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EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT, 1960-  
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVEL  
OF FRENCH EXPRESSION:  
EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT, 1960-1975

by

Betty Keene Taska

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
in French in partial fulfillment of the require-  
ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

1976

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Abstract

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVEL  
OF FRENCH EXPRESSION:  
EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT, 1960-1975

by

Betty Keene Taska

Adviser: Professor Jacques Zéphir

Before the majority of French-speaking African countries south of the Sahara gained their independence in 1960, a body of literature by Africans in the metropolitan tongue played a significant role in focusing the attention of the world on their colonial status. Involving novelists as well as poets, the movement known as Negritude produced works which seemed to represent a promise of future literary talent and indicate a permanent commitment to the development of the novel, albeit a borrowed Western genre. Some 44 novels by authors representing eleven different countries were published between 1926 and 1960. By 1960 the "African novel of French expression" was an accomplished and identifiable species of the genre.

A survey of the state of the novel at this time shows a multi-

plicity of themes and stylistic treatments all aimed at one central concern: the anti-colonial struggle. Well-received critically in the West, the African novel of French expression created expectations for its future, however, which were not entirely realized in the post-independence years. Betrayed by its singleness of purpose, the novel fell into a period of decline in the years immediately following 1960. It was a time of great optimism when Africa was at last responsible for its own destiny, and many of the novelists who had matured during the pre-independence years now turned to the more immediate problems of nation building. The few novels published between 1961 and 1965 reflect a sense of optimism and hope for the future. They are characterized by a central preoccupation with reconstruction, social, political, cultural, and personal.

But by 1966 it became evident that all the ills were not going to be righted and that the new African regimes were often no better than the colonial administrations they had replaced. General dissatisfaction and disillusionment bred a new generation of writers who turned to the novel as a medium in which to portray contemporary realities and flay the corruption and violence which gripped Africa. The decade of the 60's ended on a new note of commitment in the African novel of French expression.

Since 1970 the novel has continued to develop, with the most

significant trend being that toward a national identification by country and the increased politicization of the novel. Novelists from Senegal, Guinea, and Zaïre are leaders in this trend. Another phenomenon is the rise of the popular novel in Cameroon. The debate over vehicular versus vernacular language continues, but with the consolidation of "la Francophonie," the African novel of French expression is taking its rightful place among the literatures of the world.

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To Editions Albin Michel for selections from Malick Fall, La plaie, 1967.

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To the Union Générale d'Editions for selections from Amadou Hampaté Bâ, L'étrange destin de Wangrin, 1973 and Boubou Hama, Le double d'hier rencontre demain, 1973.

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## INTRODUCTION

- D. Prouhèze:        Quel est donc cet appel irrésistible?
- D. Camille :        Dites-moi que vous ne l'avez pas ressenti  
vous-même? Les moucheron ne sont pas  
plus faits pour résister à cette extase de la  
lumière, quand elle pompe la nuit  
                      Que les coeurs humains à cet appel du feu  
capable de les consumer. L'appel de l'Afrique.

P. Claudel, Le Soulier de satin  
Première journée, scène III.

A source of wonderment and mystery, a terra incognita to the Western world, Africa long exercised the fascination which both held and repelled over the occidental mind. Once contact was established, the obsession became reciprocal. Yet actually less than a century has passed since the European powers carved out their colonial empire on the Black Continent, less than a generation has elapsed since the first African novelists of the post-war period took up their pens to combat this colonization, and in only the most recent fifteen years the "African novel of French expression" thus created has changed direction at least three times, to settle at last into a compromise form of what Eric Sellin calls "le mariage du Weltanschauung africain et de la tradition livresque française."<sup>1</sup> It is a marriage of convenience and

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Sellin, "Ouologuem, Kourouma et le nouveau roman africain" in Littératures ultramarines de langue française, (Ottawa: Actes du Colloque de Vermont, 1974), p. 38.

not necessarily of love, a shotgun wedding which was effected during a period when African intellectuals were seeking a way to turn the colonizer's esthetic arms against him, to penetrate the barrier of incomprehension and indifference, a feat which literature can often accomplish much more readily and subversively than any political treatise. But the marriage has endured, and, possibly for all its trials and tribulations, has grown stronger. Familiarity does not always breed contempt, and in this case it may be sort of grudging affection which recognizes what so many writers of the early 60's were loath to accept: that the Western genre of the novel and a European language of expression may serve an entirely African artistic purpose.

At a writers' conference held in June 1962 at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, the consensus of the writers there assembled was "that African literature as now defined and understood leads nowhere."<sup>2</sup> This was perhaps true in 1962. There was no such thing as written "African" literature. It was but "a minor appendage in the main stream of European literature."<sup>3</sup> Critics and writers alike were seen to be consumed by European standards, and certainly the public for whom it was all intended was largely a European one. If there was any such thing as "African" literature, it was the oral tradition which ethnologists were scrambling to record before it disappeared completely.

