern of nineteenth-century usage where whites are despised by analogy with the contemporary contempt for blacks, to the basic twentieth-century reference to blacks seeking self-affirmation through some mimicking of white society, or to the more sophisticated 'colour-blindness' which acknowledges a common humanity and investigates the real problems rather than the superficial ones.

Roger Little

Trinity College, Dublin

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Society for Caribbean Studies: 1991 Conference Report

The Society for Caribbean Studies held its fifteenth annual conference from the 2nd to the 4th of July 1991, devoting a full day to commemorating the bicentenary of the Haitian revolution.

A session on *Haiti: Between Africa and Europe* included a paper on voodoo and a stimulating illustrated analysis by C. Herman Middelani (Bielefeld) of caricatures of Soulouque by Daumier and others, with racial stereotypes used as ammunition against Napoleon III. Historical discussions on the Black Jacobins, slave resistance, etc., were followed by a viewing of Pablo Bitcher's colour slides of the mural painting produced in support of Aristide's election campaign. With comments from very well-informed observers such as David Nicholls and Gregg Chamberlain, and a look at the Irish Television short series on Aristide, we gained a painful sense of the fragile vitality of the new, democratically elected regime.

While not dealing specifically with the French territories, several papers relating to the "Construction of Gender" both during slavery and in the contemporary period, were of interest. Dr Helen Hintjens, a political scientist who has specialised in the *Départements d'outremer*, is now on the SCS committee.

Note: Another slide show, with discussion, of the Haitian mural painting was arranged for November 19th 1991 at the Institute of Latin American Studies, 31 Tavistock Square, London WC1. This formed part of the seminar series on Caribbean societies, run i.a. by Dr Jean Stubbs, co-ordinator of a new interdisciplinary degree programme in Caribbean Studies at the Polytechnic of North London.

Bridget Jones
Roehampton Institute

The 1991 APELA conference in Nice

Littérature et Maladie

Some 50 delegates from as far afield as South Africa and America descended on Nice for the annual gathering of the *Association pour l'étude de la littérature africaine* on the 20-21 September 1991.

Nice was described by Jacqueline Bardolph, one of the organisers, as "La Province de la Province", but nonetheless had the feel of a major European centre basking in the late summer heat. Anne Fuchs had found some cheap, comfortable hotels very conveniently situated for the *Faculté des Lettres*, the city centre and the beach on the other side of the famous Promenade, which should perhaps be renamed the *Autoroute des Anglais*. The only practical hitches were no fault of the organisers: strikes by the SNCF on the day before the conference and by the municipal

bus service on the opening day. As someone remarked, "Cette ville a besoin d'un médecin..."

The conference was opened by the genial President of APELA, Claude Wauthier, who announced the regretted absence of Bernard Mouralis, its Secretary, because of a bereavement. Jean-Louis Joubert, APELA's Vice-President was visible only fleetingly, having to divide his time between this event and a gathering of *la francophonie* elsewhere in the city. Virginia Coulon, the treasurer of APELA, did brisk business selling copies of the conference papers of no less than three previous gatherings, published by L'Harmattan and Paul Dakeyo's *Nouvelles du Sud* (full details to appear in the next APELA bulletin).

The chair of the sessions rotated in an apparently random but efficient way, one chairperson vying with another in demonstrations of the good-humoured deployment of the stop-watch and the five-minute warning. Most delegates had a mere twenty minutes to present their papers, but this compared favourably with the ten at Villetaneuse the previous year, as did the quantity of circulated print-outs and the time allotted to discussion, which was usually vigorous and stimulating. The heat and the good humour reminded me irresistibly of similar events in Africa.

The opening papers by Jean Dérive (Chambéry) and Claude Haxaire (CNRS Paris), respectively ethnolinguistic and ethnopharmacological, looked at the role of sickness in a range of traditional African folk-tales and in the social system of the Gouro people of southern Ivory Coast. This should have been

followed by a similar study of the Kissi people in Guinea, by an APELA-sponsored visitor from Conakry, Aly-Gilbert Iffono, but his flight was delayed and we had to wait till the following afternoon to hear his paper. The morning, devoted to orature and to African languages was rounded off by a study from Wlena Bertoncini (Naples) of the theme of sickness in the Swahili writings of the Tanzanian novelist Kezilahabi.

