

and nature is necessarily forfeited, "Till in imagination from the dead faces faces on off in the dark sudden whites long short then black long short then another so on or the same" (p. 157). The stillness dealt with here does not bear comparison with that of "Still" and "Sounds," vibrant with a potential connection between the man's column of air, his breath, and the tree, "column of quiet." In "Still 3" the stillness is that of death ("marble still"), of human beings turned into statues with whom the man in his vision scorns (and fears) any "embrace." Eurydice has been lost and is resolutely kept at "arm's length"; this "Orpheus" will himself remain a spectral presence until he can through words connect his "dreamt away" state and his vision of the "dead faces" with the world outside himself. The fizzling out of "Still 3" must not, however, be prematurely taken as a summary judgment that the Orphic vision is no longer a factor in Beckett's continued development. The "fact" that Beckett can depict a man, and not some intermediary fictive self, a Molloy, Malone, or even an Unnamable, supplies the existential basis for further reconstructions by "fantasy," the imaginative faculty.

Black Women in Black Francophone Literature: Comparisons of Male and Female Writers

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The black woman has often intrigued and mystified writers of various cultures, who have attempted to capture her essence in their literary works. Some of the more well-known examples are the black women in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (1936); the "mulâtresse" Jeanne Duval in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (1857); the sensuous black dancers in Luis Pales Matos' *Poesia* (1915-1956); or the mulatto female characters in Charles Chestnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900). Although some of these portrayals were flattering, most were stereotypical one-dimensional literary types, rather than full-fleshed individuals. As a result of two significant literary movements, however, (the 1930s Harlem Renaissance in the United States and the 1940s Negritude movement in black Francophone Africa and the Caribbean), the black woman came to occupy a more significant place in black literature throughout the diaspora.

Both the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement encouraged a sense of cultural solidarity, a fresh commitment to the expression of black values, and, thereby, influenced the creation of a new black aesthetic. Inspired by the works of such eminent black writers from the United States as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, W. E. B. DuBois, the young black Francophone literati from Africa and the Caribbean, studying in Paris, began to denounce their literary imitation of French styles and themes. By developing their own thematic portfolio, they ceased to sing praise to the fair skin and chestnut tresses of European women, and to begin to draw from their own cultural reality.¹ Through the vehicle of their poetry and novels, these writers evoked visions of their own women on the hills of Martinique, in the towns of

¹ Lilyane Kesteloot provides an in-depth discussion of the Harlem Renaissance in relationship to the Negritude movement in her study, *Les Ecrivains noirs de Langue Française: Naissance d'une Littérature* (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1965), pp. 63-82.

Haiti, or in the savannahs of Senegal. In this way, they offered tribute to all of the black women who had ever nursed, taught, loved, supported or inspired them.

Although poetry had provided a useful mode of expression for the depiction of the black woman, (see David Diop's "A Une Danseuse Noire," *Coups de Pilon* (1957) and Léopold Sédar Senghor's "Femme Noire," *Chants d'Ombre* (1956), it was the novel which encouraged the broadest investigation of the female image. Novelists were therefore able to provide more accurate and panoramic tableaux of their societies and of the women in them. From the period of what is known as the first black novel (René Maran's *Batouala*) (1928) to the late 1950s, black Francophone novelists projected primarily the images of the woman in her traditional setting, where the matters of home and family were her singular concern. (See the depiction of the mother in Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953); the grandmother and wife in Ousmane Sembène's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1960); female figures in Aboulaye Sadjì's *Maimouna* (1958); Ousmane Socé's heroine, *Karim: Roman Sénégalais* (1948); Jacques Roumain's female characters in *Les Gouverneurs de la Rosée* (1946). In these earlier writings, the female character often lacked any great literary palpability, yet she consistently represented the symbol of strength.