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<sup>2</sup>Obiajunwa Wali, "The Dead End of African Literature," Transition 3, 10 (September 1963): 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

It might indeed be seen that African literature of French expression had reached a dead end. But a situation never remains static for very long; conditions are constantly changing. Certainly one of the realities on which the new situation of independence focused was the inescapable fact that a multiplicity of vernacular languages constituted an obstacle to the economic, social and political unity and development of a country. With the absence of textbooks, or anything else, for that matter, written in the vernacular languages, it was necessary to maintain French as the language of instruction from the primary grades on, with the result that about 250,000 new readers literate in French were being added each year to the reading population throughout francophone Black Africa.<sup>4</sup> This is admittedly an elite minority, but one whose influence is far in excess proportionately to its numbers. The realists among the African intelligentsia recognized that the only way to forestall any further exploitation by the West was to master, and as quickly as possible, the elements of Western technology and thought which had made the initial conquest possible. The prolongation of tribal divisions and vernacular linguistic barriers would defeat this purpose. A by-product of this concern was the continued development of African literature in French. It was an unconscious evolution, forced by the contingencies of contemporary reality. The African writer and his public were growing together, groping for a means of expression that would

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<sup>4</sup>From a UNESCO study reported in S. Van der Werf, "Francophone Publishing in Africa," Africa Report 16, 3 (March, 1971).

satisfy them both. It was not a betrayal to write in French for if, as Pierre Alexandre noted in 1963, "les 'idéalistes' expliquent avec talent, et en français, pourquoi ils devraient écrire en vernaculaire, les 'réalistes' leur répondent, avec non moins de talent, que l'heure n'est pas à la littérature, mais à la solution de problèmes matériels urgents."<sup>5</sup> There was, in fact, a suspicion in intellectual circles that any undue interest in promoting vernacular languages involved a deliberate effort to keep African society at the level of folklore for the better delectation of avid European interests.

It was in this milieu, not very conducive to luxuriant growth, but not entirely inhibiting either, that the African novel of French expression began to develop away from the confining role of anti-colonial protest literature to which it had largely been committed prior to 1960. By 1971, the critic Ernest Emenyonu could write:

African literature has come to mean several things to several people. To some it is a tool for the literate African's arrogation of the essence of his cultural heritage--an assertion and at times an imposition of the contents and excellence of a black culture, on a white dominated world. To others African literature means 'a new literature of the world' with its authentic and original genre, themes and message. To a few it is simply a political document of protest against the assumptions of colonialism and imperialism as they relate to the world of the black man. To yet other people, African literature in all its ramifications represents a mere appendage to British or French literature since most of the African writers write chiefly in English or French.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Pierre Alexandre, "Les problèmes linguistiques vus de Paris" in Spencer, Language in Africa (Cambridge, 1963), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest Emenyonu, "African Literature: What Does it take to be its Critic?" in African Literature Today 5 (1971): p. 1.

Whatever it means, it means something, proof indeed that in ten years' time African literature had led somewhere, and that the pessimism of the Makerere conference was ill-founded and not very flattering to the artistic ingenuity of the writers themselves.

The African novel of French expression was slow to establish its own authenticity. The process is still going on, and may yet be checked by a sudden turn to creative writing in the vernacular. But the longer the process continues, the larger the French-speaking readership becomes, and the more African literature in French consolidates its position. What has happened between "nowhere" and "somewhere?" It is indispensable for an appreciation of the future of the African novel in French to consider the enormous ground it has covered since it emerged into the independent world of 1960 to find itself a literature without a raison d'être. What are the characteristics of the novel in these fifteen years? What have been the major trends in the evolution of the genre? Why is the novel no longer considered to be a mere "appendage" to French literature by many people? What new visions have the novelists had of their mission? Where has the influence of the oral tradition led? These are some of the questions which the present study will try to answer.

Scholarship on the whole genre of the African novel of French expression has been sadly lacking in English. There have been many very valuable studies and books written in English on the African novel,

among them those of A. C. Brench, Wilfred Cartey, O. R. Dathorne, Judith I. Gleason, Charles R. Larson, James Olney, Eustace Palmer, and Adrian Roscoe. Brench is the only one who deals with only the francophone African novel; the others are concerned also to a greater or lesser degree with the anglophone novel. Often the same novelists are studied over and over again, and while it is valuable to have many interpretations of a single work or insights into a single novelist's motivation, it is also after a while stultifying to have yet another appreciation of Camara Laye or analysis of the same works of Mongo Beti. Such single-minded devotion was later to be shown to the works of Kourouma and Ouologuem as well. But where was the whole picture? What directions was the novel taking? What concerns are common? What had the novel to do with the public it supposedly reflected and interpreted. These elements of the development of a literature remained a mystery for the student who wished to understand the whole phenomenon of the African novel in French. It was in part to fill this void and in part to open the way to a more solid understanding of francophone African literature as it will continue to develop that the work to follow was undertaken. The African novel in French came to be through an urgent need to confront the Western world with the harsh realities of the colonial situation. It has persisted through an equally urgent need to interpret contemporary realities not only to a European public, but more importantly, to a literate and indigenous readership on the African continent.



It has been objected, mainly by Africans themselves, that Western critics have no business criticizing and interpreting neo-African literature since they lack knowledge of African cultural traditions and background, and have at best a superficial acquaintance with African lands and peoples. This is literary chauvinism of the worst sort, and shortsighted at that, since it denies any kind of universal value to the literature under study. By this same token African students of literature would be barred from considering the novels of Kurt Vonnegut or William Faulkner, and we should all be dissuaded from studying Balzac or Jane Austen because we could not possibly really know the influences of the milieu of the early 19th century in which they worked. A more reasonable approach to the criticism of African literature has been taken by those teachers and critics who only caution against strict application of Western standards and limited interpretation by Western criteria at all times. Otherwise, there is a danger, as Professor Georges Ngali pointed out that "en revendiquant le monopole sur les critères d'appréciation de nos oeuvres, en déniaut à la critique occidentale toute aptitude à nous juger équitablement . . . nous ne tombions dans cette erreur qui ferait de nous une humanité fondamentalement différente dont un des attributs essentiels serait l'incommunicabilité avec les autres groupes humains,"<sup>7</sup> At the same time the

