

sure about the political approach of the biographer. In fact the presentation of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, the chronological order within the volumes, and the biographical notes might have been intended, originally, to make a biography appear unnecessary. However, the new biography⁶ puts Orwell the novelist and Orwell the man of ideas into the more complex context that he demands. But there is still a need for a complete edition of his published work.⁷ His works have been offered as publishing ventures rather than as considered and scholarly attempts to present the whole range of his work.

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⁶Bernard Crick, *Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980).

⁷Rumor has it that 1984 will be the year for such an undertaking. Compare John Thompson's remark in his review of *A George Orwell Companion*, by J.R. Hammond. *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 April 1983. p. 440.

Eroticism in René Maran's *Batouala*

From the African ontological view, the world exists as a harmonious entity. All phases of life, from birth to death, "find themselves logically concatenated in a system so tight, that to subtract one item from the whole is to paralyze the structure of the whole."¹ Within this system, eroticism forms an integral part of the African cosmic reality; an expression of the spiritual universe in harmony with the physical. Since the concept of universal fertility is significant in African philosophy, all aspects of life lead toward procreation. Beings as well as objects have their own sexuality, symbolically dividing the world into maleness and femaleness. Two classic examples serve to illustrate this point. When the poet Aimé Césaire describes the concept of "négritude," as the force which plunges into the red flesh of the soil, he strikes a note of virility and evokes powerful male imagery.

The contrasting overtones in Senghor's poem, "Black Woman," are of a highly sensual and sexual nature, thereby portraying Africa as the personification of woman: "Naked woman, dark woman/ Firm-fleshed ripe fruit, sombre raptures of black wine/ mouth making lyrical my mouth."² Thus, it is upon the strength of this harmony of male and female, and of spiritual and physical symbolism that the complex notion of eroticism may be more fully explored. It is from this point of departure that we propose a literary analysis of this powerful theme in the classic Francophone African novel, *Batouala*, by René Maran.³

¹Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: the New African Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1961) p. 97.

²Marie Collins, *Black Poets in French* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 108.

³The distinguished black novelist, René Maran, was born in Martinique, in 1887, to French Guyanese parents, and raised and educated in France. Although he served as an administrator for the colonial government in French Equatorial Africa, the novel, *Batouala*, reflects Maran's literary expression of life for the African, under French colonial rule. Due to its highly authentic nature and poetic sensitivity, this work marks a significant place in black Francophone literature. Léopold Sédar Senghor praises Maran for having masterfully used the vehicle of the French language, to express the poetry of what he calls "the black soul."

This 1921 work is the story of an aging chief in the French Equatorial African village of Ubangui-Chari, during colonial times. The starkly simple plot reveals a love triangle between the old chief, Batouala, his favorite wife, Yassi, and a virile young man in the village, Bissinguibi. While the plot remains relatively uncomplicated, the story provides a substantial background for the literary interpretation of the erotic motif.

It is significant to note that Maran's treatment of the notions of sensuality and sexuality encompass two thematic concepts: (1) the nature of erotic innocence; (2) the theme of sexual passion. In each of these contexts, he treats the notion of individual sexual expression as well as socialized sexuality. Within the very first pages of the novel, the author has artistically captured the notion of sexual innocence and wholesomeness. The old chief greets each day with physical candor while languishing in the simple pleasure of his morning ritual. By a very natural association of thought and action, Batouala progresses from the notion of yawning, stretching, scratching, uttering low, grunting sounds, to the idea of fulfilling his "male functions."⁴ Although still in slumber, Yassi, who is accustomed to her husband's early morning sexual liberties, accepts them as placidly as the sound of her snoring and the touch of her own body. In the following scene, we find her naked, tranquil, hands on stomach, and legs innocently spread. We note the author's artful description of Yassi as she "touched her soft breasts or caressed herself, heaving deep sighs" (p. 28).