A convoy of cars and minibuses led by François Desplanques took us to lunch at the *Faculté de Droit* on a different, adjacent hilltop and miraculously brought us all back more or less on time, despite the mid-day sun, for the afternoon session devoted principally to papers on madness. Pierre Halen (Louvain) described the white man's grave, Belgian-style, in colonial literature about the Congo, and Janos Reisz (Bayreuth) the abundant literary examples of madness among the *Tirailleurs sénégalais* repatriated after the First World War, notably the Sarzan story by Birago Diop. Barbara Ischinger (Cologne) described alcoholism and debauchery as sickness in Senegalese works such as Ken Bugul's *Le Baobab fou*, provoking accusations of Islamic bias from anglophone Africanists citing Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine drunkard*. Cornélie Kunze (Leipzig) stirred up further protest by reviving the controversy about Camara Laye's authorship of *Le Regard du roi*: her candidate for the "real" author was Michel Leiris, which she justified by comparisons with *L'Afrique fantôme*. Two Frenchwomen from American universities, Sonia Lee (Hartford) and Odile Cazenave (Tennessee) traced the theme of madness in the works of women writers from Africa - Aminata Sow Fall, Mariama Bâ, Ken Bugul

and the Caribbean - Myriam Warner Vieyra. If this was not enough for a day, drinks and snacks were available to sustain the delegates before an evening showing of the Jean Rouch film *Les Maîtres fous*, followed by a discussion chaired by Jean Sevry (Montpellier).

All but the faint-hearted were back at the *Fac* at 8.30 a.m. the following morning for the APELA A.G.M.. Anny Wynchank asked for the blessing of the association for a conference of relations between France and Africa at her home university of Cape Town on 9-11 September 1992: she defended her university's record on resistance to apartheid, and this was granted, not without some dissent. I was concerned myself that her conference would overlap with our own event in London, tentatively arranged for the 11th -14th September (see notices for further details). I managed to ensure that next year's APELA day workshop, to be held in Paris at an unspecified venue, would take place on Saturday 19th: the theme was to be "*Écriture et Littérature orale*". September 1992 will be Small World month, with the conference on *Ethnography and Film*, featuring Jean Rouch, at the University of Warwick on the 25th -26th. I hope we shall tempt a few Africans, not to mention North Americans, to join us at the feast.

The second day's papers began with a lively and provocative challenge by Simon Battestini (Georgetown) to the received view that Sub-Saharan African cultures did not develop writing: he mentioned various examples of colonial repression of African writing systems, and with an apparently supernatural access to their library catalogues, listed a

number of medical treatises found in ancient African universities from Alexandria to Timbuktu. Not everyone was convinced, least of all Claude Haxaire, whose research work was entirely devoted to chronicling oral medical traditions in West Africa. Jacques Chevrier was on safer ground describing the theme of sickness and physical handicap in the novels of his most favoured author, Williams Sassine, and there were similar expositions on Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* by Nicole Yaschelde from Abidjan, and on Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* by Daniel Delas from Paris X. Romuald Fonkoua (Lille) concluded the morning's proceedings with a succinct and forceful summary of a long paper on what he described as *antillocondrie*, or the morbidity endemic in Caribbean writing from Fanon to Maximin.

The final long hot afternoon began with Arlette Chemiain's broad survey of sickness as a narrative function in a wide cross-section of works from Oyono to Beyala. Anny Wynchank (Cape Town) and Mme Kazi-Toni (Algiers) both predictably re-opened Malick Fall's *La Plaie*, the latter in comparison with works by Kateb Yacine. In the second, final session, Richard Bjornson examined the metaphor of sickness and the therapeutic value of *théâtre-rituel* in the writings of Werewere Liking, whilst Marie-Rose Abomo-Mvondo looked at sickness as a metaphor of moral destabilisation in a number of works. Bjornson's account of the work of Werewere Liking provoked a lot of comment, both sympathetic and hostile, on her past and present theatrical ventures. I myself pointed out with some irony that for her, the western-style university education of Africans was one of the sicknesses she hoped to cure with her theatrical

workshops: "La maladie, c'est nous". There were some vain attempts to draw general conclusions from the two days' debates, but these were beyond even the diplomacy of Claude Wauthier, and the gathering broke up in good-humoured disarray.

The two days were rounded off by yet another food convoy, this time to the terrace of a modest bistrot up towards the hills behind Nice, nestling under a huge arched motorway viaduct, and serving *pastis*, local wine and a wholesome *daube à la niçoise*. The flavour was still in my mouth as, next morning, I flashed past overhead in the car on the long road back up the Rhône valley towards the autumn weather and the start of term in Bristol.

Peter Hawkins
University of Bristol

African Studies Association of the UK

Symposium on popular culture in Africa

The 1991 ASA symposium, held at Bath College of Higher Education was both lively and positive: as the President said in his closing address it was a pleasure to have a conference not around African problems, but rather around achievements; and in popular culture there is plenty to celebrate.