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<sup>7</sup>Georges Ngali (Ngali Mbwila Mpaang), Tendances actuelles de la littérature africaine d'expression française (Kinshasa, 1972): p. 29.

non-African student and critic has the duty to recognize the fact that literature's role is, at the present moment in Africa, quite different from what it is in the West. The African novel of French expression has social, cultural and political inferences which exact an analysis that does require some degree of understanding of current problems. Where the critic fails to perceive the delicate relation between forme and fond, he may indeed fall into the error of treating the novel as a "mere appendage," and a not very skillful one at that, of contemporary French literature. In this study we have tried to avoid the pitfalls on both sides. A more than superficial knowledge of Africa and African problems has helped. Where an esthetic bias may seem particularly Western we have said so. Where clumsy writing betrays an inferior talent we have noted it. The greatest concern of this study has been to be as objective as possible, and to show, using as broad a base of novels as possible, the uniqueness of an emerging francophone literature which is not French literature. One does not, after all, as Ernest Emenyonu wryly noted, "expect a Mercedes Benz from a Rolls Royce factory."<sup>8</sup>

The work will deal with the African novel of French expression in two parts. Part One, 1960-1969, is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1 is an overview, an état présent, of the novel at the time of independence in 1960. A number of novels are considered in a very general way in order

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<sup>8</sup>Ernest Emanyonu, "African Literature Revisited: A Search for African Critical Standards," Revue de littérature comparée, 48<sup>e</sup> année, 3, 4 (1974): 397.

to give the necessary base from which to develop the rest of the work. The chapter identifies novelists, works and themes, and discusses the expectations for the future development of the African novel in French which the following chapters will show were not altogether realized. In Chapter 2 the first few years post-independence will be considered as a period of decline. A bibliographic study in Présence Francophone (10, 1975) shows that 20 "novels" were published in the period 1961-1965. Of these, at least two of the best (Kane, L'Aventure ambiguë and Badian, Sous l'orage) were written in the 1950's and withheld from publication by their authors because they felt the time was not right for their sensitive treatment of controversial issues. Another five, by the same author, Félix Couchoro of Dahomey, appeared only in Togo-Press as romans-feuilleton and are generally unavailable today. Three more are of fewer than 100 pages and can scarcely be called "novels." Two others are classified elsewhere (J. Jahn, Zell and Silver) as "chroniques" or "souvenirs" and do not constitute what is commonly considered a novel. So there is considerable trucage in the classification of the African novel in French in this period. Chapter 2 will show that this is indeed a period of decline, a fallow period of disorientation and confusion of purpose among creative writers, but that it also marked the beginning of a search for new themes and new treatments of the genre. What these novels all have in common is a sense of hope for a better future, which, as the novels analyzed in Chapter 3 will reveal, was to be bitterly deceived.

Chapter 3, then, considers the years of disillusionment from 1966 to 1969, when the crisis of great proportion which struck both the individual and the collectivity in African society is reflected in the novel. The prevalent mood is one of pessimism, but it served as a stimulant for new talent and new ideas. The Conclusion to Part One will examine briefly the decade of the 60's in retrospect. Part Two is composed of five chapters and is concerned with the new directions the novel seems to be taking since 1970. One of the most significant of these directions is a sense of greater national identification. The chapters of Part Two will therefore examine the novel following a geographical distribution: the countries of former French West Africa, former French Equatorial Africa, Cameroon, and Zaïre (the former Belgian Congo). The final chapter will consider the most recent novel of Mongo Beti as a case apart. There may be some objection to the division by country rather than by theme in the second part. It seems, however, far more appropriate, given the present political and national realities of Africa, to make this division. The Pan-Africanism of the novel is just as much a myth as that of the continent. The "African personality" has as many different features as the European. The Luba tribesman is as different from the Peuhl nomad as the Sicilian is from the Laplander. It is nonsense to pretend otherwise. Nation-building is an exhausting and exacting process, and the novelist must have his due share. And the encouraging fact is that he seems to be taking it.

When we talk about something being particularly "African" then, we have to realize that we are talking in generalities. No one has ever defined what being "African" means, although Senghor tried. The fact that a good many Africans reject his definitions just proves the point. One feels one knows what is "African" and what is not, and then one finds that one doesn't know at all. It is sometimes handy to be told. Peter Nazareth in An African View of Literature has given us, from an African viewpoint, a definition of what a novel is.<sup>9</sup> The eight characteristics he outlines are very illuminating. Balzac would be entirely in agreement; Nathalie Sarraute might have some reservations. Thus one finds in point 2 that "a novel deals with society, i. e., with a group of people interacting upon one another. The story may concentrate on one person, but it deals with this person in relation to and with other people." So far, so good. Nazareth is considering any novel, not just the African novel. But when it is an African context within which these relationships between persons are defined, the Western reader feels the necessity of a specific frame of reference in which to situate the interactions of groups in the society depicted. The writer's dilemma is how much to put in so that his non-African audience won't be lost, and how much to leave out so that his African public won't be bored. It is a little bit the same with criticism: when to approach

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<sup>9</sup>Peter Nazareth, An African View of Literature, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 218-219.

the characteristics of the African novel from a Western point of view, and when to apply specifically African critical standards--and how to know what these are when one is not African. The best way, it seems, is to immerse oneself in the literature, and this is what we have done, trying to pull from as many sources as possible an appreciation of the characteristics of the African novel of French expression in the decade and a half since independence so radically changed its orientation. The scope is broad, and if, in a desire to be precise and accurate, the obvious has sometimes been overstated or repeated, the didactic tendencies of the material studied and the redundant nature of the oral tradition may serve as an excuse. Their influence has undoubtedly been profound, if subconscious.

