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The Return of Africa's Daughters: Negritude and the Gendering of Exile

The relationship of the work of Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé to that of Aimé Césaire is well-known. Most recently, studies have appeared like Mireille Rosello's *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles*,¹ part of which has been translated in YFS² as 'One More Sea to Cross: Exile and Intertextuality in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*' and Sylviane Townsel's rather less incisive comparison of Césaire's *Cahier* and Condé's *Ségou: Négritude dans la littérature franco-antillaise*.³ Condé herself has often readily acknowledged in interviews the important relationship of her work to that of Césaire. In fact, on several occasions she has been willing to admit *only* Césaire as a serious Antillean influence and pretext. Even so, her relationship with this work, with the essays and poetry of the 'Father' not only of Negritude, but of the Antillean tradition itself, has never been unproblematic or uncontradictory. Quite apart from her fictional texts, Condé has written numerous critical essays on a variety of subjects related to Antillean literature, including several on negritude itself. Indeed, it is in these essays that Condé is at her most polemical. So much so that a critic such as Jonathan Ngate has been led to remark that 'the gutsy lady doth [in fact] protest *too* much'.⁴

In 1973 and 1974 she wrote two essays on negritude: 'Pourquoi la Négritude? Négritude ou Révolution?', and 'Négritude césairienne, négritude senghorienne'. Added to these two quite polemical essays, she wrote, in 1979, a study of Césaire's *Cahier* in the Hatier collection 'Profil d'une oeuvre', a study which is, as Ngate also points out, much more measured in its treatment both of Césaire and of negritude, than had been

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1 Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles*, Paris: Karthala, 1992

2 *Yale French Studies* 83: Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations and Nomadisms, Vol. 2, 1993

3 Sylviane Townsel, *Négritude dans la littérature franco-antillaise*, (Paris: PUF, 1992

4 Jonathan Ngate, 'Maryse Condé and Africa: The Making of a Recalcitrant Daughter?', in *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, 19 (1), 1986-7, p.15

the previous essays. The first of these essays, in particular, was a vociferous attack on negritude, a response to Léon Damas' claim that the world was witnessing the triumph of negritude. Condé is at pains not only to point out the current injustices being suffered by blacks worldwide but also the failure of Negritude as political practice in Senghor's apparently 'Socialist' African state, Senegal. She recalls, in a manner which has perhaps now become rather commonplace, the way in which the traditional African chiefs celebrated by Senghor were also those who sold their own people into slavery and thus created the Antillean diaspora of which Césaire is a part. As far as Césaire himself is concerned, she lambasts him for having voted for the departmentalisation of the Antilles in 1946 before, as she points out, the islands had ever been given a chance to put negritude, with all its flaws, into any kind of political practice. Above all, however, she points to the fallacy of Africa as source and origin for Antilleans, and it is *this* that provides her with her point of departure for her fictional interrogation of negritude, in particular for her first novels *Heremakhonon*⁵ and *A Season in Rihata*.⁶ Both novels are set in unnamed African countries in the grip of a dictatorship masquerading as African socialism. The heroines, Véronica of *Heremakhonon* and Marie-Hélène of *A Season in Rihata*, are educated Guadeloupeans who go in search of their origins in Africa, in search, in fact, of everything for which Condé reproaches Senghor and Césaire in *their* quests for Africa - for 'the Africa of lords, the Africa of warlike aristocracies' as she puts it in her 1973 essay. This is particularly true of Véronica Mercier in *Heremakhonon*, whose quest for origins proves to be every bit as fruitless as Condé had predicted in her earlier critical essays.

It is, in fact, this novel that I should like to concentrate on here. However, I do not wish to examine it *only* as the inevitable repudiation, by a younger writer, of an apparently outmoded cultural phenomenon, or as the 'logical progression'

5 Maryse Condé, *Heremakhonon*, trans. Richard Philcox, Three Continents Press, 1982. The novel was first published in French in 1976 and a re-edition, *En attendant le bonheur*, was published by Seghers in 1988.

6 Maryse Condé, *A Season in Rihata*, trans. Richard Philcox, Oxford: Heinemann, 1987. The novel was first published in French by Robert Laffont in 1981.

of one generation to another of Antillean writing. Rather I wish to examine the way in which Condé's response to negritude - or at least that of her character Véronica in *Heremakhonon* - may in fact also be a response which is *gendered*. Initially, there are many similarities between the text of Condé and that of Césaire. Like the identity quest of Césaire's *Cahier*, the journey charted in *Heremakhonon* is an inversion of the middle passage, a voyage from the Caribbean to Paris and then to Africa of an assimilated Antillean intellectual in search of origins. Both journeys are undertaken from a position of 'double exile': from felt alienation within the apparently 'inauthentic' identity of the assimilated Antillean, and from literal exile in France. However, as we shall see, the exile of Condé's Véronica Mercier is a 'double exile' in another sense, for while the hero of the *Cahier* - like Césaire himself - completes his triangular journey with a final return to the Antilles, Véronica never returns to her native land of Guadeloupe. While Africa constitutes a 'home' or 'nurturing mother' for the hero of the *Cahier* - however temporarily - this is never true for Condé's heroine. It would seem, as critics Elleke Boehmer has put it in a different context that 'the lap of ... Mother [Africa] may not be as soft or capacious for women as it is for men'.⁷

The hero of negritude poetry typically achieves his 'rebirth' into authenticity through a return not simply to Africa, but to Mother Africa, or to the African Mother(land). This is no less true when Césaire acknowledges the necessity of returning also to Martinique, for the island, too, is figured as feminine: everywhere, the quest for identity of negritude poetry can be seen to be a *male* quest, the quest of the exiled *sons* of Africa for a variously exoticised/eroticised lost Mother. The question that I should like to pose here is: what relationship might Antillean *women* writers, like Maryse Condé, have to a negritude tradition which is not only unmistakably masculine but which is built upon a series of metaphors that may actually entail the radical exiling of women? How might the trope of

7 Elleke Boehmer, 'Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa', in Susheila Nasta, ed. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, London: The Women's Press, 1991, p.6

woman in negritude poetry, and specifically the figuration of Africa as 'nurturing mother' influence the quests for identity of women like Condé's Véronica Mercier?

It is important to note, here, that Césaire's negritude poetry, both formally and thematically, was also very much part of the European surrealist movement,⁸ for this is not without its significance as far as the function of 'woman' in the texts of negritude is concerned. As A. James Arnold explains: 'for the European surrealist, Eros functioned primarily as an ontological gateway with woman as mediatrix between alienated self and fullness of being'.⁹ In the poetry of Césaire, it is specifically a black mother earth that becomes mediatrix between the black Antillean's alienated self and his new, 'whole' self which is reborn in the affirmation of his negritude. As one critic, Edson Rosa da Silva, has commented, specifically in relation to the *Cahier*: 'the return to the native land evokes, in the domain of the imaginary, the return to origins, to the earth-mother, to the uterus' (p.106).¹⁰ Images of rebirth thus abound in the *Cahier*,

8 Césaire's work was influenced, 'discovered' and encouraged by André Breton, and surrealism apparently represented, for Césaire, the ideal means with which he could develop his ideas about negritude. As he explains in an interview with René Depestre, Césaire saw in surrealism a 'call to Africa'. Surrealism's claims to 'call forth deep and unconscious forces' encouraged Césaire to believe that if he used the surrealist approach in the context of a negritude quest for origins, he would succeed in summoning up the unconscious forces of Africa which had been repressed within every assimilated Antillean (see April Ane Knutson, 'Negritude and Surrealism, Marxism and Mallarmé: Ideological confusion in the works of Aimé Césaire' in April Ane Knutson, ed. *Studies in Marxism* (Vol. 25): *Ideology and Independence in the Americas*, Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1989, p.57).

9 A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, Massachusetts: Harvard, 1981, pp 153-4. Shari Benstock, in her essay 'Expatriate Modernism', also describes the way in which male modernism in general 'enforce(s) patriarchal privilege in a feminised, colonised, foreign setting, imaging the landscape as a female (m)other' (in *Women's Writing in Exile*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p.29).

10 Edson Rosa Da Silva, 'La rêverie de l'eau et de la terre dans le *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* de Césaire', in *Présence Francophone* 29, (1986),

as do those of penetration, copulation, conception and pregnancy: a new nation, peopled by blacks proud of their blackness, will be born from the womb of the woman-mother as earth, as the island.

Rebirth is in fact figured in the *Cahier* on a variety of levels: from images of plant-like 'germination' (*Cahier* p.71) to those of a negritude '(which) takes root in the red flesh of the earth' (*Cahier* p.69). This earth - always figured as feminine, as the mother - is *penetrated*, copulated with. The active, virile force of negritude (and its poetic hero) not only projects itself towards, but gashes open, ploughs up the earth in a phallic act of deflorescence. It then becomes the site of nourishment first for the gestating and then for the new-born negritude hero, turning blood and water - those which were previously putrid - into maternal milk to sustain him. It is this process alone which, according to Da Silva, is capable of giving back to the black man his 'rightful place' in the world (Da Silva, p.118).

However, what Da Silva fails to point out is that this 'fertile earth' is also the exploited earth, just as it had been at the beginning of the *Cahier*. The island of the opening section of the poem is, it would seem, a ruined and abused feminine/maternal body, the site of years of colonial exploitation. Images are of putrefying blood, thick mud and stagnant water: this is not the warm and nurturing maternal/native land 'ordinarily' dreamt of. Though Da Silva mentions this, what he fails to interrogate is whether the mother-earth of negritude is in fact significantly different from the *colonised* mother-earth of the beginning of the poem. When the *Cahier* is read closely, especially alongside commentators such as Da Silva, it becomes evident that the exploited and appropriated island of the beginning of the poem is in fact *reappropriated* - and thus re-exploited, albeit to different ends - by the hero of negritude himself.

Significantly, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his famous essay 'Black Orpheus',¹¹ similarly - and unproblematically - interprets

pp 105-125. Subsequent references will be in the text. All translations are mine.

11 Sartre, 'Orphée Noir'. This essay was written in 1948 as an introduction to the first collection of negritude poetry, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, edited by Senghor.

negritude as an 'orphyic' quest, in which the negritude hero, 'Black Orpheus', descends into the earth in order to *reclaim* (that is, to *reappropriate*) it.

This earth, figured not only as feminine but, more specifically, as the woman Eurydice, must be reclaimed from the coloniser, the White Man, figured as Pluto. Eurydice, as a trope for the black mother Earth, thus exists only as an object of exchange between the black negritude hero and the white (male) coloniser. She becomes, it would seem, merely the means through which 'Black Orpheus' is able to achieve his own 'authentic' identity as a black man by asserting himself against the white man. Eurydice herself is typically reduced to a merely symbolic function, a function which ultimately leaves her silent and silenced by and within the androcentric discursive structures surrounding her.

What is more, Eurydice's fuction within the discourses of negritude is far from unique. In fact, it can be seen to be part of a tradition, identified by both Elleke Boehmer and Susheila Nasta, of what can be loosely termed 'Nationalist' discourses.¹² For Boehmer, nationalism, like negritude, relies heavily on gendered languages to imagine itself ... the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may bear a feminine face.¹³ In terms which evoke the negritude heroes of

Césaire, Boehmer describes the way in which, in nationalist discourses, it is the male figure who is author and subject of the nation, while the role of 'woman' is to be:

the strength or virtue of the nation incarnate, its fecund first matriarch, but it is a role which excludes her from the sphere of public national life. Figures of mothers of the nation are everywhere emblazoned but the presence of women in the nation is officially marginalised and generally ignored.¹⁴

In all such figurings of woman as nation, the 'woman-mother', or that which is figured as female - the native land - serves as the *foundation* of the nation, the ground upon which the nation - and representations of it like negritude poetry - are built. If the woman-mother is the foundation of the nation and of male selfhood, however, women as such have no place *in* the nation, and no identity, themselves, as women. On a practical level, for women of a nation undergoing decolonisation to seek emancipation or identity *as women* is too often seen as a betrayal, both of those traditions which are inevitably asserted when 'indigenous culture' is being revalidated, and of the so-called 'wider' struggle for national liberation.¹⁵ For example, as alienated and exiled as Césaire and his fellow Antillean intellectuals were, and felt themselves to be, their means of representing their movement from alienation to rebirth necessarily entailed a further exiling of 'their' women. These were women who - like Suzanne Césaire and the Nardal sisters - had already subsumed their felt alienation within patriarchal structures, indigenous and/or colonial, into an apparently more fundamental alienation within colonialist structures. So-called 'nationalist' discourse, it would seem, favours what the editors of a recent book on *Nationalisms and Sexualities* have called 'a distinctly homosocial form of male bonding': for them, the nation can be seen as a 'passionate brotherhood'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Elleke Boehmer, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁵ See Susheila Nasta, *op.cit.*, p.xv.