About 35 people attended, from a range of institutions and across an range of ages, but with a strong representation, particularly among the speakers, of relatively young people and of women. Topics

ranged from literacy programmes (Fred Aede, of the University of Reading, put the case both for a more sensitive understanding of specific cultural indicators, and for electronic printing techniques to increase legibility) to "other" forms of fiction in Nigeria and Kenya. Thus, Jane Bryce of the Commonwealth Institute, London, in a wide-ranging paper, discussed particularly the appeal of Pace-setters to a newly-literate and newly-urban readership seeking moral guidance in a setting in which the old rules no longer apply and gave rise to a fascinating discussion of the attraction of Mills and Boon romances for young women in Nairobi. Of particular theoretical interest was the paper by Mpalive Msiska (Bath College of Higher Education) on *Cultural Authenticity in African Popular Fiction*, discussing the different ways in which African fiction identifies with or resists Western culture. Michael Pennie's slide presentation of European art and African artifacts led to a discussion of the sliding definitions of "art" and of the ways in which European artists have seized on the forms rather than the functions of African art. Lucy Duran of the National Sound Archive began the day with a presentation of recent developments in Malian music, illustrated with slides and tapes and showing how the Jali-tradition of individual praise-singing, much encouraged under Moussa Traore (and capable at one sitting of producing rewards such as six Paris-Bamako return air-tickets, a villa, or, over a slightly longer period, sixteen Mercedes) is now being supplanted in popular taste by music such as that of the Wassoulou region, which is more participatory and not linked to the caste-system. Marion Barber effectively ended the day with a tour de force discussing Yoruba popular theatre. Drawing together

themes which had arisen throughout the day, she pointed out that popular culture is essentially a hybrid arising from different traditions. Her account of her own involvement in Yoruba popular theatre amply demonstrated this: from its origins in Church drama, Yoruba theatre has moved on to using props such as seven-foot teddy-bears in gingham aprons (!), and draws large audiences both in the city and in the countryside. She also showed how the drama essentially evolves in performance, with new elements being constantly added to each play; so that the only way effectively to study it, as with so much other popular culture, is to participate in it.

This was a well-organised day, and the only regret was that papers tended to run late and, under pressure of the audience's enthusiasm, to over-run, so that Roy Armes' paper on the Context of the African Film-maker, had to be cut very sadly short. There was vigorous but friendly discussion, with an apparent absence of the competitive overtones evident at some conferences. The surroundings were idyllic: a castle, an 18th century mansion (built on the proceeds of the slave-trade?) with cows browsing outside the windows of the lecture-theatre. The lunch was out of this world. Well worth the trek from Bath station.

Anna Ridehalgh
University of Southampton

Note:

The African Studies Association of the UK was founded in 1963 to promote lively debate in the academic study of Africa. It is open to anybody with

an interest in African studies. Membership entitles the holder to lower fees at all symposia and at the biennial conference, as well as a receipt of the influential quarterly journal, African Affairs.

A small additional fee entitles members to join the Royal African Society. They are then able to use the Royal Commonwealth Society's lending library. They will also receive the RAS meetings card and will be able to attend meetings organized by the RAS.

Recent symposia and conferences included: **December 1991:** African Presence in the UK (Joint with RAS at Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London); **June 1991:** South Africa: Post-Apartheid Society (London); **September 1990:** Peoples and Places (Biennial conference, Birmingham); **May 1990:** Francophone Africa (Oxford); .

Future symposia and conferences to include: **May 1992:** Borders in Africa (venue to be decided); **September 1992:** Order and Disorder in Africa (Biennial conference, Stirling).

Membership is £18 (ordinary); £21 (joint ASAUK/RAS); £9 (Student ordinary); £12 (Student joint ASAUK/RAS); £50 (corporate); £3 (Associate - no journal).

Further details and membership forms available from:

The Hon. Secretary, ASAUK
18, Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BJ
Tel 071 930 1662

Impressions of the ASCALF conference 1991

On Friday 29 November, the annual ASCALF conference opened with a welcome opportunity to greet old friends and new members over a glass of *Beaujolais Nouveau*. This was followed by a screening of Souleymane Cissé's *Finye*, a film which struck the audience as hauntingly prophetic in the light of recent events in West Africa.