For the purposes of this study, the term "African novel of French expression" will refer only to that produced by novelists from the African continent south of the Sahara. The large and fascinating body of Maghrebian literature in French is another study altogether, as is that of the literature of Madagascar. Any work of fewer than 100 pages has been omitted, and this has included, reluctantly, the omission of such a work as Le Mandat by Ousmane Sembène. A relatively strict chronology has been followed, although there are shifts and overlappings within the limitations of each chronological period in order to accommodate a development of theme or follow the boundaries of geography.

"French-speaking Africa," "francophone Africa," and "Africa of French expression" are terms which have been used interchangeably throughout in discussing literature or the novel written in French by Africans of whatever nationality. The terms are not entirely satisfactory, but they have become more or less hallowed by use and for want of anything else to describe the linguistic situation of countries where French was the language of the former colonizer. "Anglophone," "English-speaking," and "English expression" are used in referring to the former British colonies in Africa with considerably less emotional distaste. The "English-speaking world" has perhaps a longer history of sharing a common language for means of communication. English has for centuries ceased to be just the language spoken in England by the English. The "French-speaking world" is coming late to this kind of union through language, and there are undoubtedly some purists in France who wish it would not happen. They would prefer to keep French, even that exported overseas, the language of the metropole and the Académie. But la Francophonie is on the rise. It may save French as a world language. Its literature can revitalize the French language the way American literature or Australian literature has revitalized the English language, a process which the new "African" literature written in English is carrying on.

The terms noir or négro-africain have not been used because they are not exact. Black or Negro-African literature includes that

of the Americas and the Caribbean as well as that of Africa. They seem very vague catch-all terms for an extremely varied body of literature. The term "neo-African," coined by Janheinz Jahn, has also generally been avoided.

The enormous geographical area of Africa south of the Sahara and north of the Zambezi includes seventeen independent nations where French is either the official language or the first foreign language of importance for official purposes. These countries are Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo Republic, Dahomey,<sup>10</sup> Gabon, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo, Upper Volta, and Zaïre. Together they have a total population of approximately 75 million. Only a minority is really fluently francophone, but compulsory education and literacy campaigns are beginning to make their effects felt. The growth of

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<sup>10</sup>Now the Republic of Benin. The country formerly known as Dahomey adopted its new name on November 30, 1975. The name, Benin, is of ancient historical and cultural significance in the area which includes Togo, the former Dahomey, and Nigeria, along the coast of the Bight of Benin in the Gulf of Guinea from the mouth of the Volta to the delta of the Niger, an area also once known as the Slave Coast. The Benin kingdom, in what is now southern Nigeria, reached a peak of development in the 15th to 17th centuries. The famous Benin bronzes bear witness today to the skill of its craftsmen. The capital city, also called Benin, was a commercial center of the day, but decline set in, in the 18th century, when the kingdom began paying more attention to warfare, territorial expansion and the attendant slave trade than to commerce and the economy.

Because bibliographies and studies concerning the African novel written prior to 1975 refer to the country as Dahomey, this name will be retained and used, rather than Benin, throughout the present work.



the cities is facilitating the process. Exchanges between countries are becoming more and more numerous. A telephone call from Lome to Cotonou, less than 100 miles along the Togo-Dahomey coast, which used to have to go via Paris can now be made direct. Dozens of jet flights a week link the various capitals. In all of this assumption of autonomy, cultural autonomy will not be neglected. First things first, of course, but the evolution and development of the novel in fifteen years indicates a significant beginning; it is the purpose of the study which follows to chronicle that beginning.

## PART ONE. 1960-1969

### Chapter 1: The state of the African novel of French expression at the time of independence, 1960\*

It was a momentous year. A wave of independence was sweeping across Africa, and on the crest of it rode the French colonies of west and central Africa. In 1960, seventeen, or fully half of Black Africa's countries, gained their independence from the colonial power. Thirteen

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\*The novels considered in this chapter are Bakary Diallo, Force bonté (F. Rieder, 1926); Félix Couchoro, L'Esclave (La Dépêche africaine, 1929) and Amour de féticheuse (Ouidah, 1941); Ousmane Socé, Karim, roman sénégalais (Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1935) and Mirages de Paris (Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1937); Paul Hazoumé, Douguicimi (Larose, 1938); Laye Camara, L'Enfant noir (Plon, 1953) and Le regard du roi (Plon, 1954); Bernard Dadié, Climbié (Séghers, 1953) and Un Nègre à Paris (Présence Africaine, 1959); Aké Loba, Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir (Flammarion, 1960); Mongo Beti, Ville cruelle (pseud. Eza Boto, Présence Africaine, 1954), Le pauvre Christ de Bomba (Laffont, 1956), Mission terminée (Buchet-Chastel, 1957) and Le Roi miraculé (Buchet-Chastel, 1958); Ferdinand Oyono, Une vie de boy (Julliard, 1956), Le vieux Nègre et la médaille (Julliard, 1956), and Chemin d'Europe (Julliard, 1960); Ousmane Sembène, Le docker noir, (Debresse, 1956), O pays, mon beau peuple! (Amiot-Dumont, 1957), and Les bouts de bois de Dieu (Presses pocket, Le Livre contemporain, 1960); Jean Malonga, Coeur d'Ayrenne (Présence Africaine, 1954) and La Légende de M'Pfoumou ma Mazono (Editions Africaines, 1954); Benjamin Matip, Afrique, nous t'ignorons! (Lacoste, 1956); Olympe Bhély-Quénou, Un piège sans fin (Librairie Stock, 1960); David Ananou, Le fils du fétiche, (Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1955); Abdoulaye Sadj, Nini, mulâtresse de Sénégal (Présence Africaine, 1955) and Maïmouna (Présence Africaine, 1958); and D. T. Niane, Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue (Présence Africaine, 1960).