¹⁶ Editor's Introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, *op.cit.*, p.6. Although negritude is perhaps not strictly speaking a 'nationalist' discourse, it has been converted by its proponents, notably Senghor and Césaire, to

¹² See Boehmer's essay in *Motherlands*, *op. cit.*, and Nasta's Introduction to the same volume of essays.

¹³ Boehmer, *op.cit.*, p.6. The editors of a recent collection of essays entitled *Nationalisms and Sexualities* also point out in their introduction that 'the trope of the nation-as-woman' recurs throughout writings which in a very general definition can be termed 'nationalist' (Andrew Parker; Mary Russo; Doris Sommer; Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, London: Routledge, 1992 pp.1-18). Boehmer finds this phenomenon to be entirely unsurprising in the context of anti-colonial struggle, a struggle represented in a Manichean binary of coloniser versus colonised. The former's dominant power is typically represented as 'rational, disciplined, assertive, masculine', while the supposed inertia, weakness and disorder of the colonised nation is represented as feminine. In order to seize power, the colonised nation must thus assert itself as 'masculine' according to the above schema, and the accompanying literary representations must be full of images of force and autonomy. Negritude heroes themselves are, as we have seen, phallic, thrusting, a 'rising strength' in Boehmer's words (pp.7-8).

The idea of the nation as a *fraternity* is a common and constant theme. As Jonathan Goldberg (in the same volume) points out, women have come to be 'translated into a trope of ideal femininity, a fantasmatic female *that secures male-made arrangements and an all-male history*'.¹⁷ This, in fact, and in a manner which recalls both Sartre's and Da Silva's analyses of negritude, bears a striking resemblance to French psychoanalyst, philosopher and feminist-theorist Luce Irigaray's analysis of 'patriarchy'. Hers is a description of a

what were for them, if not for Frantz Fanon, later, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, more overtly political and 'nationalist' ends. Senghor, in his capacity as President of Senegal between 1960 and 1980, was not the only negritude poet to base his politics on the tenets of negritude. In an Antillean context, Césaire founded the independent *Parti Progressiste Martiniquaise* (PPM) in 1958, after several years as Martinican Deputy to the French National Assembly, as a member of the French Communist party. By 1958 he could no longer accept the Marxist demands that he subordinate the specificities of black experience and black oppression to those of class oppression. For him, Western models of Marxism could not work in the Antilles, and he thus called for the adaptation of such models to the needs of black and Antillean peoples. Thus, as PPM deputy for Martinique, he has taken a fiercely pro-liberation stance, despite his earlier (1946) commitment to attaining department status for the Antilles, a commitment which, as Clarisse Zimra explains, may have proved to have been misguided, but which seemed at the time to be the only solution to the devastated post-war economies of the islands. Indeed, Zimra goes on to remark that if Césaire's policy on departmentalisation (his assumption that full autonomy would follow semi-autonomy) was wrong, it has in fact lead to a form of negritude far more 'militant' in the Antilles than in those African countries, like Senegal, which have at least nominally achieved decolonisation. As far as Zimra is concerned, departmentalisation has effectively left the Antilles more colonised than ever, for 'the bondage to the *métropole* is felt much more severely than any de facto trade bondage between France and its former African colonies' (Zimra, 'Negritude in the Feminine Mode: the Case of Martinique and Guadeloupe' in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 1984, pp 58-9). The result, it would seem, is a much more radical situation in which negritude, converted to a 'nationalism' of sorts, is much in evidence.

17 Jonathan Goldberg, 'Bradford's Ancient Members' and 'A Case of Buggery ... Amongst Them', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, op.cit., p.63. Emphasis mine.

world of between men, of a 'hom(m)osexual economy'¹⁸ (a better term may be 'homosocial' since many have had problems with the implications of the term 'hom(m)osexual') in which men are the only subjects which exist, and in which women are 'commodities', objects to be exchanged between men, and mediators of all-male relationships. What is more, as Lemuel A. Johnson points out in his study of figurations of the female body in Caribbean women's writing: 'Irigaray's contention [is] that woman constitutes the silent ground on which the patriarchal thinker erects his discursive constructs'.¹⁹ Indeed, despite its Eurocentrism, Irigaray's overall critique of 'patriarchy' is enormously helpful for an examination of the simultaneous idealisation and fetishisation of the black Woman-Mother in the 'patriarchal discursive construct' that is negritude.²⁰ One of her main concerns, for example, is to look for:

The conditions of male subjectivity: the 'matter' from which the [necessarily male] speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself and which constitutes the *red blood* which stands for the sustaining maternal-feminine.²¹

18 See, for example, Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, pp. 168-9

19 Toril Moi, cited in Lemuel A. Johnson, 'A-Beng: (Re)calling the body In(to) Question' in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1990, p.115

20 I am aware, of course, that negritude as a 'patriarchal discursive construct' does not operate in the same way as those Western patriarchal discourses upon which Irigaray's analyses are based. Different men have different access to 'patriarchal oppression'. This problem is part of the much wider debate as to the merits and/or usefulness of using 'Western' theories to examine non-Western texts, and it is a problem with which I engage elsewhere.

21 Margaret Whitford, in Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp. 75-6. Whitford's citation from Irigaray here is from 'The power of discourse' in the same volume (p.123).

In other words, Irigaray wishes to examine the 'ground' upon which patriarchal culture is built, and concludes that the 'substratum is the woman who reproduces the social order': the mother.²² Her 'matter' - her body, her blood and her life - is that upon which patriarchy is built.²³ In a similar manner to Boemher and Nasta, Irigaray explains that if the woman-mother constitutes the 'foundation' of patriarchy, she herself cannot exist as a subject *within* patriarchy.

And so woman will not yet have taken (a) place ... Experienced as all-powerful where 'she' is most radically powerless in her indifferentiation. Never here and now because she is that everywhere elsewhere from whence the 'subject' continues to draw his reserves, his re-sources, yet unable to recognize them/her.²⁴

That is, women must renounce their identity *as women* in order to be the mother for men. Though the native land is always figured as feminine, there is no place for 'real' women in that land.

As we have seen, it is precisely upon the body and blood of the Mother Earth that the negritude hero's identity, as well as that of the new race of black Antilleans, is built. The *Cahier* abounds with allusions to the earth's 'matter', and especially to the blood that is necessary for the hero's rebirth. What is more, Da Silva's reading itself is full of references not only to 'matter' but, more fundamentally, to 'the repellence of matter, the horror of blood, the ambivalence of milk'.²⁵ He describes 'the black blood of putrefaction' (Da Silva, p.112), 'the image of menstrual blood, the ill-fated/harmful water that must be avoided' (p.115). This is a blood which only becomes positive and life-giving once it has been appropriated by the hero of negritude, the returning son who, as we have seen, can only achieve rebirth

22 Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers, the silent substratum of the Social Order', in *The Irigaray Reader*, p.47

23 Irigaray, 'The bodily encounter with the mother' in *The Irigaray Reader*, p.45

24 Luce Irigaray, 'L'Incontournable volume', in *Spéculum de l'autre femme*, p.282

25 Irigaray, 'Volume without Contours', p.54.

once he has returned to, appropriated and exploited the earth's fecundity.

This desire to return to the mother's womb, the 'native land' which is central to the narrative of negritude, is also fundamental to Irigaray's critique of patriarchy. Indeed, in both cases, one of the common reference points is Freud, for not only is much of Irigaray's work a critique of Freud, but Césaire himself was influenced by him,²⁶ and nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Cahier*. Here, the hero's return to the mother's womb, in a phallic act of copulation, is a return to and reappropriation of origins evocative of Freud's essay 'Das Unheimliche'.²⁷ Here, Freud equates exile from one's native land with exile from the mother. Examining the various meanings of the term 'unheimlich' - literally 'unhomely', but translated as 'The Uncanny' - he describes it as a fear of that which is at once familiar and unfamiliar, as an impression which 'proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed' (p.247). He concludes that it is actually nostalgia for 'intra-uterine existence' (p.244): that familiar yet unfamiliar place is the mother's body, 'the former Heim (home) of all human beings' (p.245). He goes on to recall a 'joking saying' that 'love is home-sickness', and he equates man's dreaming of a familiar place or country with his nostalgia for the mother's body: 'the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar, the prefix "un" is the token of repression'.

Irigaray makes a similar point when she describes male desire for women as nothing more than 'a desire to return to the original womb'.²⁸ However, where Freud either ignores women's relationship to origin or assumes it to be the same as that of men, Irigaray shows how women's relation to origin is lost, how she, unlike the hero of the *Cahier*, has no 'native land'. If women - and this is of profound importance in my study of Condé's relationship to negritude - if women are always identified with and figured as the mother - as is the case

26 Arnold, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-6

27 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in Standard Edition of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, trans. and ed. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

28 Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984, p.99

within the discourses of negritude - then they can never represent their own relation to the mother-origin. Because the place of the mother is the only role open to women, they can only relate to each other via men, in a mode of rivalry for the desire of men. Crucially, this rivalry begins between mother and daughter:

To be loved, desired by man, one must get rid of the mother, become a substitute for her ... This destroys the possibility of love between mother and daughter. They are at once rivals and accomplices to reach the only possible position in the desire of man.²⁹

In the hom(m)osexual economy that is patriarchy, mothers and daughters are thus radically separated, exiled from one another in order to become objects of exchange for men. While men's relation to origin is one of continual attempts to (re)discover and (re)appropriate, women's relation to origin or to motherland is necessarily one of dispossession:

She is left with a *void*, a *lack* of all representation, representation ... of her desire for origin. That desire will henceforth pass through the discourse-desire-law of man's desire. 'You will be my woman-mother, my wife, if you would, and (like) my mother, if you could', is a statement equivalent to: 'You will be for me the possibility of repeating-representing-appropriating the/my relation to origin. Now this operation ... constitutes ... an exile, an extradition, an exmatiation [from the origin-desire of the little girl, of the woman].'³⁰

As Jane Marcus points out in an essay on race, gender and exile, estrangement is therefore 'built-in' to the female condition. What is more, if woman's is a position of 'radical homelessness', then literal displacement and exile, like that of the Caribbean peoples, is necessarily experienced differently by women, for they are already 'displaced by gender in their home

29 Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*, p.177

30 Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, New York: Cornell UP, 1985, p.42.

cultures'.³¹ If, for Césaire, negritude poetry was the much-needed representation of the Antillean's return from alienation to the native land, for his younger sisters, such a representation - what Clarisse Zimra has termed 'negritude in the feminine mode'³² - has, in the words of another French feminist Hélène Cixous, yet to be 'invented':

A boy's journey is the return to the native land, the *Heimweh* Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure, to appropriate it for himself .. a girl's journey is farther - to the unknown, to invent.³³

It is here that I want to move on to an examination of Condé's *Heremakhonon*, and especially of the way in which the negritude tale of the son returning to his motherland becomes inverted, here, in Condé's rewriting *au féminin* of the negritude journey. Véronica's journey to Africa is not associated with a return to a nurturing 'Mother Earth', and nor does her identity quest take place through a symbolic return to and penetration of the mother(land). Instead, it does so through what Véronica herself terms 'a good fuck' (*Heremakhonon* p.177): her relationship with Ibrahima Sory, Mwalimwana's corrupt Minister of the Interior and of Defence. Indeed, Africa becomes associated, for Véronica, with two men: it constitutes not a symbolic mother/lover, but, through Sory, a symbolic father/lover. Her trip to Africa from Paris is one which is intimately bound up with a need to rediscover her ancestors, her blackness, against which her assimilated, upper middle class Guadeloupean parents had so constantly struggled and which, we are told, lay 'hidden in their very soul. Lurking like a fetid beast' (*Heremakhonon* p. 37). It is specifically with her father, however, that she has a score to settle in this return, not with

31 Jane Marcus, 'Alibis and Legends: The Ethics of Elsewhereness, Gender and Estrangement' in *Women's Writing in Exile*, op.cit. p.274-6

32 Clarisse Zimra, 'Negritude in the Feminine Mode: The Case of Martinique and Guadeloupe', in *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (1984).