The novel provides a broad description of male/female pulchritude in this African society. Maran casts Yassi in a notably sensuous mode, in which she emerges as "woman voluptuous." Bissinguibi is portrayed as the young, magnificently chiseled male, whose muscular form is symbolically compared to that of the antelope or panther. He is noted among the village women, for "the vigor of his loins and the frequency of his desire" (p. 48). On the level of individual sexual expression, Yassi acknowledges her attraction to the young man, and begins to participate in a type of psycho-sensual universe in which associations are drawn between emotions and the senses. It is an engaging world of aroma, desires, sun, heat, and the rhythm of the drum, which fuse and transmit multiple sensual invitations.

Maran simultaneously introduces the themes of sexual passion and collective eroticism in a colorful and moving chapter, in which an entire village participates in an erotic love ceremony. This love dance, called Ga'nza, is significant, for it highlights the concept of socialized sexuality, and the erotic association between nature and man; between the African and his surroundings.⁵ What Maran has portrayed, in effect, is a type of sensual pantheism, presented in a network of "vegetal and sexual symbols."⁶ By calling upon the powerful symbols of earth, sky, water, animals, and plantlife, he succeeds in titillating the senses and awakening desire. He artfully immerses the characters in this pool of symbols, while they emerge as one with their reality.

By using a type of word magic in his description of the Ga'nza, Maran has created a truly orgasmic effect. First, visual desire; then, sensory excitement; sexual foreplay; and finally, the fulfillment of the sex act. The theme of the drum is fundamental in creating this highly charged sexual atmosphere. Allowed the full

⁴René Maran, *Batouala: A True Black Novel*, trans. Barbara Beck and Alexandre Mboukou (Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1972), p. 32. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

⁵See Léopold Sédar Senghor's article "L'Esthétique Nègro-Africaine," in *Liberté I: Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 202, for further discussion of this point.

⁶Jean-Paul Sartre, *Orphée Noir* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), p. xxxiv; my translation.

measure of their potential, the drums seem to demand, provoke, caress and invite the dancers, leading them from mere rhythmic enjoyment to what the author calls "a moment of delirium." The cadence is accelerated, while the bodies perform in erotic convulsive ecstasy: "And what cries, what laughs, what gestures! The presence of so many men and of so many women, the beer, the hemp, the activity, the joy pushed the quivering heat of desire little by little to its culmination" (p. 93).

Ultimately, climax is achieved: a climax which not only suggests a sexual union between Yassi and Bissinguibi, but between nature, man, and the cosmos, as well. "Bissinguibi approached Yassi, kissed her and bending her in the embrace of her desire, took possession of her inner flesh" (p. 159). After the sexual union between the lovers finally occurs, the author dramatically decelerates the rhythm of the scene, creating a sense of sexual release and repose. The symbolic notion of eroticism slackens its beat in order to harmonize with the natural rhythm of the African universe: a universe in which all phases of life exist simultaneously; all responding to one another; all impregnating; all creating.

The powerful and persistent theme of eroticism in Maran's *Batouala* represents what Sartre calls "an enormous and perpetual coition. The black man," he suggests, "represents the natural Eros; he manifests it and incarnates it."⁷ This classic novel masterfully captures this underlying erotic current and reaffirms its deeply rooted presence in African literature of French expression.

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⁷Sartre, p. xxxiv.

A Note on Introductions: *The Fiction of André Pieyre de Mandiargues*

Mandiargues is neither a household word nor a literary one in English-speaking countries, and he is only now, in France, beginning to gain the fame that he so richly deserves. David J. Bond defines his task in *The Fiction of André Pieyre de Mandiargues* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982) as that of introducing the enigmatic work of this French writer to a larger public than he has known heretofore. To the degree that Bond presents, in summary fashion, representative novels and short stories, and informs his readers about many of the recurring motifs that appear in Mandiargues's fiction, he has accomplished his task. The "l'homme et l'oeuvre" approach that he uses resembles the one Twayne Publishers favor in their "World Author" series.

The first chapter of Bond's book is biographical, and in it he traces Mandiargues's steps from childhood to the present. Bond mentions Mandiargues's family, his studies, his friends, his participation in the Surrealist group surrounding Breton, his diverse writings, and his prizes. Mandiargues's first book of prose poems,