of these had been formerly under French rule.<sup>1</sup> Another, the former Belgian Congo, now Zaïre, extended the zone de la francophonie into the very heart of the continent. Together, these fourteen new nations d'expression française constituted a population approximately double that of their anglophone neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

A literature of surprising force and vigor, written in French, had played a vital role in this march to independence, a fact which is not in itself unusual, because as Claude Wauthier has pointed out, "throughout history, the demand for national independence has gone hand in hand with cultural revival."<sup>3</sup> The movement for emancipation in the former African colonies was no exception to this rule. What we may question, however, is that this was, as Wauthier termed it, a REvival. Surely this implies the notion that something had existed before, whereas in fact it had not. This was a brand-new literature, "born out of internal and external conflicts, nurtured by subtle emotional

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<sup>1</sup>Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Dahomey, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Upper Volta. Guinea, following the referendum of 1958, opted not to join the French community and thus became the first of the French colonies to become independent. Madagascar also gained independence from France in 1960, but the island nation is not generally considered part of sub-Saharan Black Africa, and so I have not included it as part of this study.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, (Paris: Fayard, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa, (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 17.

crises, complicated by political stress and all kinds of political involvement."<sup>4</sup> More than just a literary phenomenon, moreover, this new cultural awareness, under the impulsion of Black intellectuals of the pre-independence decades, had generated a revolutionary "prise de conscience des valeurs noires" which erupted into the movement known as Négritude.

The term is Césaire's and the origins and development of the concept as ideology and as literary movement have been well documented elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> I do not propose here to enter into the debate which is still raging about the permanence or impermanence of Négritude. In general French-speaking Africans have supported its premises, while the English-speaking Africans have opposed them. This may be because the English colonies in Africa had never been subjected to the myth of assimilation and the English-speaking African intellectual had no need for a symbolic journey back to Africa to find his roots. As Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian, put it, Negritude "was essentially the exiled African's cri du coeur, his protest as a colonial

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<sup>4</sup>Mbella Sonne Dipoko, "Cultural diplomacy in African writing" in Wästberg, Per, The Writer in Modern Africa, (New York: Africana Publishing Co, 1969), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup>cf. Janheinz Jahn, Manuel de littérature néo-africaine; Lilyan Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature; Jean-Marie Abanda Ndengue, De la négritude au négritisme; L. V. Thomas, Les idéologies négro-africaines d'aujourd'hui; Thomas Melone, De la Négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine; and numerous articles (see Bibliography).

man and an assimilé . . ." <sup>6</sup> The degree of alienation felt seems to be in proportion to the degree of assimilation experienced or aspired to. An assertion of the positive values of the Black world was not necessary to the African who had never suffered the suppression of his individuality or experienced the loneliness of the Negro in the white world. It would have seemed, as Dr. Davidson Nicol noted in an address at Fourah Bay College (Sierra Leone) in 1963, "like emphasizing the obvious." In order to feel the necessity for Negritude, one must first have experienced the multiple influences of Western civilization.

This was certainly the case of the first generation of Africans writing in French: "Negritude is almost too perfect an example of one literature growing directly out of another culture and its literature, be it, as they were, negative influences: exile, assimilation, and rejection of French culture by African students living in France between the two world wars." <sup>7</sup> These students sought to open up a dialogue with the West and to assert their consciousness of an apartness. They wrote less to satisfy themselves or an African public than to confront a foreign audience with the presence and uniqueness of the Black experience.

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<sup>6</sup>Kofi Awoonor, "Africa's literature beyond politics," The Worldview 15, 3 (March 1972): 21.

<sup>7</sup>Charles R. Larson, "African literature and comparative literature," Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature 18 (1969): 72.

. . . up to about the late 1940's or early 1950's the literature of Negritude is in a posture of facing towards the white world. The expression it wears on its face may vary; it may be one of reconciliation, it may be one of bringing gifts to enrich the common store; it may be an expression of hatred; it may be an expression of rejection; it may be an expression of hope; it may be one of disappointment; it may be one of grief; but the face is towards the white world, toward Europe . . .<sup>8</sup>

Poetry was their first medium of expression, and poetry remains the genre par excellence of Negritude. Vernacular literature is rich in a variety of instruments of cultural expression. Oral tradition throughout Africa includes a wealth of myths, tales, ballads, praise poems, songs, and legends which are analogous in spirit if not in form to much of Western poetry. The African poets writing in French were easily able to accommodate their themes to a European mode of expression when they dealt in this genre. However, the novel was not related to a traditional African genre, and was slower to develop. By the end of the Second World War, only a half-dozen novels had been published in French.<sup>9</sup> The first of these, Force bonté by Bakary Diallo of Senegal appeared in 1926. Notable only because it marks a "first,"<sup>10</sup> it has long been out of print and exists today as a

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<sup>8</sup>Gerald Moore, "The Politics of Negritude," in Pieterse and Munro, Protest and Conflict in African Literature, (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1969), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup>J. R. Duclos, "Bibliographie du roman négro-africain française," Présence Francophone 10 (1975): 147.