While the colonial period and French domination left an indelible mark upon black Francophone cultures, in general, it notably affected the role of the women in these cultures. The emergence of western values regarding education, religion, morality, and trends toward urbanization were duly reflected in the literature. Ironically, it was the colonial system which provided the impetus for the development of more intricate and subtle literary treatment of the black female persona. From the period of the late 1950s and into the early years of independence from colonial rule, a new and problematic female character developed in Francophone literature: a character "whose goal was to redefine the position of the African individual in a changing and developing society."² Existing in a world of conflict and forced to struggle with social, political, philosophical or sentimental problems, the black female character was frequently depicted in a climate of anxiety. There, she often found herself cut off from her past, trapped within the confines of a system of alienation, and lost in a labyrinthine search for self. Some of the more classic examples of these phenomena are the heroines in Aboulaye Sadjì's *Nini: Mulâtresse du Sénégal* (1947) and *Maimouna* (1958); N'Deye Touti in Sembène's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1960); Diouana, in his *La Noire de . . .* (1962).

Ousmane Sembène, a noted contemporary Senegalese novelist and filmmaker, stands out among Francophone writers as one who frequently presents his female characters as real, palpable individuals. By creating women figures who do not merely represent shadows of the male figure, nor echoes of the male voice, Sembène's works reflect the complexities of a changing Africa. (See *O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple* (1957); *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (1960); *L'Harmattan* (1964); *Voltaïque* (1962); and *Xala* (1974). These novels abound with portraits of black women who must often break ties with traditional socio-cultural mores, and thus, constantly struggle to redefine their perceptions of the world.³ Through this mirror of social criticism, Sembène reveals two powerful messages. First, women are the repository of Africa's strengths and wisdom. Secondly, women often provide a vital catalyst for change. Thus, with particular skill and perception, he has crystallized the story of Rama, the young female educator (*Xala*); Tioumbé, the female political activist (*Harmattan*); and

² Sunday Anozé, *Sociologie du Roman Africain: Réalisme Structure et Détermination dans le Roman Moderne Ouest-Africain* (Paris: Tiers-Monde et Développement, 1970), p. 27. My translation.

³ For further discussion of this point, see Karen Smyley, "Ousmane Sembène: Portraitist of the African Woman in the Novel," *New England Journal of Black Studies*, 1, No. 1, (June 1981), 23-27.

Penda, the prostitute turned soldier (*Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*). While these characters experience new depths, and new heights, they must also face new dilemmas, as well. Often betrayed by the new roles, they must learn to survive without mate, (as Maimouna in Sembène's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*) or family ties (as Tioumbé, in *Harmattan*). This is a compelling and singularly new theme in African literature.

While images of the black female by male writers have been fairly accurate, the view of the black female writer provides new insights and greater depth to those portrayals. Through her perceptions, she has been able to articulate the feelings of the black woman and to invite the reader to penetrate the inner psychological world of the female. Thus, she adds the necessary flesh and blood to what are, at best, literary skeletons set out by the male writer.

Currently, there exists a veritable choir of major black female voices in Francophone literature: Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Nafissatou Diallo (Senegal); Michèle Lacrosil (Martinique); Maryse Condé and Simone Schwarz-Bart (Guadeloupe). By telling a tale of women, each writer presents a special portrait of black female reality. The special bonds of female friendships (as in Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1960); the pains and joys of motherhood (as in Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre* (1980); women in love (as in Schwarz-Bart's *Télumée*, or Michèle Lacrosil's *Cajou* (1961)); women who survive alone (as in Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*, and Mayotte Capécia's *Je Suis Martiniquaise* (1948); women in search of self (as in Maryse Condé's *Hérémakhonon* (1976), or Lacrosil's *Sapotille et le sérin d'Argile* (1960).

As these writers penetrate the female psyche, each ponders female identity, questions female expectations, analyzes female deceptions. What is most important is that they have presented a panorama of black female characters, who, although in some cases, may be wearied by life (as in Lacrosil's *Sapotille*, or Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*), are ultimately committed to survival (see Schwarz-Bart's *Télumée*).

These and other female writers are expanding upon the original view of black women in Francophone literature, as presented by male writers. They are preparing their audiences for the eventual development of future roles for black women in literature and in society. Through their deftly-painted brush strokes and keen sense of artistry, they have created a sensitive, yet realistic tableau of black female life. Their work serves as testimony to their accomplishments throughout a difficult past, holds promise for their achievements in a brighter literary future, and will undoubtedly encourage further study of the black woman in literature.