Day two of the conference began with guest speaker, Jacqueline Leiner (Aix en Provence), whose paper, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe: une esthétique de la différence* focussed on Antoine Vitez's production of Césaire's play at the *Comédie Française*. Professor Leiner presented the experience of otherness as the root of Césaire's aesthetics which, in a modulation of Lévi-Strauss's notion of "bricolage linguistique", she described not as "collage", but as "transposition":

Césaire manipule les mots comme des substances magiques qui créent des sensations. [...] Il revalorise les signifiés dans une syntaxe inattendue. [...] Césaire nous préserve de l'homogène, de l'indifférencié ...

The feminine "other" was the subject of Sita Dickson Littlewood's paper, *Surrealism and Sexuality: the Symbolism of femininity in Aimé Césaire's identity quest*, which traced the development of "femininity" as signified in Césaire's writing. Contrasting the binary oppositions of *Le Cahier* with the negation of the masculine/feminine polarity in *Une Tempête*, Ms Littlewood (London) identified an "androgynous

resolution of the post-colonial West Indian identity crisis" in Césaire's texts.

After lunch, three speakers presented papers on different aspects of African fiction. In a paper entitled *L'esthétique de la nouvelle chez les écrivains négro-africains d'expression française*, Guy Ossito Midiohouan (Bénin and Bayreuth) traced the development of the short story genre and then proceeded to discuss the form and content of the African *nouvelle*. One of the distinguishing features of the African *nouvelle*, explained Dr Midiohouan, is its supernatural content which is generally associated with the *conte* in Western literary tradition. Although it is impossible to date the birth of the short story in francophone Africa, Dr Midiohouan demonstrated its formal links with the oral tradition as a short, didactic narrative.

The influences of the oral tradition on the African novel were then discussed in Amadou Koné's paper, *Le roman africain entre l'oralité et l'écriture*. Having presented a number of reasons for the late development of the novel in francophone Africa, M. Koné (Abidjan and Bayreuth) discussed the difficulties involved in expressing one's cultural identity in what is ultimately a foreign language. Amadou Kourouma was cited as a successful African novelist who, unlike Cheikh Hamidou Kane for example, refuses to write from an exterior (ie academic) perspective. Kourouma writes in a French which has been transposed by Malinke, a language which therefore fills what M. Koné identified as the

gap between the "langue maternelle orale" and the "langue d'écriture orale".

The final paper of the day focussed on "the African political novel". In her paper, entitled *Ibrahima Ly: the challenge of tradition*, Anna Ridehalgh (Southampton) presented Ly's writing as a "radical view of African tradition which traces back modern ills to pre-colonial roots". Through her readings of the dialogues in Ly's two novels *Toile d'araignée* and *Les Noctuelles* (incomplete), Dr Ridehalgh illustrated what she described as the author's preoccupation with the problem of acquiescence and his conviction of the possibility for those who are bound by political passivity to free themselves from it.

On day three of the conference, the second keynote address was given by guest speaker, Jacques Chevrier (University of Paris XII) who spoke on *L'écriture du mythe dans la littérature africaine contemporaine*. In his discussion of a large number of texts, M. Chevrier examined the way in which myths interact with contemporary African novels, observing that:

Si le mythe survit dans la littérature
contemporaine, c'est souvent de façon parodique, décalée
...

The paper was followed by a long discussion of the term "myth", which M. Chevrier defined as beyond a literary genre or form. Myth is both permanent and flexible; it is "un objet de croyance", he explained.

The contemporary linguistic situation in Senegal was the subject of Jill Taylor's paper, *Code-switching between Wolof and French in Dakar* (subtitled "Things that make you go mmmn"). With illustrations from Sembene's films and novels, as well as from the results of her recent field-trip to Dakar, Dr Taylor (Exeter) demonstrated how, in a multi-lingual situation, "le switch" is a way of life. Although Sembene uses code-switching to symbolise relationships in *Xala*, Dr Taylor's interviewees were often not aware that they had selected a word from another language. From this she concluded that the roles of French and Wolof are gradually being fused and that French is not the language of intellectuals in Dakar; rather the pro-Wolof movement is an intellectual one.

After an intriguing experiment on memory, James Leahy presented his current research project, *Cinematic rhythm in African films*. Having introduced the notion of kinetic memory in his initial experiment, Mr Leahy (London) addressed the question of how to describe the kinetic organisation which makes a film such as Adama Drabo's *Ta Dona* more compelling than, for example, Bassek Ba Kobhio's *Blanc d'ébène*. He then gave a brief outline of his proposed method of analysis in comparative studies of a number of films which included Ouedraogo's *Tilai* and Sembene's two versions of *Le Mandat*.