33 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p.93. Originally published in 1978 as *La Jeune Née*.

her mother whose opinions, according to Véronica, are merely a replication of those of her husband (*Heremakhonon* p.48). It is thus her father whom she links with Africa, constantly referring to him as 'the Mandingo Holy Man' and thereby restoring his denied African ancestry to him and linking him, and through him herself, to the Africa which she feels holds the key to her identity.

Véronica finds Sory, the black African, much more attractive than any of the black Antilleans to which her parents had introduced her, because he represents 'black culture' before colonialism and slavery. What is more, it must be Sory, and not Saliou, the revolutionary descended from the peasantry, who becomes Africa for her, because Sory has 'ancestors': he belongs to a family of the ancient African aristocracy, the Africa of negritude myth. He is her 'nigger with ancestors', 'an authentic aristocrat' (*Heremakhonon*, p.24), her means of reconnection with her black, African ancestry:

This man who is about to take me does not know that I am a virgin of sorts. Of course, the wrapper won't be stained with blood and the griotte won't hold it up proudly to reassure the tribe. It will be another blood. Heavier and thicker. Before letting it flow, black and fast, I now realise why he fascinates me. He hasn't been branded.
(*Heremakhonon* p.37)

Unfortunately, it becomes obvious that Sory is indifferent to her desire to 'find herself': he will not allow himself to be her means of access to her African past. Slowly, she begins to realise that it is fruitless to seek her identity through Sory, that she has in fact been seeking her identity in the wrong place entirely. Notions of 'home' become confused: sometimes it is Guadeloupe, sometimes France, never Africa. It is as her exile in Africa becomes more apparent, that thoughts of her mother and of Guadeloupe, her mother's land, begin to enter the narrative in flashbacks, often intruding on her conversations with the people around her, people from whom she becomes more and more distanced. She is constantly aware that she has not 'gone back' for nine years, and she begins to realise, as had the hero of the *Cahier*, that:

If I want to come to terms with myself, i.e. with them [her parents], i.e. with us, I ought to return home. To my island specks ... Home. Not here, where I'm a foreigner.
(*Heremakhonon*, p.71)

It is not, however, until she visits Saliou's aunt in a small, rural village, that her mistake becomes fully evident to her. Suddenly, as she sits in the village, surrounded by strangers, she has the impression that she is returning 'To the darkness of the womb. To the hollow of the maternal womb. Vague images pass through my head like a foetus.' (*Heremakhonon*, p.85) As her dream of returning to the womb continues, however, she realises that it is not that of Mother Africa, as she had earlier hoped would be the case, but that of her own mother(land): 'I am a long way away ... In my mother's womb which I never should have left' (p.86). Unfortunately, however, although she is incapable of imagining Guadeloupe separately from her mother, she is equally incapable of physically returning to Guadeloupe, and this fact itself has much to do, it would seem, with her difficult relationship with her mother. Véronica's present isolation in Africa, her felt exile from the native land is, as Elaine Savory Fido comments in a different context, 'clearly an extension of her separation from her mother. There is no passionate attachment to the country of birth, because there is alienation from that first country, mother herself'.³⁴ In the case of Véronica, and in a manner which recalls Irigaray's description of the mother-daughter relationship in patriarchy, her mother's own exile from traditional, Antillean culture - and the absorption of her identity into that of her husband - has been transmitted to Véronica. This, in part, has contributed to Véronica's own sense of exile in a fundamentally damaging way, even necessitating her quest to Africa. Véronica feels that she never really knew her mother: they were, it would seem, always exiled from one another, her mother rarely exhibiting any affection towards her: 'I imagine my mother's face wrinkled. She never liked me very much ... They had wanted a boy.' (*Heremakhonon*, pp17-8) It is such a sense of alienation, then, that Véronica has continually fled: first to Paris and then

³⁴ Elaine Savory Fido, 'Motherlands: Self and separation in the work of Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head and Jean Rhys', in *Motherlands*, op.cit., p.343.

to Africa, hoping to reconcile herself with her father through reconciling herself to Africa, and through this reconciliation, to her mother and her mother's land, Guadeloupe.

Although I do not have space here to deal with *A Season in Rihata* in any depth, the problems of Véronica are also, to a similar extent, those of Marie-Hélène, who feels unable to return to Guadeloupe precisely because of her mother's death, and because of the circumstances surrounding it. Marie-Hélène blames her father, a lower-class black ('un nègre nègre') for the death of her mother, a Guadeloupean of the mulatto class. She died, it seems, from an 'undiagnosed disease' (which, it is implied, is in fact 'madness') at fifty, brought on by not being loved by her too-black husband, of being 'despised, in body and soul' (*Rihata*, p.61). Marie-Hélène's thoughts of Guadeloupe are, like those of Véronica, always linked to thoughts of her mother. She, too, and to a much greater extent, dreams always of her native land, Guadeloupe, as her mother's land. Also like Véronica, she is unable to return to her native land: not only because her mother is dead, leaving her with nothing to which it is worth returning, but because she had never properly reconciled herself with her mother before her death, because they had never really understood one another. Thus:

Returning to Guadeloupe had meant little more for Marie-Hélène than going back to her mother. The island had symbolised one thing: her mother; a womb in which she could retreat from her suffering, eyes closed, fists clenched, soothed by the throbbing blood circulating round her. But her mother was dead. The grief of having lost her for ever, of not having been near her at the last moment, had made her hate the island and it became like a sterile womb, never to nurture a foetus again. (*Rihata*, p.62)

Unfortunately, for both women, 'repatriation' to Africa, the land imagined as the homeland, in fact constitutes 'exmatiation', exile from the mother(land).³⁵ Rather than enabling a return to

³⁵ I borrow this formulation from Susan Hardy Aiken, 'Writing (in) Exile: Isak Dinesen and the Poetics of Displacement', in *Women's Writing in Exile*, op.cit., p.114.

the Antilles, as had Césaire's hero's journey to Africa, the journeys of Véronica and Marie-Hélène actually hinder such a return. There is no room, it would seem, for Africa's daughters to return, at least not in the same manner as have her more famous sons.

Heremakhonon, then, ends with yet another flight on Veronica's part, this time back to Paris. However, if Véronica's quest has thus 'failed', in the sense that she has not managed to undertake the final return that she feels is necessary to her sense of identity, it has not been entirely in vain. By the simple fact of undertaking such a quest, Véronica can be seen to have disrupted the underlying tenets of the masculine quest for motherland of negritude. Véronica's inability to return to her motherland as had Césaire's narrator is thus not necessarily to be read as negative, for the hero of the *Cahier* represented his return by figuring the motherland as a female lover to be penetrated and made fecund, as a female body to be appropriated by him and transformed into the mother of a nation. Véronica, as a woman herself, can, like her own mother, occupy only a symbolic role within a patriarchal discourse such as negritude; they can exist only as the means through which heroes can represent their relation to origin. Crucially, however, Véronica refuses to occupy the position of symbolic Motherland, and instead goes in search of that land for herself. Through her journey and her 'exile', she constitutes, at the very least, a 'disruptive excess', an 'uncanny figure'. In removing herself from her sphere, 'home', the woman in exile, such as Véronica, refuses to represent 'home' for men.³⁶ If, for Irigaray, woman is always 'everywhere elsewhere', because of her exile in patriarchy, this 'elsewhereness', at least in the case of Véronica, can in fact be interpreted as a radical 'elsewhereness': in her constant flight, she remains also in a constant state of disruptive exile. In addition, her childlessness itself can be read as disruptive, as a desire on her part not only to refuse to be a 'home' for sons, but also to refuse to replicate her own relationship with her mother with daughters of her own. This

³⁶ As Jane Marcus explains, if, for Freud, the woman's body represents 'home', then the position of the woman in exile is necessarily 'uncanny'. (Jane Marcus, 'Alibis and Legends: The Ethics of Elsewhereness, Gender and Estrangement', in *Women's Writing in Exile*, op.cit., pp. 272-3)

final point, in fact, is vital, for Véronica's inability to represent her return is at the same time a refusal to represent the motherland as 'feminine matter' to be exploited, as a mother's body to be used only as a site of mediation between alienation and 'rebirth'.³⁷ Had she succeeded in representing her return to the motherland, then she would have run the risk of simply replicating the masculine, appropriative relation to the motherland described by Irigaray and Cixous. Unfortunately, Véronica never manages to 'invent' a different relation to motherland, as Cixous recommends in my earlier quotation from *La Jeune Née*. Instead, it is in Condé's subsequent novels, from *Une Saison à Rihata* to her most recent works, which are in fact set in Guadeloupe, that the relationship to the motherland begins to be 'invented', either through dream and madness in the case of Marie-Hélène, or through story-telling, myth- and history-making in *Traversée de la mangrove* and *Les Derniers Rois Mages*. However, I should like to end by suggesting that such a movement would not have been possible without the radical disruption of the negritude theme which takes place through Véronica Mercier in this initially much disliked, and possibly misunderstood, first novel.

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37 Such attempts to demythologise androcentric representations of the nation as the exploitable mother's body, are, of course, not necessarily undertaken by women writers revising the canon. Some women writers may choose instead to remythologise Africa as a nourishing mother for women. As Elleke Boehmer points out, however: 'how are such myths, such apparently redemptive symbols, to be separated from those which continue to shore up patriarchal desire and a system of gendered national authority?' (Boehmer, in *Motherlands*, op.cit., p.9). Irigaray, too, insists that in liberating themselves from patriarchal representations of women only as mothers for men, they must do so along with, not at the expense of, their mothers: 'we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters' ('Women-mothers, the silent substratum', op.cit., p.50).

'Nègres blancs': the Comic Stereotype of Jijé's *Blondin et Cirage*



After hunting for some time, out of general interest, for a copy of the issue no. 91 of *Notre Librairie* (janvier-février 1988), long since out of print, which deals with *Images du Noir dans la littérature occidentale, 2: De la conquête coloniale à nos jours*, I had the happy surprise of finding in it (on p.147) an illustration of the cover of a book entitled *Le Nègre blanc*. Published at Charleroi by Editions Dupuis, it is a B.D. by Jijé, dating from 1952, in a series entitled 'Les Aventures de Blondin et Cirage'. Enquiries of the publisher revealed that *Le Nègre blanc* was reissued with three other adventures of Blondin and Cirage in 1984 in a hardback 'Péchés de jeunesse' collection and again in 1991, alongside *Blondin et Cirage au Mexique*, *Kamiliola* and, in a quite different style, two other tales outside the Blondin and Cirage cycle. It is the first volume in a reissue intended to collect all the works of Jijé, the pseudonym of Joseph Gillain, who was closely associated with the weekly comic *Spirou*, in some twenty volumes covering his productive life from 1938 to 1977 and to be published at the rate of two a year.¹

An unsigned preface to the 1991 volume *1951-1952: Tout Jijé* recounts the origins of Blondin and Cirage: 'Créés pour l'hebdomadaire confessionnel PETITS BELGES en 1939, *Blondin et Cirage* reposent sur le contraste existant entre deux

¹ I am grateful to M. Thierry Martens of Editions Dupuis, Charleroi, for helping me to trace some of these details.

héros de race différente, mais sans le paternalisme régnant à cette époque dans la B.D. européenne. Si le petit Blanc y joue au malin et paraît tout savoir, c'est l'astucieux petit Noir qui résout le plus souvent les problèmes et ils sont véritablement égaux ... Dans *Le Nègre blanc* (1951 [sic]), sur un synopsis d'Henri Gillain [frère de Joseph], une Afrique d'opérette constitue le cadre de l'histoire' (p.4).