<sup>10</sup>I do not consider Rene Maran's Batouala, which appeared in 1921 and won the Prix Goncourt, an "African" novel in the sense that I understand the term for this study, as the author was Martiniquais by origin, educated in France, and came to Africa for the first time as an adult and as a colonial administrator to boot.

footnote to studies of African literature, a curiosity representative of the assimilationist tendencies of the period. It is, as Lilyan Kesteloot notes "un naïf panégyrique de la France,"<sup>11</sup> praising the civilizing mission of French colonization.

Two novels by Félix Couchoro of Dahomey (later a Togolais d'adoption) appeared in this period, L'Esclave in 1929 and Amour de féticheuse in 1941, neither of which has received any particular critical attention, but which render, according to Jacques Nantet, "de façon... charmante la vie de tous les jours, les moeurs propres à cette population animée, allante et somme toute d'esprit méridional."<sup>12</sup>

The 30's saw the publication of three novels which it is worth considering more fully since they are truly the forerunners of the explosion of the novel in the post-war period before independence.

In 1935 appeared Karim, roman sénégalais by Ousmane Socé. Roman de moeurs, Karim establishes a theme which will be fully explored in novels of the post-war period, that of the cross-cultural encounter. Although the originality of African tradition is asserted, Socé also recognizes the attraction of European civilization. Karim is drawn to his ancestral past not, as Sunday O. Anozie would have

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<sup>11</sup>Lilyan Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature, (Brussels: Eds. de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'U. L. B., 1965), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, p. 101.

it,<sup>13</sup> to flee the realities of the present, but because he has never really been separated from his heritage and is so imbued with the values and customs of the proud line of Wolof warriors from which he is descended that a certain grandeur d'esprit is quite natural to him: "Concevoir grand, dire grand, faire grand, c'est cela même qui était l'essence de leur esprit sénégalais. Rien n'avait de la valeur que s'il était ample, puissant, extraordinaire" (Karim, p. 139).

Indeed, life in Senegal of the period favored a civilisation métisse, and the citizens of the four veilles communes, Dakar, Gorée, Saint-Louis and Rufisque, unlike Africans of other colonies, enjoyed full French citizenship. There was never really any question that they were part of the metropole:

Au fond, ils hésitaient tous à rompre définitivement avec le vieux Sénégal, pour épouser les moeurs d'Europe, dont certaines s'imposaient.

Leur coeur parlait en faveur de la tradition ancestrale et leurs intérêts en faveur du modernisme pratique de l'Occident.

Mais par-dessus leurs discours, d'année en année, une civilisation métisse s'organisait, n'obéissant qu'aux lois de la lutte pour la vie.

Une civilisation métisse dont l'élément étranger consistait en apports matériels et intellectuels, nécessaires à notre adaptation dans le courant de vie mondiale, dont nous faisons désormais partie intégrante. Karim, pp. 105-106.

But the war intervened, and after it there was never any question of the harmonious integration of two cultures. The cross-cultural encounter became a conflict and the rapprochement which seemed

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<sup>13</sup>Sunday O. Anozie, Sociologie du roman africain, (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970).



possible, at least in Senegal, became a violent anti-colonial struggle in which the novel was to play a significant part.

Socé's second novel, Mirages de Paris, was published in 1937, and establishes a second major theme, that of a young African's impressions of Europe, and with it the picaresque tradition which thrives to this day in the African novel of French expression. A. C. Brench has asserted that "until 1959 no African novelist had described an African's impressions of France... Dadié and Aké Loba, whose novels were published in 1959 and 1960 respectively, are the first to give their impressions of the capital of the mother country."<sup>14</sup> But Socé's novel preceded these two by a good twenty years, and his hero, Fara, experienced the same dépaysement which was to assail Climbié and Kocoumbo years later:

Dans le taxi qui le conduisait à l'avenue des Champs-Elysées, il regardait à travers les vitres les multitudes de maisons défilant, hautes et grises, portes et fenêtres innombrables, toujours closes. Paris était, plus qu'une ville, un monde sans limites précises. La foule surtout étonnait: ces millions d'hommes qui marchaient inlassablement faisaient prodigieux, comparés aux foules d'Afrique, à densité d'autant insignifiante que partout autour d'elles les horizons étaient ouverts sur des espaces infinis.

... Cette immensité d'hommes blancs le troublait. Ce fut la première fois de son existence qu'il eut une aussi forte sensation de son être et de sa couleur. Mirages de Paris, pp. 29-30.

The shock of the contact with the Occident is Fara's, not Karim's, for it is Fara who is the exile, away from home in a strange, cold land where the sun never strays far from the southern horizon.

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<sup>14</sup>A. C. Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in French Africa, (London: Oxford, 1967), p. 11.

That this alienation of one's being was deeply felt by African intellectuals who sojourned as students in France is attested to by the many novels to redevelop this theme in the 50's and beyond. The experience was a painful one, and while they may take care to treat it objectively, few novelists were able to laugh at it in retrospect.