This paper was followed by Romuald Fonkoua (Lille) who considered the problematic definition of the Caribbean short story as a genre. In his paper on *La Nouvelle antillaise comme forme et discours*, Dr

Fonkoua posed the question of a writer's national identity and that of the identity of his/her writing. Xavier Orville's short story, *Le Géranium*, was quoted as an interesting example of a text which is presented as a Senegalese work by an author born in Martinique. Having commented on the minority status of the short story in the Antilles, Dr Fonkoua emphasised the socio-political role of the *nouvelle* as a collectively distributed text which provides a means of communication among the people of the islands.

The concluding paper of the conference consisted of a fascinating overview of German research - past and present - on Caribbean and African literature in French. The paper, entitled *L'état présent des recherches sur les littératures francophones de l'Afrique et des Antilles en Allemagne*, was presented by Professor Janos Riesz of the University of Bayreuth, and outlined Bayreuth's multi-disciplinary research project on *Le Changement d'identité en Afrique*. Funded by the German Research Council, the University has contacts with a large number of African academics, two of whom (Dr Midiohouan and M. Koné) ASCALF was delighted to welcome at this conference. Professor Riesz's paper provided an appropriate conclusion to a successful conference, offering encouragement and optimism for research on an international scale.

Nicki Hitchcott
University College London

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

as a centre for study of the islands of the African diaspora

Those colleagues not already aware of the riches of data and resources available in Aix-en-Provence for study and research in areas central to ASCALF interests might like to know something about a short visit which I made to Aix in November 1991.

I was visiting Aix-en-Provence (under the auspices of a French-Irish Higher Education research exchange programme) mainly in order to establish contact with two university research institutes, the one associated with the creole-speaking world in general and the other with the Indian Ocean in particular.

My principal contact in Aix was Monsieur Hubert Gerbeau, director of the very user-friendly CERSOI (*Centre d'études et de recherches sur les sociétés de l'Océan Indien*) and specialist in the history of colonisation and slavery. This institute belongs, in institutional terms, to the faculty of law and political science of the University of Aix-Marseille III. In fact, I spent much of my stay working in the Institute's library and meeting its teaching and research team: notably, Monsieur Jean Benoist, the Québécois who has written so prolifically on the Caribbean from an ethnological point of view but who has also written much on the islands of the Indian Ocean.

The Library of the CERSOI

This library is the documentation centre of the CNRS research group working on the Indian Ocean (GDR 15). The librarian, Madame Monique Girardin, is most helpful and the library held on October 1st 1991 more than 3,500 works (including offprints and brochures) and was receiving 75 periodicals.

The former are classified geographically in the first instance: Madagascar, Mascareignes (Réunion, Maurice, Rodrigues), Comores (Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mohéli, Mayotte), Seychelles etc. Works falling into each geographical subdivision are then further classified according to the form of publication involved:

- A. *publications officielles, statistiques, rapports*
- B. *textes littéraires, récits, témoignages*
- C. *études dans toutes les disciplines des sciences humaines*
- D. *ouvrages d'information générale et de vulgarisation*

The library is open from Monday to Thursday (inclusive) between 10am and 1pm and between 2pm and 6pm. It is closed during the university vacations.

CERSOI
Université d'Aix-Marseille III
3, Avenue Schumann
13628 AIX EN PROVENCE Cedex 1
Tél. 42 17 28 96

The Institut d'études créoles

A mere five-minute walk away from the *Faculté de Droit* which houses the CERSOI one finds the *Centre d'études créoles*. This research institute comes under the umbrella of Aix's *Faculté des Lettres*, i.e. the *Université de Provence* (Aix-Marseille I). I met its director, Monsieur Robert Chaudenson and various other members of the centre's teaching and research staff, including Madame Priska Degras, a specialist in Francophone Caribbean writing, who is in Aix on secondment from the University of Louisiana.

The library of the centre is very well-endowed and has a very useful computerised data-base. Although it is possible to work there, the library is quite chronically short of space; indeed, as its director lamented, the floor is in danger of subsiding (that is, of tumbling down to the next floor) under the seriously excessive weight of the material housed there.

Archives d'outre-mer

Just over the fence beside the *Faculté des Lettres* are the *Archives d'Outre-mer* (the national overseas archives which are now all located in Aix-en-Provence). This impressively designed, brand-new building is home to that (decentralised) section of the National Archives which was created in 1966 to hold those administrative archives repatriated, so to speak, from France's former colonies upon the latter's independence. The CAOM is one of the major centres

of historical research, both in France and abroad, into the whole question of colonisation.

In 1987, the *Archives d'outre-mer* also acquired documents from central colonial administration: for example one important collection from the Depot of public colonial documentation and another from the Depot of colonial fortifications. In addition to 3,000 review or journal titles, and 2,000 press titles, 45,000 books and 20,000 brochures, the CAOM holdings include extensive collections of maps (50,000 items in all) and photographs (60,000 items). Considerable private archives complement the public ones.