In the event, the *Nègre blanc* here is merely a white boy in disguise. The tale opens with Blondin and Cirage - whose very names pander to stereotypes, the latter choice being distinctly offensive - playing tennis and the latter being kidnapped as he goes to retrieve a ball. Comic diversions frustrate Blondin's search for his 'terrible twin' friend² but, as it emerges that several black youngsters have disappeared in mysterious circumstances, he decides to make himself a target for kidnap by blacking up and so beat the captors by joining Cirage. (The secret of the chemicals which give such lasting effects to skin and hair is not of course divulged.) His ruse succeeds. The boys' endeavours to escape are frustrated, but it transpires that their kidnappers, led by a minister in league with B'akélit the sorcerer, are seeking the heir to the throne of Bikitilili who had gone to earth to avoid the effects of sorcery practised against him, and they therefore treat them well. With heavy irony, Blondin is taken for the prince. The lads are flown separately to Bikitilili where, not surprisingly, the king, Trombona-Koulis ('trombone à coulisse', get it?!), fails to recognise his son in Blondin. Cirage is produced, however, and, much to his surprise, is so recognised.

Sent to slave in the fields for personation, though his real disguise - and therefore its true nature - remain unpenetrated, Blondin escapes by the expedient of washing off his coloration and re-emerging as himself. His disappearance is noted, however, and to escape the authorities (including fez-wearing *tirailleurs sénégalais* come as if straight from the Banania posters) he resorts to a manicured jungle. There he meets the real heir apparent, who has at his command a performing chimpanzee and a squad of pygmies.

2 There are certain very similar features in the drawing of the two boys despite the obvious differences: the outlines of their heads and tightly curled hair are, for example, almost identical.

They run rings round the troops sent to recapture Blondin, and in turn both the minister and the sorcerer have their comeuppance, scared out of their wits by an okapi head and skin wielded by Blondin representing the local spirit god (a clear example of high-minded European paternalism). They are brought to justice either via a heated cauldron or through the evangelising mercies of the local white missionary. The prince is happily reunited with his father, Blondin and Cirage are honoured guests at festivities marking the occasion, and peals of thick-lipped laughter ring from the final frame.

From this summary, I have glossed over details of subsidiary episodes, localised humorous by-play, discontinuities and inaccuracies. The stylised distortions of the genre are as present as the trusty convention of speech-bubbles and the 'GLOP'; 'POP'; 'WA WA'; 'HI HI'; 'GRRR'; '!!'; and '¿?' of sound effect and speechless comment. One character alone is represented without distortion and that is the missionary, who by that very fact joins the stereotypes which inhabit the tale and inhibit one's pleasure.

It is not my purpose here to pursue a semiotic study of this particular representation of the *Nègre blanc* but rather to note the conservative interpretation of the expression which my initial study (in *ASCALF Bulletin* no 4, Winter 1992) allows us to recognise unambiguously, whatever disclaimers may be made on Jijé's behalf with regard to paternalism. The blacked-up Blondin is a variant of the nineteenth-century view of the 'Nègre blanc' as a White person reduced in some way to the condition of a Black. Blondin engages in a scenario on the lines of the 'stoops to conquer' topos. To find a character who may be aligned with the twentieth-century Black view of the *Nègre blanc* as a fellow Black aping white manners, we have to turn, paradoxically, to the tennis- and golf-playing Cirage, whose incompetence at both sports is not only a source of ridicule but also integral to the narrative.³ Manifestly, it is not part of Jijé's programme that this interpretation should be applied to his title.

The popular nature of the B.D. designed for children is a rich source for adults of semiotic study of the interaction of word

3 Incompetence at white men's sports is made a characteristic of Cirage: in *Kamiliola*, he plays various deck games to disastrous effect and significantly is berated as a 'mal blanchi' for his lack of prowess.

and image and of the stereotyping apparent in *Le Nègre blanc*. While it may be argued that Jijé ostensibly, even ostentatiously, selects a white boy and a black boy as his main protagonists to show that friendship can transcend race, and that he thus demonstrates his liberal credentials by concentrating on their common humanity rather than on their difference and the racial 'barrier', he falls unconsciously into the trap of a double jeopardy.

The visual stereotypes are matched by verbal ones, notably in the use of 'petit nègre' ('Missié', 'Ça y en a drôle', 'Moi y en a devenir fou', etc.) for the less educated African characters. The perniciousness of such features must be condemned even more forcibly when the likely readership of the material is considered. Paradoxically, the apparent liberalism of juxtaposing Blondin and Cirage as friends and joint heroes makes the effect more insidious, since it can be dismissed as legitimate characterisation, suitably simplified for children. It does not need a great effort of the imagination to recognise the dangers inherent in what might otherwise be seen as 'only a bit of fun'.

Michel Pierre gives a useful introduction to the genre in his 'La B.D., terre des grands fantasmes',⁴ from which emerges a pattern parallel to that which my study of 'Nègres blancs' revealed, namely a reversal of attitudes only when Black writers engaged in producing their own counterweight to previous White assumptions. Clearly the study of the *bande dessinée* in the context of other manifestations of the image of the Black in White eyes has immense potential as a kind of litmus test of prejudice and stereotyped assumptions.

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⁴ *Notre Librairie*, 91: *Images du Noir dans la littérature occidentale*, 2: *De la conquête coloniale à nos jours* (janvier-février 1988), 116-119.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

APELA Conference

Littératures africaines et démocratie, Université de Paris IV,
17-18 Sept. '93

Mineke Schipper opened the first day with a paper on 'Poétique et politique - mariage forcé ou divorce à faire?' in which, opening out from the European notion of 'art for art', she discussed the generally accepted connection between literature and politics in Africa, and the recent South African debate generated by Albie Sachs' attempt to redefine the relationship between 'art' and 'the struggle'. Subsequent papers related to specific authors or texts as well as general themes, covering a wide range of areas: 'francophone' West Africa (among others, Madeleine Borgomano's discussion of democracy as utopia in Kourouma, Lopès and Adiaffi was particularly interesting), the Maghreb (Jean Déjeux: 'Deux pamphlets algériens contre la barbarie: Boujédra et Mimouni'), Congo (Mohamed Ait-Aarab: 'Pouvoir totalitaire et fiction littéraire chez Sony Labou Tansi et Rachid Mimouni'), Tanzania (Elena Bertoni: 'La littérature swahili entre l'Ujamaa et la démocratie'), South Africa (Jean Sévry: 'La fin de l'Apartheid et les littératures: à quelle langue se vouer, et pour quoi faire?').

As always at APELA conferences, the atmosphere was 'familiale'. The policy of not splitting the conference into different workshops makes the event something of a test of stamina (twenty papers in less than a day and a half) but means that everybody is involved in an evolving discussion of the central topic. In this case, the debate took off furiously from the moment when Romuald Fonkoua produced the provocative formula that democracy would only become possible in Africa when people dared to say 'Famille, je vous hais!' - this became the sub-theme which dominated most of the conference. Discussion revolved largely around the development from orature to literature, the relationship between politics and individual psychoanalysis (this provoked largely by Ursula Baumgardt's paper on 'La Démocratie absente: le cas de Monenembo'); the distinction between democracy and popular

behaviour (how democratic is rumour?) and the question of the existence of a literature of collaboration as well as a literature of contestation. It was suggested, in discussing this last question, that the lack of literature of collaboration in Africa could be due to the control exercised by French publishers, a theme which perhaps deserved further discussion. If the preponderance of individual textual studies over general papers on the relationship between politics and literature was perhaps slightly disappointing, the comparativist nature of many of the papers (evident from the sample of topics given in the first paragraph, above) and the evolving discussion provided considerable compensation.

Next year's Study Day is to be stretched to two days in Montpellier on the theme 'Littératures et cinéma: paroles et images'. Projection facilities will be available for both illustration of papers and the projection of full-length films.

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Aimé Césaire's 80th birthday

I was privileged to be invited to give a paper at the conference organised in Fort de France by Roger Toumson, Jacqueline Leiner and Daniel-Henri Pageaux, in honour of Césaire's 80th birthday. It was a memorable experience - not just a conference which brought together most of the Césaire specialists from all over the world, but an ambitious Festival as well, on the Césairean theme of 'Hors des jours étrangers'.

What sometimes seemed like a week-long party began on the big day itself, Saturday 26th June, at ten in the morning, at the colonial-style Lycée Schoelcher where Césaire began his teaching career in September 1939. A gathering of his former pupils welcomed him to a crowded classroom with reminiscences of his inspiring classes on French poetry. One of them recalled his arrival one morning, throwing his briefcase across the desk and pronouncing: 'Rimbaud, puissance de la révolte!'. Revolting times they were, indeed, as speakers evoked the Pétainist régime in Martinique, and the creation of the review *Tropiques* with René Ménil. A plaque was unveiled in the staff room and we enjoyed *accras* and *'ti punch* to celebrate,

whilst admiring the magnificent view across the bay of Fort de France.

Later the same morning, in the packed reception room at the top of the modern Town Hall, a pink toast-rack of a building, the municipal staff had gathered to greet the man who had been their Mayor for nearly fifty years. The speeches were no catalogue of administrative achievements, but rather an appreciation of the poet, with recitations of his poems and what amounted to a post-doctoral research seminar. The birthday present was a microfilm of the original typed manuscript of the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, sent to the editor of the revue *Volontés* where it appeared in 1939, and acquired for the library of the *Assemblée nationale* by its former President, Henri Emmanuelli. The manuscript stopped at the line '... debout et libre'; the remaining 70 lines, from 'et le navire lustral ...' to 'immobile verrition' were apparently added subsequently, at the suggestion of the editor.

The copious buffet lunch, the *'ti punch*, the crowds and the heat made a siesta indispensable, and Joel and his team of shuttle-bus drivers were on hand as they were whenever they were needed throughout the conference to take us back to the Hôtel Batelière at Schoelcher. We were ferried back to town in the evening for an inspiring performance by Opera Ebony from New York entitled 'Freedom Song', a collage of spirituals and extracts from modern black operas: 'Frederick Douglass' by Dorothy Rudd Moore, about escaping slaves in 19th century USA and 'Oh Freedom' by Lena McLin, about the civil rights campaign of Martin Luther King. Césaire was there to enjoy the spectacle and be fêted once again with speeches and presents. More *accras*, more *'ti punch* were offered back at the Town Hall, this time by the organisers of the Festival, the SERMAC - 'Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle'.

Sunday was a break and a chance to visit the island, including Basse-Pointe in the north, where Césaire was born and the location of the Rue Paille of the *Cahier*, which like so many towns on the Atlantic coast turns its back on the unpicturesque black sand beaches. We also visited Saint-Pierre, the former capital, completely destroyed in 1902 by an eruption of the Montagne Pelée, and the 18th century sugar plantation at Leyritz, now a hotel where the *cases-nègres* have been turned into tourist bungalows ...

The conference proper began on Monday 28 June in the Colisée, a former cinema, large and air-conditioned, close to the centre of Fort de France. Claude Lise, President of the Conseil Régional, opened the proceedings, followed by further dramatic renditions of Césaire's poems by Elie Pennont. The first papers focused on Césaire's theatre and particularly *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*: Alain Moreau from Montpellier emphasized the Greek notion of 'hubris', Clément Mbom from Yaoundé and Barthélémy Kotchy from Abidjan highlighting in different ways the tragically prophetic model of Christophe seen from an African perspective; Régine Latortue from a Haitian point of view, and Marianne Bailey from the angle of the universal appeal of ritual theatre.

The Monday afternoon sessions concentrated on Césaire's poetry, with Michel Lequenne, himself a former surrealist, looking at Césaire's involvement with the movement, Joël Beuze from Martinique on the 'expérience de l'abîme', Clarisse Zimra from Illinois on the 'longue transhumance du Rebelle' in the poems of *Moi, laminaire*, and Daniel Delas from Nanterre on the *jeu de mots* in the same collection. Hans-Peter Ruhe from Würzburg in Germany looked at the ironic intertextuality of Claudel's Christophe Colomb in *Et les Chiens se taisaient*; and Lilyan Kesteloot, the doyenne of Césaire criticism, caused a stir with her provocative emphasis on resentment as the basis of Césaire's inspiration, contrasting it with the distant, impassive facade of the politician. This later provoked the only public comment from Césaire, who had been present for most of the day: when pointedly asked by a woman in the audience 'Où va la Martinique?', his response was 'Demandez à Lilyan Kesteloot!'