Paul Hazoumé of Dahomey contributed to the meager pre-war output of African novels with the publication, in 1938, of Douguicimi. This lengthy work (511 pages) was the first to set forth in minute detail the customs and traditions of an ancient kingdom, and to present them as values, albeit pagan ones, which were essential to the structure of an historically documented civilization. With his anthropologist's care for exactness - Hazoumé was a sociologist and ethnologist who, in 1937, became a research director at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris - he set forth a pageant of life as it was lived before colonization in the ancient kingdom of Dahomey during the reign of King Ghezo in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was from his court in Abomey that King Ghezo and his ancestors before him, leaders of a proud, fierce race of warriors, launched the many wars against their neighbors which produced human cargo for the Portuguese slave ships that had been plying the coast of Dahomey for centuries. Palace intrigues, wars, religious customs and rites, feasts and observances fill this documentary novel with authentic views of a lost past. Although the tragic love story of the Princess Douguicimi is the thread which holds the novel together, it is the historical fresco which retains our

attention since it establishes the theme of recapturing the African past and establishes the model of the epic historical novel which will be exploited by a later generation of novelists.

These few novels of the pre-war period hardly constituted a major trend in the genre. They were quite different in theme and treatment one from the other, and may be presumed to have satisfied a craving for exoticism on the part of a European readership. The novelists, two from Senegal, two from Dahomey, had no particular axe to grind with the West. It would have been unproductive to attempt to do so in the 20's and 30's in any event. The anti-colonial novel would be born only after World War Two, a by-product of the struggle for national liberation which conditions of the war years did much to hasten.

After the Second World War the novel came into its own and began to surpass poetry as a medium through which to present the African reality to a public still largely composed of Western readers. Born against a pro-assimilationist background in the 1920's and 30's, the French-African novel was, as Janheinz Jahn has shown, heir to two traditions: traditional African literature and Western literature.<sup>15</sup> The overlap of cultures occasioned by the French colonial policy of assimilation furnished the novelist with two sources of inspiration, the French literary heritage which was his by right of conquest of the French language as a medium of self expression, and the African oral

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<sup>15</sup>Janheinz Jahn, A History of Neo-African Literature, (London: Farber & Farber, 1968), p. 22.

tradition which was his by right of birth. It was "the greatest achievement of negritude, that a genuine African feeling for life, and attitude to life, could be and was expressed in a European language, " a European language mastered "right to its last refinement."<sup>16</sup> For it was indeed "the much debated and often maligned concepts of Negritude (which) provide a link between pre-World War II writers and the postwar literary explosion."<sup>17</sup>

Paris was the scene, in the years following 1945, of a veritable foisonnement of novels by French-African writers, and the common denominator which united them all was the anticolonial struggle. The novelist's mission, like that of the poet, became one of affirming the originality of the African personality and rejecting the forces of acculturation which were turning so many évolués into "toubabs noirs" (black white men). Where there had been earlier a dream of complete cultural and political assimilation, there now began a cultural self-assertion and a rejection of the French mission civilisatrice which was to have its culmination in the movement of national liberation at the end of the 50's. This development in the novel was led by a generation of young men, born in the 20's and 30's, whose youth had been marked to one degree or another by the war and the way it affected the French

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>17</sup>Edris Makward, "African writers share basic themes and concerns," Africa Report 16, 3 (1971): 28.

colonial policy in their native countries. The exploitation of the colonies to provide raw materials for the French war effort and the levying of conscription for forced labor gangs greatly accelerated the disaffection of the colonized from the mother country. Families saw their young men march off to war in a land they had never seen, for a cause they had no notion of. And there were many who never returned. Ferdinand Oyono, in Le vieux Nègre et la médaille (1956), gives us a vivid and poignant picture of an old peasant who has given his two sons to France and his lands to the colony, to receive in return a medal and an ultimate humiliation.

To trace the development of the novel in French Africa between 1950 and 1960 is to trace the political and social development of a people. It is not that the diverse populations of the French colonies were in any way united in the literal sense of the word, but that the novelists' preoccupation with the anticolonial struggle provided a unifying theme which reflected common goals and aspirations, and a common prise de conscience ethnique in the face of white domination. More disposed than poetry to the techniques of reportage, it is not surprising that the novel as genre took over from poetry to become "littérature de revendication et de combat." The key word is engagement in the exact Sartrean sense:

. . . le romancier ouest-africain nous présente une image plus exacte, ou fondamentalement plus dynamique de la réalité sociale en Afrique, et cela signifie l'adaptation progressive du roman

en tant que véhicule de l'empathie disciplinée. Or, de la prise de conscience aiguë des romanciers ouest-africains d'une Afrique en état de bouleversement social, conséquence directe de l'apparition d'une nouvelle réalité sociale avec tous ses résultats, ressort un fort besoin de redéfinir, même imaginativement, la place de l'individu africain dans une société changeante et qui se modernise.<sup>18</sup>

The novelist's mission and the function of the novel as littérature de combat has been judged by Leonard Sainville, conveniently overlooking a few precedents in French literature and elsewhere, as "une tâche historique toute nouvelle pour le roman. . ."