The attractive reading room has 50 places and the building also boasts an exhibition room and a seminar room. There are also facilities for use of typewriters, word-processors etc and for reading of microfilms.

Centre des archives d'outre-mer
29, Chemin du moulin Detesta
13090 Aix-en-Provence
Tél. 42.26.43.21

Open from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm
Closed each year for two weeks from the Monday following the 14th July.

Mary Gallagher
University College Dublin

EXHIBITION

Images of Africa: Emil Torday and the art of the Congo 1900-1909
National Art Collections Fund Award Winner, 1991

Emil Torday, a Hungarian by birth, worked in the Belgian Congo in various capacities from 1900 to 1909: as a minor official of the Belgian government, as an employee of the independent *Compagnie du Kasai* and as leader of ethnographical expeditions. He came to speak fifteen African languages, and generally preferred the company of the Africans amongst whom he worked to that of Europeans; a consistent critic of colonialism, he endeavoured above all to know and record the civilisations of the Congo as they existed at the time. His work revolutionised anthropological thinking, since it threw sharply into question current notions of "the primitive", forcing western recognition of the fact that African societies which had had virtually no contact with white people had elaborate civilisations and sophisticated cultures of their own. And this at a time when the buildings of Great Zimbabwe and the sculptures of Benin were widely held to be the result of European influence or even (in the case of Great Zimbabwe) produced by non-African peoples. As for the Congo itself, of course, western perceptions of it at the time were generally closer to those of *Heart of Darkness* (published in 1902), and very far from acknowledging the existence of civilisations such as those which Torday encountered.

This exhibition contains objects and photographs acquired by the British Museum from Torday and first exhibited in 1910. It is really three exhibitions in one: one about the civilisations of the southern Congo in the early years of the century; one about Emil Torday and his work; and one about contemporary European anthropology and perceptions of Africa. It is immensely informative on all three levels, and the intersecting of the three makes it particularly exciting.

Many of the objects displayed are outstandingly beautiful and intricate: particularly the very fine raffia textiles and the wooden carvings. The complex surface detail of Kuba craft work was a revelation in Britain at the time, and seemed reminiscent of Celtic art: it was apparently this more than anything which helped to raise African society to the status of "civilisation" in European eyes. The exhibition organisers make the point that the original exhibition of Torday's collection took place at a time when French artists were beginning to exploit the possibilities of non-western art. They suggest that although there was no similar movement in Britain, the effect of the Torday exhibition was in fact more radical and positive, since "primitivism" in art, after all, endorsed a 19th century view of "the primitive". The section devoted to the Kuba kingdom conveys something of the intricacies of a society in which any man over 40 stood a 50% chance of court office, each one with its title, insignia and responsibilities. (Such elegance necessarily reposed on a system of slave labour: literally indeed, as can be seen in the photograph of the Kuba royal court, in which King Kot aPe is seen sitting

comfortably on the back of a slave, surrounded by some sixty courtiers).

The exhibition is accompanied by written panels giving information, comment and from time to time quotations from Torday; a much friendlier and more usable device than a catalogue. There are two related publications: a book, *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo* by John Mack, who organised the exhibition (British Museum Publications, n.d., price £7.95, ISBN 0-7141-1594-0), and a set of teachers' notes, covering Kuba and the Savannah kingdoms; Europe's relations with Africa; and suggestions for teaching with the exhibition (available free from the Museum of Mankind).

Anna Ridehalgh
University of Southampton

Museum of Mankind, Burlington Gardens W1X 2EX
tel: 071-437 222 (recorded information 071-580 1788)
Monday - Saturday 10.00 - 5.00, Sunday 2.30 - 6.00

BOOK REVIEW

Voix et visages de femmes

by Madeleine Borgomano

Abidjan: CEDA, 1989, 161p

ISBN 2-86394-170-4

As the first critical work to focus exclusively on African women's writing in French, Borgomano's study contests the much repeated claim that the corpus of women's writing in francophone Africa is too small to merit separate analysis. She writes:

Notre objectif se limite exclusivement aux textes écrits par des femmes africaines, donc à une sorte de vision interne, à une prise de parole et à des images de femmes produites par des femmes. (p.6)

In an attempt to produce a "literary" study rather than a "thematic" one (p.7), Borgomano divides her book into two parts: the first, entitled "Voix de femmes", aims to unravel the author's point of view through analyses of a number of texts grouped together by genre. Unfortunately, much of the discussion consists of descriptions of the narrative, and fails to consider in any detail the complex relationship between author, narrator and characters on which many of the conclusions are based. Interesting points are raised from time to time, such as the position of the asexual narrator in Ntyugwetondo Rawiri's *Elonga* (p.82), and the adaptation of an imported genre in African women's autobiography (p.12). Sadly, such questions remain undeveloped, and are rarely substantiated by textual evidence.