On Monday evening, as on every other evening of the conference, there was an unmissable performance to go to: *La Nef*, a play written and directed by Césaire's daughter Michèle and capably performed by the Théâtre Racines at the charming Théâtre Municipal in the old colonial-style Town Hall. The play is an allegorical piece about the search for a problematic Caribbean identity: the ship of the title is rocked by sexual and political rivalries until its self-appointed captain reaches land and dons the symbolic colonial trappings of a tunic and pith helmet. Another veiled attack on the contradictions of papa

Césaire's political stances? Probably not: rather an oblique and poetic comment on the chronic instability of Caribbean politics. The Tuesday morning session of the conference began with Thomas Hale from Pennsylvania drawing fascinating parallels between the multi-genre structure of African oral epics and the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Antoine Court from Clermont-Ferrand compared Césaire's account of Toussaint Louverture with Lamartine's play, and Régis Antoine from Nantes and Daniel-Henri Pageaux from Paris analysed Césaire's rhetoric, in the *Discours sur le Colonialisme* and in his political speeches respectively.

Two feminist readings began the afternoon: Annette Smith, co-translator with Clayton Eshleman of Césaire's complete poetic works brought out the latent 'feminine writing' in Césaire's poetry, while Valérie Rouf, the heroic and tireless conference administrator, examined the roles of women in his plays. Dolores Lairer from Cleveland compared Césaire with the black American author Jean Toomer, and the afternoon ended with three papers of broadly psychoanalytical interest: my own, on the notion of the unconscious in Surrealism and the *Cahier*, and two Martinican psychoanalysts who proceeded to fall out with each other. Guillaume Suréna focused on 'le meurtre du père nègre' in the *Cahier* and Simone Henry-Valmore sought to reaffirm the existence of a form of therapy - in Césaire's poetic practice - prior to the arrival on a yacht of a Swedish couple in bermuda shorts who are supposed to have 'brought psychoanalysis to Martinique' and, presumably, to Guillaume Suréna ... The rest of us were somewhat bemused and relieved when the stage had to be cleared to make way for a recital of Césaire's poetry, powerfully performed to a percussion accompaniment by Delphine Lequenne, Guillaume Lebon and Colin Serin.

The final day began with some papers by researchers at Roger Toumson's GRELCA, 'Groupe de Recherche et d'Etude des Littératures et Civilisations de la Caraïbe et des Amériques noires', beginning with Christian Lapoussinière, editor of the *Cahiers Aimé Césaire*, on the fusion of knowledge and action in Césaire's poetry, Véronique Bessard on the theme of nostalgia and Henriette Raccach on the theme of the island; the archivist Jean-Claude Louise-Alexandrine examined the genealogy of the Césaire family to affirm that Aimé was *not* in

fact related to the Césaire who was a leader of a slave revolt in 1834. Angela Santa from Lleida in Spain looked at the *Cahier* as autobiography and Ivan Grullon at the historical sources of Césaire's writings.

Wednesday afternoon began with the discussion of the problems of translating Césaire, into Portuguese with Lilian Pestre d'Almeida from Rio, and into Spanish with Imma Linares from Valencia. Ulla Schild, curator of the Jahnheinz Jahn collection at Mainz, entertainingly recounted stories of the German critic's relations with Césaire, and Ronnie Scharfman her own experiences in trying to write about Césaire in the middle of the American orthodoxy of deconstruction.

Césaire himself was again present for the conclusion of the conference, during which several fellow writers paid tribute to him, such as Daniel Maximin, Henri Corbin, Georges Desportes and Edgardo Rodríguez-Julia. Roger Toumson had asked Daniel Henri-Pageaux from the Sorbonne to produce a synthesis of the conference papers, a daunting task which he accomplished with magisterial assurance: rather too magisterial for some delegates, who would have preferred a plenary discussion. The inevitable malcontents could not deny the fact that the conference had been a rich and varied feast, intellectually and culturally, and that the generosity of the welcome had been overwhelming. The edited papers of the conference are expected to appear in due course with the Günther Narr publishing house in Germany. The fundraising, planning and administration must have been a formidable challenge, and the results were truly magnificent, a credit to the efforts of Roger Toumson, Daniel-Henri Pageaux and particularly Jacqueline Leiner, omnipresent in spite of her age and fragile health. As a fittingly exuberant conclusion, we were treated that evening to a spectacular performance by the National Ballet of Guinea, who were given a standing ovation not least by Césaire himself.

The conference was over but not the cultural treats of the Festival de Fort de France. After another day out, visiting amongst other things the magnificent botanical garden at Balata, full of those obscure tropical plants so much loved by Césaire and celebrated in his poetry, on Thursday evening we were able to attend an all too rare performance of *Et les chiens se taisaient*, performed by the Compagnie Hervé Denis from

Haiti. Denis himself is a veteran Césairean actor having performed in the 1973 Patrice Chéreau production of *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*. This new production had been conceived and performed virtually underground, as a gesture of defiance to the 1992 military take-over in Haiti. Not an easy play to stage, more a poetic dialogue than a piece of theatre, it was handled imaginatively and powerfully, with the main role of Le Rebelle shared between three actors, to suggest development and provide variety in the long speeches. A challenging performance and a fitting conclusion to a very rewarding conference, although by no means the end of my stay in Martinique ...

Peter Hawkins
University of Bristol

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Francophone Writing

Francophone Writing from North and West Africa at London Guildhall University, July 16-17, 1993

London Guildhall University and Laïla Ibnlfassi wasted no time in putting themselves on the map with this splendid conference, actively supported by Dr Seán Hand and the Dept of Language Studies. An impressive list of keynote speakers were invited, including the pioneering novelists Mongo Beti and Albert Memmi, and the eminent French academic Charles Bonn from the Université de Paris-Nord at Villetaneuse. It was Albert Memmi who began the proceedings on the Friday afternoon with a broad survey of his work, 'L'itinéraire d'un écrivain'. This was of great interest since his novel, *La Statue de sel* of 1953 was one of the first in French by a writer of Maghrebian origin and contains all the main themes of his subsequent writing, and indeed many of those developed by later Maghrebian authors. His later work continues more in the lineage of his famous essay *Portrait du Colonisé* of 1957, however, with *L'Homme dominé* in 1968 and *La Dépendance* in 1979. He attempted to sum up, perhaps a little schematically, the central polarities of his work, but it was nonetheless a

stimulating and challenging opening to the conference. My coverage of individual papers will necessarily be selective, since it was not possible to attend all the sectional meetings that ran concurrently. I regretted missing the opening of Nicki Hitchcott's paper on the sexual politics of Mariama Bâ. At the sectional meeting I chaired later in the afternoon, Belinda Jack and Alec Hargreaves both tackled the perennial problem of the slipperiness of cultural labels. Belinda Jack examined the notion of Francophonie, difficult to disentangle from the neo-colonial politics of French governments and the inevitable cultural hegemony of France; she even went as far as to question the neutrality of the 'in French' of the forthcoming *Oxford Companion to Literature in French*. Alec Hargreaves was concerned to find a working definition of what has come to be known as 'Littérature beur(e)', writing by authors of Maghrebian immigrant origin in France, a definition which as it stands could include Michel Tournier ...

The evening wine reception and buffet dinner was generously and appetisingly provisioned, and we were asked to work off our surplus kilos by walking to the University's Tower Hill site to dance to the music of the group Noor Shimal, of mixed North African and Turkish origins. Several invitations to get up and boogie fell on deaf ears, however, as the audience preferred to watch the spectacle of energetic and colourful dancing in traditional costume. Finally, a happy few bravely rose to their feet and joined in.

On Saturday morning, the proceedings were opened by Charles Bonn, who gave us a fascinating glimpse of the corridors of power and influence in the French higher education system. He described the uphill battle for the recognition of Francophone literature in French universities, where the only two institutions officially authorised to teach it at all levels are his own, Paris-Nord and Bordeaux III. There are Departments of Comparative Literature which also cover the subject, such as at Paris III, but the involvement of staff and students is restricted by the obligatory competence in a foreign language, deemed to be essential in comparative literature studies.

In the ensuing sectional meetings, my own paper examined Aminata Sow Fall's re-working from a more conservative and Islamic point of view, in her novels *La Grève des battù* (1979) and *Ex-père de la Nation* (1987), of certain themes of Sembène,

treated from a Marxist perspective in *Xala* (1975) and *Le Dernier de l'empire* (1981). Fírinne Ní Chréacháin critically juxtaposed the Marxist positions defended by Sembène in his novels with the contemporary conflicts of Senegalese politics, and wondered if there wasn't an element of 'confort intellectuel' in his aloofness as revolutionary artist. After another copious buffet meal, during the afternoon sessions, I followed Carys Owen's fascinating comparison between the novels of Rachid Boujédra and Michel Tournier, and then went on to hear Madeleine Borgomano from Aix-en-Provence discussing 'l'hétérogénéité linguistique' of the textual experimentation undertaken by Ahmadou Kourouma in *Monnè, outrages et défis*, Jean-Marie Adiaffi's *Silence! on développe* and Calixthe Beyala in her first two novels *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, and *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. After a break for tea, the last plenary speaker was for me the star of the show: Mongo Beti. He recounted the moving story of his return to Cameroun in 1991, in the company of Ambroise Kom, after 35 years in exile in France as a political dissident. He had returned to his native village where some people took him for a ghost, believing him to be dead; but he was able to see his mother and speak to her in Ewondo, only months before she died. He was now involved in building wells to ensure a hygienic water supply in his village, and plans to return to Cameroun to set up a bookshop when he finally retires from his teaching post in Rouen in 1994. His sarcasm and irony was reserved for the Biya regime - corrupt and inept and propped up by French support, even though in the recent election Biya only won 39% of the votes despite having total control of the media, as against 36% for his rival John Freundie and 15% for the Northern Muslim party candidate. I had heard most of this story in advance, having been given the delightfully pleasant duty of collecting Mongo Beti from the airport and showing him around London. After his lecture, there were many questions, and eventually we returned to the dining hall for a light meal; the last survivors went for a friendly farewell drink on a pub terrace beside Liverpool Street station, before going our separate ways after what had been a very enjoyable conference.

Peter Hawkins
University of Bristol

BOOK REVIEWS

(1) AFRICA AND GENERAL

Ourika par Madame de Duras, Présentation et étude de Roger Little. (University of Exeter Press, 1993)

Ce livre reproduit le texte court (20 pages) du best seller de 1823; il fournit un ensemble iconographique qui sensibilise et donne à réfléchir à la question féminine noire, et sous la plume de Roger Little, critique et professeur à Trinity College, Dublin, il comporte plus de soixante pages d'étude accompagnée par une bibliographie et d'excellentes annexes.

Voilà de quoi parler autrement qu'à la légère d'un petit chef d'oeuvre.

Quelle est l'histoire, calquée sur un fait réel? Une jeune enfant sénégalaise, avant 1789, a été donnée à une aristocrate parisienne, Mme de B., qui l'élève en jeune fille de grande famille, comme si elle était blanche. Mais une conversation que l'adolescente surprend lui révèle qu'elle n'a aucun avenir social, ni sentimental, dans le milieu qui l'a bienveillamment adoptée.

Vouée dès lors à la solitude et au sentiment que personne dans la petite société de sa bienfaitrice n'a besoin d'elle, blessée par le préjugé de couleur qui persiste pendant les années de la Restauration, après la Révolution française, croyant devoir se désolidariser de ses congénères noirs après les excès de la Révolution haïtienne, elle souffre encore d'une déception affective, après le mariage de celui qui avait été le compagnon de sa jeunesse.

Elle ne voit plus d'issue que tragique, se fait religieuse, mais sa santé physique et morale s'est définitivement détériorée, et elle meurt au terme de quelques mois.

C'est le mérite de Roger Little de nous fournir suffisamment d'informations et d'éléments d'analyse pour que nous puissions dégager la singularité de cette histoire écrite à partir de 1820, malgré son évidente appartenance au courant littéraire

romantique, malgré sa parenté avec non seulement *Atala* de Chateaubriand, *Paul et Virginie* de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Bug Jargal* de Victor Hugo, mais aussi avec de multiples petits romans ou nouvelles de l'époque qui déclinent le motif de l'opposition, résolue ou non, de l'amour et du préjugé de couleur, notamment les nouvelles de Mme Sophie Doin. La centralité féminine du point de vue sur ce motif est par ailleurs un variant de la littérature antillaise, illustré par les romans de Michèle Lacrosil (années soixante) et plus récemment par Maryse Condé. Motif majoritairement traité par des femmes écrivains, ce qui autorise Roger Little à prolonger la partie psychologique de son étude par l'examen des 'interprétations féministes' d'*Ourika*.

Mais le critique montre que l'appréciation 'racialiste' du drame de la petite Sénégalaise n'est qu'une première approche, la seconde consistant à considérer le problème de la paranoïa, de la haine de soi, et la plus affinée allant aux 'effets de l'éloignement sur l'individu, et de l'autre, une critique du moins implicite de l'inflexibilité et de l'intolérance de la société'.

Le personnage d'*Ourika* parle à la première personne, mais il ne s'agit pas de cette prosopopée si répandue alors, quand un auteur voulait débattre de la question nègre. Roger Little montre bien la relation étroite qui unit Madame de Duras 'femme-écrivain d'une trempe et d'une sensibilité exceptionnelles et son héroïne, 'première noire transplantée dans la société européenne devenant le sujet principal d'une fiction'. Sous la plume de notre collègue, la biographie littéraire se fait roman parallèle. Ajoutons pour notre part qu'*Ourika* partage visiblement avec son auteur le goût du bien dire, celui des aphorismes, des alliances de termes, des syntagmes antithétiques, des jeux sur les mots.

Histoire réelle avons-nous dit, et Roger Little fournit de précieux renseignements sur les milieux émigrés des années de la Révolution, les salons littéraires des années 20, la forte présence de Chateaubriand, le 'réalisme historique' de l'écrivain, l'état de la question noire. Un moment, et s'agissant du constat et de la contradiction suivante: il n'y a pas de bonheur pour une négresse instruite, *Ourika* a pu croire que l'événement révolutionnaire de 1789 a rejoint l'avance prise par la générosité de la bienfaitrice, mais le moment émancipateur n'aura été ni total, ni durable.

Modulations sur la jalousie masochiste, retentissement poétique du non-accompli, saveur d'une prose achevée, voilà ce qu'apporte encore cette réédition d'*Ourika*, qui reproduit la première édition en nous faisant profiter de tous les acquis de la critique littéraire actuelle.

Régis Antoine
Université de Nantes

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Peter Hawkins & Annette Lavers, eds, *Protée noir. Essais sur la littérature francophone de l'Afrique noire et des Antilles*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1992. 299pp. ISBN 2-7384-1473-7.

At the beginning of his contribution on *The Language of African Cinema*, James Leahy quotes Med Hondo's remark that 'to have so many languages in a country, it is a richness'. At the beginning of her essay on *The Question of Language in African Literature*, Jill Taylor quotes an inquiry that once came Pierre Alexandre's way: 'Are you the Professor of African?', he was asked. Both writers seek to draw our attention to the problem that underlies any discussion of modern African culture: the fact that the multiplicity of the continent's languages indicates a multiplicity of related but separate cultures and gives rise to very serious difficulties of communication, a situation which is not always readily appreciated, even by specialists in African literature who work within the relative simplicity of African creative writing in a small number of European languages. Yet Med Hondo's remark can itself seem to be a way of neatly side-stepping the problem by blessing it. The reality is, of course, that the evolution of the post-colonial cultures of Africa is going to be a very complex process involving tensions between the imposed languages and cultures of the West and those of pre-European Africa, in which political, social and economic forces will, as they have always done, play the determining role and ultimately destroy most of these languages.

The concluding conversation with Sembène Ousmane helps to focus on a key issue arising from this discussion of language: the fact that through the cinema, which is immensely popular with the majority, Africa, like the Western world, has returned

to an oral and visual culture which preceded and profoundly contrasts with the artificial written literature of the minority. In Africa, the cinema projects accessible images of a broad range of human experience which, unlike the written literature, greatly reduces the negative effects of linguistic incomprehension. It is interesting that Sembène has reservations about the possibility of his moving on to the theatre, perhaps because, in spite of the attempts being made to renew the African theatrical tradition, it still seems too contrived a form to achieve the same breadth and vitality of communication as the cinema.

There runs through the contributions of James Leahy and Jill Taylor and the conversation with Sembène Ousmane the recognition of the existence of what is effectively a class distinction between the majority who continue mainly to use the indigenous languages and the minority who by and large prefer to use the language of the former colonizer and are moving more rapidly towards a culture determined by the West. This recalls to mind Richard Burton's perceptive analysis earlier in the collection of Damas's depiction in *Hoquet* of the way class distinctions in Guyana are expressed in terms of language, for the relationship between creole and French in the West Indies is not unlike that between the indigenous languages of Africa and those of the colonizers. Without the cinema, the gulf between the cultures of the majority and the minority would grow wider more rapidly, but at the end of the day it will not prevent the continuing development of a destructive class rift.

These three vital contributions, coming at the end of the volume, throw those that precede them into relief and to some extent diminish the certainties they often seem to project. The violinists who precede the guitarists who play us out seem, in retrospect, a little tired and remote, almost too fussy. This is, of course, an illusion. Novelists like Hamidou Kane, Williams Sassine, and V. Y. Mudimbe have interpreted and reflected with great sensitivity on the complexities and miseries of the colonial experience, and the contributors to this collection who have analysed their work have all heightened our awareness of what they are saying. On the other hand, by their very nature, surveys of a field of literature run the risk of seeming sketchy and superficial; thus, the contributions from Jean-Louis Joubert

on the poetry of the Indian Ocean, Arlette Chemain on women's writing, and Anna Ridehalgh on Francophone literature and apartheid, while useful to the newcomer as an indication of what is on offer, do not entirely surmount this hurdle. Dorothy Blair's essay dealing mainly with Calixthe Beyala and Ananda Devi is, however, an effective introduction to two very significant, and different talents, examined in the context of women's writing in Africa as a whole. Bridget Jones's discussion of the prospects for literature in French Guyana is perhaps the most illuminating of this set of essays because it is firmly based on an assessment of the political and social factors without which neither African nor Caribbean literature can be properly appreciated.

But perhaps by far the most stimulating single essay in the collection is Fírinne Ní Chréacháin's 'Sembène Ousmane incorporated', for its forthright demolition of Martin Bestman's Negritude-based study of Sembène Ousmane, all the more so as Sembène is himself a contributor to the collection and stands intellectually at the opposite pole to Senghor, the chief exponent of African Negritude. Bringing these two together in this intellectually dramatic way makes this essay the pivot of the volume as a whole.

Moreover, Fírinne Ní Chréacháin, a white critic, feels able to take a tough line over a text by a black writer without making any apology for doing so, and this is as it should be. Peter Hawkins and Roger Little, however, both feel the need to defend the white critic's 'right' to comment on black writing. This is a tired issue which was only ever relevant in the context of a certain political stance adopted by some African writers and intellectuals. I can discern nothing in Sembène's contribution to suggest that it has any importance today, and in my view it is best left alone.

Especially as it tends to lead straight into another, even more delicate, tangle. For Roger Little goes on to insist that positive discrimination by the white critic in favour of black writers would be a mistake; 'there is no reason', he says, 'to lower critical standards'. He then declares that the motives of anyone who sees his remarks as patronizing are likely to be suspect. Notwithstanding this caution, I am bound to say that they *are* patronizing. In the same category is Peter Hawkins's reference to African literature as having 'come of age'. But Roger Little

and Peter Hawkins are in the very best company: the great Sartre himself showed himself to be as patronizing as any of his compatriots on the cultural right of his day when he coined his famous title *Orphée noir* (and it follows that the title *Protée noir* for this present collection falls into the same trap). Senghor should have put Sartre right at the time, but he himself enjoyed too much being patronized by the French intellectual establishment, all the way to the *Académie française*, to do so, satisfied that he could use the claims of Negritude to patronize it back.

Overall, this is a valuable volume. Peter Hawkins's comprehensive, balanced and well-informed introduction maps the field and raises the issues very perceptively. The expert essays that follow all, in one or more ways, take us forward in our understanding of the French-language literature of Africa and the Caribbean. Since it is made up of conference papers, the volume does suffer, inevitably, from the random character of the topics chosen by the participants - although their importance is frequently mentioned, there are no essays on writers like Sony Labou Tansi or Tati-Loutard, nor even on the poetry of the African continent as a whole; there is no essay on the theatre. Perhaps these and other gaps will be filled in the next volume. And if the editors decide to use a French publisher again, they might take a tougher line regarding the correction of printer's errors in the English text, where the sense is at times completely lost in an appalling mess of misprints. To allow this to happen is a discourtesy to the contributors and it damages the discipline in the eyes of the wider academic community.

It is also a very significant volume, for its publication and the conference upon which it is based represented an important step forward in the belated wider recognition of French-language African and Caribbean in the French departments of universities on this side of the Channel.

Clive Wake

Présence Francophone, Revue Internationale de Langue et de Littérature, N° 41, 1992, 'Le Roman négro-africain'

Ce numéro aurait un intérêt tout particulier aux enseignants, critiques et chercheurs de la littérature négro-africaine. Il est composé en partie de communications qui ont été présentées à divers ateliers et tables-rondes lors du colloque sur les 'Nouvelles tendances des littératures d'expression française', organisé par *Présence Francophone* en 1991.

Notons surtout les contributions suivantes:

- Hélène Jaccopard et Jean-Marie Volet, 'Pactes autobiographiques et écrivaines francophones d'Afrique noire', qui détermine la place occupée par l'autobiographie dans la soixantaine d'ouvrages publiés par des romancières francophones au seuil des années 1990.
- Christiane Ndiaye, 'Sony Labou Tansi et Kourouma: le refus du silence', qui compare *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* au dernier roman de Kourouma, *Monnè, outrages et défis*, et cherche à démontrer comment 'ces deux écrivains parviennent à en relativiser un certain nombre de vérités reçues pour faire valoir des réalités vécues qui échappent à l'entendement rationnel et au réalisme romanesque conventionnel.
- Josias Semujanga, 'La littérature africaine des années quatre-vingt: les tendances nouvelles du roman'.

Le numéro 42, (1993) de *Présence Francophone*, dont Ambroise Kom assume la direction, sera consacré à l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti.

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Bulletin Franco-Femmes N° 1, 1992

Coordination: Christine Makward, Pennsylvania State University Park PA 16802, USA

Tarif d'abonnement individuel: un an: \$20, trois ans: \$50

Coordinatrices selon l'aire géographique (celles-ci invitent des informations féminines francophones, questions, notes bibliographiques, annonces et notes de conférences):

Afrique Noire: Elizabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, African Languages and Literatures, Duke University, Durham, NC 27706

Antilles: Clarisse Zimra, Dept of English, SIV-Carbondale, IL 62901-4519, USA

Maghreb: Denise Brahmini, 2 rue Victor Durroy, 75015 Paris, France

Le Bulletin Franco-Femmes, inauguré sous l'égide de *Présence Francophone*, à l'Université de Sherbrooke, Québec, est un espace ouvert à l'information concernant les femmes de la francophonie. Conformément à la mission de *Présence Francophone*, Revue internationale de langue et de littérature, et aussi de la tradition du *Bulletin de Recherches et d'Etudes Féministes Francophones*, le BFF a comme but de faire connaître les activités littéraires, culturelles et socio-politiques des femmes qui s'expriment en français.

Ce premier numéro contient, inter alia, des comptes-rendus de certaines publications récentes susceptibles d'intéresser les membres de l'ASCALF, à savoir:

- Beyala, Calixthe (Camerounaise), *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*, roman, Paris: Albin Michel, 1992
- Djebbar, Assia (Algérienne), *Loin de Médine, filles d'Ismaël*, roman, Paris: Albin Michel, 1991
- Yahia, Emna Bel Haj (Tunisienne), *Chronique frontalière*, Paris: Noël Blandin, 1991
- Mortimer, Mildred, *Journeys through the French African Novel*, Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1990
- Schwarz-Bart, Simone, *Hommage à la femme noire*, Paris: Editions Consulaires, 1988-89

...

Les Cahiers du CAEC, Analyse et informations culturelles, Janvier 1993, Abonnement annuel (4 numéros): France, 120 FF; autres pays, 30\$ US

Le but exprimé de cette revue trimestrielle, fondée par Aminata Sow Fall, éditée et exploitée par le Centre Africain d'Animation et d'Echanges Culturels (CAEC) est de fournir un aperçu de l'actualité littéraire et artistique africaine, de donner une analyse

approfondie d'oeuvres littéraires, et d'offrir un débouché aux oeuvres inédites d'écrivains reconnus et d'auteurs débutants.