Despite the author's intention to resist a thematic study, the second section of the book,

"Visages de femmes", analyses images of women through a number of (thematic) axes: age, culture, financial independence, *paysanne/citadine*, etc. Inevitably, perhaps, Borgomano's decision to discuss a large number of works in a very slim volume results in superficial readings which fail to do justice to the texts in question. Although she claims not to be concerned with aesthetics (p.6), the author is quick to point out the "maladresses" of, for example, Anne-Marie Adiaffi's *Une vie hypothéquée* (p.143).

Although the various shortfalls of this study are often frustrating for the reader of African literature, the large corpus of writing by women from francophone Africa makes this a useful reference book. In an extremely brief "conclusion", Borgomano declares that the aim of her book is to bring readers' attention to the "riches promesses" (p. 152) of this literature. Hopefully, her work will encourage greater interest in this field.

Ultimately, the reader can only agree with the words of Borgomano herself:

Le caractère relatif de tout ouvrage de ce genre, qui fait état d'une situation découpée à un moment d'une histoire en permanente évolution, s'en trouve toujours accru. Et l'auteur même souhaite que son travail soit rapidement rendu caduc par d'autres ouvrages émanant des voix plus autorisées de femmes africaines (p.8).

Nicki Hitchcott
University College London

NOTICES AND INFORMATION

1. ASCALF: the year's work 1990-1991

- The **Committee** met four times between the two AGMs: on 23 February, 18 May, 6 July and 25 October. We unfortunately lost two members in the course of the year: Belinda Jack, who resigned because of family responsibilities, and Dominic Thomas, who has gone to the United States.

- **ASCALF BULLETIN**: the third issue appeared in May 1991.

- **Donation of books**: early in 1991, a generous donation of African and Caribbean texts was received from the French Cultural services. Most of these have been distributed among university and college libraries and some have been taken for review and translation.

- ***Protée noir***: (papers of 1989 ASCALF conference): After difficulties with the University of Lille, the manuscript was submitted to L'Harmattan in mid-November 1991, and it is hoped that the book will appear shortly.

- **Annual conferences**: In both 1990 and 1991, the annual conference was again held at the *Institut français* and we extend our thanks to the Institute staff and to the French Cultural Services for their assistance.

- **1992 conference**: The aim is that this should be a larger conference with a comparatist component, including work on literature in English and Portuguese as well as French.

We had originally hoped to hold it at Roehampton, but reluctantly decided that this would be impractical. Plans are now going ahead to hold the conference in conjunction with the Commonwealth Institute, with accommodation to be arranged. UNESCO and "Kaleidoscope" (cultural section of the EC) are being approached for funding, and it is hoped that the French government may also make a contribution.

- **Relations with APELA**: Peter Hawkins represented ASCALF at APELA's biennial conference in Nice, and we are delighted to have been able to welcome Jacques Chevrier at our 1991 conference.

Anna Ridehalgh
Secretary

2. FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES OF INTEREST TO ASCALF MEMBERS

May 14-17, 1992

Interdisciplinary conference on Gender and Colonialism at University College Galway. To be held under the auspices of the Women's Studies Centre, UCG. The aim of the conference is to highlight the web of connections between gender and/or sexuality and the politics, representation and history of

colonialism. It is hoped that the experience of colonialism and post-colonialism in countries other than Ireland will be included and that the conference will embrace as wide a variety of approaches as possible. Topics for discussion are likely to include:

- (1) how or whether the status of women and the regulation of sexualities alters with the impact of colonialism and/or post-colonialist political systems
- (2) the role of women in colonialist and anti-colonialist discourses
- (3) the representation of sexuality in the construction of national identities
- (4) the history of women in anti-colonialist insurgency movements
- (5) women and cultural "revivals"
- (6) the construction of gender in colonial and/or post-colonial literature and popular culture

June 20-27, 1992

The international conference of the CIEF (*Conseil international d'études francophones*) will be held in Strasbourg in 1992.

For further details contact Maurice Cagnon at the Department of French, Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043 USA
Tel (201) 893-4283 or Fax 212-666-3715.