Ce premier numéro contient, *i.a.*

- des comptes-rendus par Lilyan Kesteloot de deux numéros de *Notre Librairie*

- le texte d'une communication faite par Ousmane William MBaye à une table ronde au CAEC: 'Le Cinéma sénégalais 30 ans après'

- le texte du discours de Boubacar Boris Diop, pour inaugurer l'Union National des Ecrivains du Sénégal (UNES)

- un poème inédit d'Ibrahima Malick Dia, 'Obsessions humaines', écrit en 1991

- un extrait du roman *La Prédiction* de Moukhtar Diop, CAEC, Khoudia Editions, 1991

Dorothy Blair

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Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, London: James Currey, 1992, 354pp, ISBN 0-85255-700-0, £9.95, p/b

Daniel Etounga Manguelle: *L'Afrique a-t-elle besoin d'un programme d'ajustement culturel?*, Ivry-sur-Seine: Editions Nouvelles du Sud, 1991, 154 pp, ISBN 2-87931-001-6, 80Fr, p/b

Although neither of these books deals with literature, they are both of interest to anyone concerned with the preoccupations of African literature and the context in which it is produced. Both, in different ways, deal with a frequent theme of modern literature and film: the reasons for the corruption of the postcolonial élites and the passivity of the people.

Basil Davidson's work explores and develops the familiar thesis that the nation-state was foisted on Africa at decolonisation, it being unthinkable that any but the 19th century European model could be appropriate; and that the resulting concentration of power in the hands of small élites has disempowered peripheral communities and the mass of the people, the consequence being a massive disengagement from the state. In a fascinating early chapter, he analyses the role of

early Europeanised intellectuals in Liberia and Sierra Leone - the 'recaptives' liberated by the ending of the slave trade, but without roots in their new 'homelands' - in establishing a Eurocentric political agenda for Africa. Much of the work is taken up with an analysis of 19th and 20th century Yugoslavia, which provides an instructive comparison: from the 19th century struggles for independence, which under the leadership of middle-class exiles rapidly became struggles for national rather than social revolution, to the recent failure of federalism, the analogy is one with considerable pertinence for Africa.

As always with Davidson's work, this is a massive effort of synthesis, and the resulting smudging of regional differences is liable to infuriate some historians. His alternative to the nation-state - federalism - is rather sketchily proposed, and could have benefited from an analysis of developments in South Africa. Another reviewer¹ has remarked on the rosiness of Davidson's view of precolonial 'African society'. Nevertheless, this is an immensely disturbing and provocative book and important reading for anyone concerned with modern African politics or identity.

Manguelle's concern is chiefly to analyse the reasons for the passivity of African peoples in the face of corrupt, dictatorial or inefficient government, and he finds these reasons largely in inherited and now outmoded cultural models: if Africa is not to perish, it must change, and in particular change what he refers to as the 'culture du silence' produced by institutionalised respect for authority, age, wealth and supernatural power, and give more place to individual views and initiatives. The forces which produced social cohesion in the past now produce inertia. Like Davidson, he points to the enormous size of the parallel economy in many countries: 90% of trade in Benin is 'unofficial' (Davidson), 28.4% of the population of 'francophone' Africa is organised in *tontines* (Manguelle). If Manguelle is less acute than Davidson in analysing the historical reasons for this alienation from the state, his analysis of the weaknesses of inherited culture is rivetting, and parallels in many ways that produced by writers of radical fiction over recent years. The problem he poses is that of finding a way out

¹ John Lonsdale, *Journal of African History*, vol. 34, 1993, No. 1, p.145.

of the marasma which will draw on the strengths of African culture, particularly its sociability, and allow Africans to escape from undue reliance on imported structures and personnel (the tendency to live 'par procuration'). Unsurprisingly, his attempts at sketching a solution are the least satisfactory part of the book. The models he proposes for change - top-down, bottom-up, and harmonious (by co-operation between management and employees) clearly owe much to the book's avowed origins in reflexions begun at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, but are (even?) less helpful when applied to whole societies than to companies. Indeed, Manguelle's basic model - that of an analysis of corporate culture - while it may have helped the author, did not seem particularly illuminating to the reader. Nor did it seem, any more than Davidson's class-based analysis, to produce any indication of the way in which change could be achieved. Interestingly, despite their very different ideological starting-points, the goals of the two writers are very similar: greater involvement of individuals at ground level, greater local autonomy, and a move towards federal structures. The excitement of both books lies not in any magisterial proposal of means to achieving these goals, but in the very illuminating and carefully synthetic analysis of (predominantly) history (in Davidson's case) and culture (in Manguelle's) in relation to the problems of development.

Anna Ridehalgh
University of Southampton

Aminata Sow Fall, *Le Jjubier du patriarche*, roman, Dakar: Editions Khoudia, CAEC, 1993, 143pp

A new novel by Aminata Sow Fall is always an important event. Her fifth work of fiction, *Le Jjubier du patriarche*, is part legend, part morality tale, part evocation of the personal problems of an extended family in the context of contemporary society and its practical exigencies. It demonstrates the author's versatility in dealing with her recurrent preoccupation: the

necessity to preserve traditions, without being enslaved to the past.

This is achieved by conjuring up an epic from former pre-colonial times whose protagonists are paralleled in their descendants, living today in a fictional West African city, but originally from the village of Babyselli, on the banks of the Natangué river, which flowed through the Foutjallon region. As in the author's previous works, her setting is easily identified as her native Senegal, if only by the liberal sprinkling of Wolof words and phrases.

The action opens in the present with Yelli, a descendant of the great Almamy Sarebibi, learning from the griot Naami that the eponymous jujube-tree, long reduced to a barren stump, has begun to put forth shoots again. Tradition has it that the tree appeared miraculously on the tomb of the Patriarch, whether Sarebibi or his son Yellimané is immaterial. Its fruit and leaves had the property of bringing good fortune to those in distress and healing to the sick. But people's greed eventually destroyed the tree. Yelli, reduced to poverty by his own improvidence, suffering from ill-health and the dissensions and conjugal discord in his family, nourishes the dream of returning to Babyselli to honour the memory of the Emperor Sarebibi, and by touching the miraculous tree finding relief from his physical, mental and material problems.

While the first half of the novel is devoted to the history and vicissitudes of Yelli's extended family, in the second half, the griot Naami recounts to the pilgrims assembled in Babyselli the legend of the Almamy Sarebibi and his wife Dioumana. The daughter of his rival, Gueladio, an animist magician and hunter chief, she gives birth to a son, Yellimané, then leaves the Almamy and, with the help of her father's magic, takes refuge in the belly of the whale Tarou in the Natangué River, where she lives for twenty years. Yellimané, grown to manhood, is enjoined to set out to conquer Gueladio and return his mother to her rightful home. He is helped in his mission by a slave-girl Biti, who dies assisting him. Dioumana emerges from the belly of the whale, but is killed by Gueladio's spear, intended for Sarebibi. The griot finishes his song with the enigmatic words:

O sons of Babyselli, thus did Dioumana depart.
She closed the twelfth door of the song, did she not...

But Yellimané will return, He will open the thirteenth door...

Will Yelli, his direct descendant and namesake, be the one who personifies the return of the heroic age so opening a new chapter in the saga? It would appear not.

Aminata Sow Fall tackles several contemporary issues in this short novel. While advocating the ever-important need to preserve past traditions, this must not be at the expense of practical considerations. Yelli, from youth onwards, only showed interest in his family's past history (leaving real study and acquisition of a profession to his sister Fama) so that his inability to provide for his wife and children brings about his bankruptcy: bailiffs seize his fine furniture and they are forced to leave their elegant villa and live in a slum. Penda, the descendant of slaves, the voice of common sense, upbraids Yelli for living in the past and neglecting the future: 'L'avenir, il faut le construire. L'histoire ne fait pas vivre.'

The prejudices associated with the caste system, as it survives today in Senegal, are an important theme here. Traditionally the children of slaves were entrusted to high caste, noble families, 'descendants des damels' who brought them up as virtually adopted children. So Penda was brought up considering Yelli's parents as her father and mother, and in turn gives her daughter Naarou to Yelli and his wife Tacko. And while the latter live in poverty and dependent on charity, Naarou by her intelligence and hard work, thrives and becomes wealthy. A crisis in the novel occurs when Tacko, jealous of Naarou's success, insults her by calling her a slave. The problems of the generation gap and of sterility are also touched on or treated in more detail.

While the above themes are dealt with explicitly and without much subtlety, implicit in the characterization is belief in the superior strength of women. The male protagonists in the present-day narrative are, with few exceptions, portrayed as shiftless, lazy n'er-do-wells, and at best impractical dreamers. The strong characters, both secondary and in the forefront of the action, are women: Yelli's sister Fama who becomes a doctor; Yelli's wife Tacko, who seems justified in becoming embittered and shrewish through her husband's fecklessness, as she is the one who works hard to earn a living for the family. Moreover, her own mother had inculcated in her the need to

work hard at school and 'avoir un métier avant le mariage'. But, in particular, the two descendants of slaves, Penda and her daughter Naarou are the determined, courageous, wise characters, the real enablers. This imbalance between the sexes is even seen in the legendary epic: Sarevuvum, the great Almamy is a shadowy figure, while his wife Dioumana has the courage to flee an unsatisfactory marriage (the basic reason for her flight is never totally clear); their son, Yellimané, the traditional hero of the saga, can only accomplish his mission through the help - and sacrifice - of two women: the slave Warèle, who had been placed under the guardianship of Sarebibi's mother, and her grand-daughter Vivi - 'Biti, l'amazone à l'allure de guêpe et au coeur de lion' the distant and almost mythical ancestor of Penda and Naarou. An interesting question: has Aminata Sow Fall been a closet feminist all along?

D.S. Blair

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Raymond Bachollet, Jean-Barthélemy Debost, Anne-Claude Lelieur & Marie-Christine Peyrière, *Négripub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité*, Préface de Kofi Yamgnane, Paris: Somogy, 1992, ISBN 2.85917.143.6(hb), -144-4(pb), 275F (hb).

This is a most welcome and stimulating book, with a brilliant *mise en pages* in which some 300 colour plates interact with a most instructive text. It started life as the catalogue to the exhibition 'Négripub: 100 ans d'images de Noirs dans la publicité' at the Bibliothèque Forney in Paris in 1987 and is well worth the more permanent form which it now enjoys. Most of its material is drawn from the last hundred years and thus illustrates the evolving techniques of poster production, mainly in France, from chromolithography to photocomposition, and the inventiveness - or mindlessness - of graphic designers. Its chief interest for those interested in Black studies is its vivid portrayal of the Black through the commercial - and therefore culturally cynical - representation and use of stereotypes during the period covered. The Preface and Introduction present

admirably in their different ways the profound imaginative depths stirred by the images, and each chapter takes a telling aspect - *Rencontres*, *Produits bruts*, *Serviteur des serviteurs*, *Visages volés*, *Corps offerts*, *Nouvelle génération* - and offers an overview followed by key examples, each with its informative 'notice' (so betraying the origins of the book). The critical apparatus is scrupulous, giving a brief chronology of key moments in 'Black' history, an index of designers, photographers and agencies, and an index of products by category, a bibliography and a list of illustrations. I see very few errors of detail (e.g. the suggestion, p.165, that the 'Code noir' was 'instauré après la Révolution française', whereas it dates from 1685, the year of the *Révocation de l'édit de Nantes*) and only one omission of consequence: no reference is made to publicity generated or used in the newly independent states of former French colonies in Africa.



The information contained in the book is both valuable in itself and conducive, for 'historiens des mentalités' including the literary scholar, to further reflection. Thus the *Bureau de Vérification de la Publicité* recommended in 1970 - but only in 1970 - as follows: 'La publicité doit éviter avec le plus grand soin de faire appel, même indirectement, aux relents de sectarisme ou de racisme qui peuvent exister dans certaines couches de la population. Toute allusion, même humoristique, à

une quelconque idée péjorative ou d'infériorité liée à l'appartenance à une ethnie ou à une religion doit être bannie. L'expression de stéréotypes évoquant les caractères censés être représentatifs d'un groupe ethnique ou religieux doit être maniée avec la plus grande délicatesse ...' (cited p.9) Senghor's call, thirty years earlier, to 'déchirer les rires Banania sur tous les murs de France' paradoxically took far longer than his achievement of political independence for his country. And there is still ample evidence, as in successive Benetton ads, of offensive stereotypes being alluded to as part of the shock effect. The Black as child, justifying paternalism; as evil incarnate, legitimising both expulsion and recuperation; as over-sexed animal, prompting horror and *frisson*, etc. is portrayed with features which caricature reality but suit the purposes of merchandising a particular product: thick red lips to denote an excessive taste for chocolate or coffee; laziness and servility help to sell a variety of comforts; sensual enjoyment is linked with rum, tobacco and, more recently, the intimate delights of perfume and lingerie. Blackness itself can be removed by the liberal use of various brands of soap. 'Il faut s'y résigner: la publicité n'est rarement empreinte d'humanisme', writes Kofi Yamgnane, Secrétaire d'Etat à l'Intégration.

Négripub offers an important lesson in self-awareness for Whites who are endeavouring to understand and report on Black phenomena. I cannot recommend it too highly: it combines the attractiveness of a coffee-table book with several important lessons.

Roger Little
Trinity College, Dublin

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Papier blanc, encre noire: cent ans de culture francophone en Afrique centrale (Zaïre, Rwanda et Burundi), Collectif édité sous la direction de Marc Quaghebeur par Emile Van Balberghe avec la collaboration de Nadine Fettweis et Annick Vilain. 2 vols. Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1992, xciv + 690 pp ISBN 2-8040-0816-9.

A huge swathe of central Africa remained blank on maps until towards the end of the nineteenth century. It corresponded roughly to the Congo, owned privately by Leopold II (through machinations admirably recounted by Thomas Pakenham in *The Scramble for Africa*) until, under pressure, in 1908, he made a present of its poisoned chalice to the Belgian nation. These volumes revealed a similar gap in my own knowledge, and, if others interested in Francophone Black Africa are in my position, should go a considerable way to filling it. The substantial introduction by Marc Quaghebeur retraces the literary history of the area in question up to 1930; he promises a sequel to complete the picture. There follows an extract from the Zaïrean Joseph-Albert Kompany wa Kompany's new and as yet unpublished novel, *L'Ogre-Empereur*. The rest of the two volumes is devoted to cultural - mostly literary - studies presented in broadly chronological order of their subject matter starting, ironically one might think, with a piece on Conrad's visit to the Congo. Studies follow on antislavery and missionary literature, both Catholic and Protestant; on groups and movements (the first generation of Zaïrean and academic writers, Rwandan literature); on individual authors (Simon Divès, and V.Y. Mudimbe, who also contributes a text); on individual works (Pierre Ryckmans' *Barabara*, Nele Marian's *Poèmes et chansons*, Anna Geramys' *Le Reste du monde*); and on a variety of other subjects including Zaïrean painting and music at different periods, the periodical *Zaire-Afrique*, the image of colonisation and decolonisation in Belgian history books and that of central Africa in (mostly) Belgian *bandes dessinées* (in which Jijé's *Le Nègre blanc* does not, however, figure). This is, in short, a mine of information, less to be read through from cover to cover (something that I confess I have not done) than treasured as a source of reference and comparison.

Roger Little
Trinity College Dublin

2) CARIBBEAN

Régis Antoine, *La Littérature franco-antillaise*, Paris: Karthala, 1992, 382pp.

Jacqueline Leiner, *Aimé Césaire, le terreau primordial*, Tübingen: Günther Narr, 1993, 172pp.

Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles*, Paris: Karthala, 1992, 202pp.

All three volumes are to some extent collections of articles previously published in academic journals, but brought together and unified around a general theme. Régis Antoine's volume is the most ambitious, aiming at a broad survey of literary production in the Francophone Caribbean, from the earliest times of colonisation through to the recent movements towards 'Créolité', including chapters on everything from 'Les paroles perdues de l'Indien et du Nègre marron' to Saint-John Perse. This is no Bordas manual, however: it attempts to present the results of original and sometimes obscure library research on the less accessible aspects of this literature, such as the representations of 'Le Planteur et son monde'. The more familiar modern terrain of the origins of Negritude and relations between Surrealism and black writers is also covered, and there is a special chapter for the 'Gonflements et rétractions d'un objet littéraire: Haïti chérie'. Régis Antoine's strategy in this book seems to be to provide a broad survey for the non-initiate, which is a useful undertaking as there are not so very many in existence, and at the same time to attract the specialist academic researcher by including a lot of more recondite material. This double focus makes the book a good one to refer to in the library, but not so satisfying to read, in that one leaps rather abruptly from very familiar terrain, such as Césaire, but treated from an oblique standpoint, to 'L'exotisme antillais' in some metropolitan French writers from Eugène Sue to Malraux. The range is nonetheless impressive, and allows the reader to situate the more recent literature of problematic ethnic identity

against the backdrop of an older metropolitan and colonialist discourse about the Caribbean.

Mireille Rosello's book focuses on this latter aspect of contemporary literature from the Francophone Caribbean, as the title suggests. She attempts to construct an 'imaginary canon' of works which trace this contradictory notion of Caribbean identity from Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* to Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant's *Eloge de la Créolité*, by way of Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Daniel Maximin's *L'Isolé soleil* and Maryse Condé's *Moi Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem*. This is not presented as a unified evolution, however, but rather as a series of insights, often in the form of comparisons of one or several texts. Mireille Rosello shows a familiarity with critical theory and makes use of references to such diverse figures as Michel Serres, Michel de Certeau, Lyotard and Kristeva. She outlines the strategies used by writers in coming to terms with their paradoxical cultural heritage, and almost in spite of herself constitutes a kind of 'grand narrative' of a tradition which goes from the suicidal heroes of Césaire's *Et les chiens se taisaient* or Maximin's *L'Isolé soleil*, to the fatalistic 'art de survivre' of Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Télumée* or to the exile and disenchanted return of Césaire and Maryse Condé. In the end, the unresolved contradictions lead 'de la révolusion à l'éruption' for a whole group of writers, or else to the 'ruses de l'intelligence' of the heroine of André Schwarz-Bart's *La Mulâtresse Solitude*. One of the most striking detailed studies in the book is the analysis of the intertextuality of the phrase 'comique et laid' borrowed by Césaire from Baudelaire's 'L'Albatros' to describe the negro in the tram in the *Cahier*. The implied association of the 'voyageur ailé' with this representative of his own humiliated race is what reveals to him 'sa lâcheté retrouvée': a whole network of resonances which illustrate very well the complexity of Césaire's assimilation of the French literary heritage, the main reproach of the authors of the *Eloge de la Créolité*. It is a stimulating and rewarding book, full of such penetrating insights. My only reproach is the lack of any comparative reference to the Anglophone or Hispanic Caribbean, which would have broadened the perspective; but this is more than compensated by the sharpness of its detailed analyses.

Jacqueline Leiner's pioneering studies and interviews with Césaire are often referred to by Mireille Rosello, and many of them are brought together in a useful volume, *Aimé Césaire - le terreau primordial*. This contains some indispensable material for the Césaire specialist, in particular some very informative interviews dating from the mid 'seventies and early 'eighties, previously difficult to obtain. It also includes the conference paper given by Jacqueline Leiner to the ASCALF conference in 1991 on '*La Tragédie du roi Christophe*: une esthétique de la différence'. The articles, mostly short, cover a wide range of topics and are loosely grouped according to the different aspects of Césaire's work: general studies, poetry, theatre, political pamphlets, interviews, etc. There is a wealth of material here, which reflects Mme Leiner's lifelong admiration for the poet of the *Cahier* and the dramatist of *le roi Christophe*, and which inspired her to work yet again on the organisation of the 80th birthday celebrations reported on elsewhere in the present *Bulletin*. Her enthusiasm is infectious, and backed up by some interesting detailed studies, particularly those focusing on the comparison between the poetic and ideological sensibilities, of Senghor and Césaire. We have every reason to be grateful for her long-sustained defence and illustration of the riches of Césaire's work, which honours her as well as the poetry whose birthday we are happy to celebrate.

Peter Hawkins
University of Bristol

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Jacqueline Leiner, *Aimé Césaire, le terreau primordial*, Tübingen: Günther Narr Verlag, 1993 (Coll: études littéraires françaises)

Les articles et essais réunis dans ce volume couvrent une quinzaine d'années consacrées à chaque aspect de l'oeuvre de Césaire: poète, pamphlétaire, dramaturge. Deux préoccupations les animent: primo, par des études purement textuelles, cerner en quoi consiste 'cette esthétique de la Différence' dont Césaire se révèle le maître incontesté, et en même temps rendre

accessible au grand public une production littéraire qui peut sembler hermétique au premier abord.

- Un chapitre important (pp 111-143) y ajoute le témoignage d'Aimé Césaire lui-même: la transcription de deux entretiens qu'a eus le Professeur Leiner avec l'auteur à Paris, d'abord en 1975, à l'occasion de la réédition de *Tropiques* et en 1982, à la sortie du Disque: *Aimé Césaire*.

Le Terreau primordial est l'outil indispensable à tout enseignant des écrits césairiens et à tout lecteur qui desire approfondir son appréciation de l'oeuvre d'un écrivain qui, selon Leiner, 'tenta par la parole de changer le cours de l'Histoire, de faire entrer le tiers Monde dans le Monde.'

D.S. Blair

NOTICES

ASCALF SECTIONAL MEETINGS AT THE FRENCH STUDIES CONFERENCE

In collaboration with the Society for French Studies, ASCALF is organising two sectional meetings covering a wide range of non-metropolitan writing in French at the next French Studies Conference at the University of Liverpool, 28-30 March, 1994. The programme of the sectional meetings is as follows:

Francophone Literature I: Black Africa and the Caribbean

Chair: Bridget JONES (Roehampton Institute)

Peter HAWKINS (University of Bristol):

Modernism and Postmodernism in some recent examples of African fiction in French

Mary GALLAGHER (University College Dublin):

The re-evaluation of the plantation in 20th Century Caribbean writing in French

Francophone literature II: The Maghreb and Francophone Canada

Chair: Alec HARGREAVES (University of Loughborough)

Laïla IBNLFASSI (London Guildhall University):

The use of French in the Moroccan Novel

Guy SNAITH (University of Liverpool):

First Heroes, first heroine: Aubert de Gaspé's *Les Anciens Canadiens*

Full details of the conference can be obtained from the Conference Officer, Dr Janice Carruthers, Society for French Studies, Queen's University, Belfast BT7 1NN, N. Ireland, Tel: 0232-245133. Postgraduate students may apply (before 14 February) for financial assistance in attending the conference to the Society's President, Mrs. Rhiannon Goldthorpe, St Anne's College, Oxford, OX2 6HS. We are very grateful for the help and co-operation of the Society and its President.

STUDY DAY IN SCOTLAND ON AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH

Saturday 12 February 1994 at the French Institute in Scotland, 13, Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7TT (Tel: 031-2255366), sponsored by ASCALF and the Society for French Studies. We hope to welcome as visiting speakers the Senegalese authoress Khadi Fall, Professor Jean Derive from the Université de Haute Savoie and Dr Rabah Ayad from the Université de Tizi-Ozou in Algeria. Postgraduate students wishing to attend may apply for financial assistance to the President of the Society for French Studies, Mrs Rhiannon Goldthorpe, St Anne's College Oxford OX2 6HS. The detailed programme should be available early in January 1994, and

will be circulated to all Scottish universities and other interested groups. Offers of papers and further information: Peter Hawkins, University of Bristol, 19 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TE, Tel. 0272-303423 or Dr Keith Aspley, Department of French, University of Edinburgh, 60 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9JU, Tel 031-6508411.

Aimé Césaire seminar

The Institute of Romance Studies is organising a special seminar on Friday 10th December (4.30-7.00pm) to mark the publication in the Bloodaxe Contemporary French Poets Series of a new translation of his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Speakers will include the Bloodaxe translators and introducers of Césaire's work. For further information, please call the Institute's Administrator on 071-636-8000, ext. 3071.

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