3-6 September, 1992

Writing and History: Problems and Perspectives

An international conference to be held at Bath College of Higher Education

This conference will explore the interaction of writing studies and historical studies. It will establish new perspectives on an area of intense contemporary debate. Contributors include poets, novelists, playwrights and professional academics from Europe, America and Africa.

The backbone of the conference will be a series of plenary lectures by writers of international standing. They will address the theoretical and practical problems of writing that seeks to transcend traditional boundaries, whether between the disciplines of literary criticism and history or between fiction and fact. In addition, the conference will offer parallel workshops and seminars in three distinct but complementary and challenging areas of study:

- Writing and Ireland
- Writing and the Colonial Experience
- Writing and National Identities

The conference is to be held at the Newtopn Park campus of Bath College of Higher Education. It will include a guided tour of Bath, a city rich in historical, architectural and cultural interest.

For further details, contact the conference secretary:

David Timms, Bath College of Higher Education,
Newton Park, BATH BA2 9BN, Avon, England
(Tel. 0225 873701) fax: 0225 874123

9-11 September, 1992

University of Cape Town, South Africa: a conference
on France-Afrique: relations between France and
Africa

11-14 September, 1992

Annual ASCALF conference: AFRICA, THE
CARIBBEAN AND EUROPE: LITERATURE IN
1992

ASCALF, in cooperation with the Commonwealth
Institute, the French Institute and the French Cultural
Service, are planning a major conference for 11-14
September 1992, involving all aspects of African and
Caribbean literary production in relation to the new
Europe.

The multi-lingual proceedings will take place at both
Institutes and residential accommodation should be
available at reasonable rates at Imperial College in
South Kensington and at International Hall in
Bloomsbury.

As well as the usual wide range of academic papers,
we hope to be able to offer some considerable cultural
events such as visiting theatre companies.

Fuller information should be available in the summer
issue of this bulletin and any advance enquiries, offers
or proposals should be addressed to:

Peter Hawkins, Department of French, University of
Bristol, 19, Woodland Road, BS8 1TE.

Saturday, 19th September

APELA is organising a *journée d'études* on *Littérature
orale et écrite en Afrique* at a venue in Paris as yet to
be determined.

24-27 September, 1992

As announced in our last bulletin, there will be a
conference at the French Institute on the above dates
on *L'Autre et le sacré: L'ethnologie, le film
ethnographique et le surréalisme en France* (1930-
1968), sponsored by Professor C.W. Thompson of the
French Department of the University of Warwick.

3. UPDATE

Centre d'études littéraires francophones et comparées

Université de Paris-Nord
Avenue J.-B. Clément
93430 Villetaneuse
Tél. (1) 49.40.33.31.75

Readers might be interested in having an update on the research and teaching activities of the above centre. In a letter dated 25 September 1991, Monsieur Charles Bonn, himself a noted specialist in the area of *littérature maghrébine* pointed out that the centre boasts the largest team of academics working in France on francophone literature and that it also has the most developed infrastructural facilities in this area. He cites in particular not just its collection of relevant theses and other dissertations but also its publications, notably the review entitled *Itinéraires et contacts de cultures*. In addition, the centre is very active in international research and in providing not alone research and teaching forums in the field of francophone writing but also significant data bases etc.

Monsieur Bonn adds that the centre's *formation doctorale* project concerns more than 70 *troisième cycle* students. Indeed the main purpose of Monsieur Bonn's circular is to introduce and publicise the revamped DEA programme in Francophone and comparative literature on offer in the centre.

Most of the research seminars for this DEA take place on Wednesdays and those of a parallel DEA course in *Contacts entre aires culturelles anglophones et francophones* are held on Thursdays. For the current year seminars began in the month of November; henceforth, however, they will commence in October.

Monsieur Bonn also points out that the centre is collaborating at the moment with the UREF/AUPELF network co-ordinated by Jean-Louis Joubert (who himself teaches of course at Paris-Nord and who is in fact one of the founders of the centre) in the creation of a document and publications data-base. The centre has been entrusted with the task of constituting a database on "*les littératures du Maghreb*" in co-operation with the *Coordination internationale des chercheurs sur les littératures du Maghreb*, an association which is also under the umbrella of the centre. Monsieur Bonn goes on to say that a large team has been working on this project for some two years and that its system can be used as of now, even by those researchers and students who don't know anything much about computers! Further details can be had from me, should any ASCALF member be interest in gaining access to this data-base. Similarly, should anybody be interested in having further information about the doctoral programme offered by the centre (in *Etudes francophones et comparées*) or specifically about the DEA, this can be obtained either directly from the centre or from the editor of the *ASCALF Bulletin*.