Jusqu'ici, à quelques exceptions près, les mouvements littéraires et artistiques n'ont été que le reflet des civilisations, de l'état matériel et intellectuel où elles étaient parvenues à un moment donné de l'évolution des peuples.<sup>19</sup>

That this is straining a point in favor of the African novel is evident when one considers the history of French literature. In the 18th century Marivaux had promoted the prise de conscience of the rising middle class; Zola had taken up the cudgels in the 19th century for the exploited laboring classes; and the littérature engagée of Malraux, Sartre and Camus found its most avid audience in those European intellectuals who were committed to a change in contemporary society--all causes which are not entirely dissimilar with the situation facing African writers in the middle of the 20th century. The fact is, of course, that the barbs

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<sup>18</sup>Sunday O. Anozie, Sociologie du roman africain (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970), p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>Leonard Sainville, "Le roman et ses responsabilités," Présence Africaine 27-28 (1959): 38.

of the novel were aimed more at pricking the conscience of the colonizer than at awakening the indignation of the colonized. How could it be otherwise on a continent where the average rate of illiteracy in the 1950's was 90 percent or higher. It is possible to see this decade as a period, relatively short, it is true, of commitment to a definite purpose when the novel, by every approach available, tried to analyze colonialism and the Africans' reaction to it. The myths were to be destroyed, and in penetrating detail, the soul of the colon, the soul of the indigène, and the basic forces which pitted them one against the other were to be uncovered.

From the end of the war through 1960, thirty-eight novels were published or appeared under the imprimatur of various sponsoring organizations. Of these thirty-eight, twenty-three by a dozen different novelists set the themes and established the characteristics of the novel of the period. It is these dozen writers then that we must consider as being seminal influences not only in their own time as écrivains engagés in the anticolonial struggle, but as models for the present engagement of contemporary writers in the development of their countries' national images.

In order of date of first publication, they are Laye Camara\* (Guinea), Bernard Dadié (Ivory Coast), Jean Malonga (Congo- Brazzaville), David Ananou (Togo), Mongo Beti\*\* (Cameroon), Ferdinand Oyono (Cameroon), Ousmane Sembène\* (Senegal), Benjamin Matip (Cameroon), Abdoulaye Sadjì (Senegal), Olympe Bhêly-Quénou (Dahomey), Aké Loba (Ivory Coast), and Djibril Tamsir Niane (Guinea). All of them found publishers in Paris at such diverse and prestigious maisons d'édition as Plon, Séghers, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Laffont, Julliard, Lacoste, Corrèa-Buchet-Chastel, Amiot-Dumont, Stock, Flammarion, Le Livre contemporain, and Présence Africaine.

This latter house had its origins in a review founded by a group of African intellectuals residing in Paris. The first issue appeared simultaneously in Dakar and Paris in December 1947, and rapidly became, as Lilyan Kesteloot noted, "l'organe du monde noir en France."<sup>20</sup> Associated in the founding were, for the first time, a majority of Africans unlike the earlier reviews of the thirties, La Revue du monde

\*Camara and Sembène are African patronymics. It was (and is) the custom in African societies to place one's father's name first, so that it is often mistaken in the West for a first name. Laye Camara and Ousmane Sembène have therefore been widely referred to by what are really their own first names, Laye and Ousmane. This study will refer to them as Camara and Sembène and follow consistently the Western form of first name followed by last name to conform to the order which the other novelists to be considered have adopted.

\*\*Pseudonym of Alexandre Biyidi. Biyidi originally published under another pseudonym, Eza Boto (Ville cruelle, 1954), which he subsequently abandoned.

<sup>20</sup>Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature, p. 254.



noir and L'Etudiant noir, whose collaborators were, for the most part, Antillian. The project of Présence Africaine had been conceived as early as 1942-43 in the bleak Paris of the war years by a group of students who, 'au sein des souffrances d'une Europe s'interrogeant sur son essence et sur l'authenticité de ses valeurs . . . [se sont] groupés pour étudier la situation et les caractères qui nous définissaient nous-mêmes."<sup>21</sup> The leader of this group and chief motivator of the founding of the review was Alioune Diop of Senegal. Diop launched an appeal to all the intellectuals of Africa to affirm the existence of authentic African values and to reverse the historic predicament of Africa in which 'le noir . . . brille par son absence dans l'élaboration de la cité moderne."<sup>22</sup> Championed by leaders of the French intelligentsia such as Sartre, Gide and Camus, supported by the benevolent interest of French ethnologists and sociologists, drawing on the reputations of already recognized Negro-African writers like Léopold Senghor, Paul Hazoumé, Aimé Césaire and Richard Wright, Présence Africaine soon established its authority, and within two years was able to expand its activity into the realm of publishing.

Thus, with the best of Paris's publishing houses behind them,

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<sup>21</sup>Alioune Diop, 'Niam n'goura ou les raisons d'être de Présence Africaine, " Présence Africaine 1 (Nov. -Dec. 1947): 8, quoted in Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: Naissance d'une littérature, p. 255.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

these dozen novelists sallied forth to challenge the colonial dragon. How they did this, the themes with which they tipped their lances, was to a large extent dependent on their background and upbringing in colonial society. As A. C. Brench rightly observes, "a factor which is often ignored but which has considerable importance is the influence of the writers' country of origin."<sup>23</sup> "The first point," he continues, "is that, with rare exceptions, the majority of the writers, both poets and novelists, come from countries on the coastal plain; Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon . . . This can be explained by the existence of a greater number of urban centres and, therefore, educational institutions on the coast."<sup>24</sup> It can also be explained by the fact that the administrative centers linking the coastal colonies with France were of longer date historically than those of the interior. And the linkage itself was more easily effected since the sea routes were immediately accessible. René Maran in Un homme pareil aux autres (Albin Michel, 1947), describes the incredible journey in time and space which was required for a colonial administrator to reach his post in the Ubangui-Chari (now the Central African Republic). And in Kotia-Nima (Présence Africaine, 1968), Boubou Hama retraces the long steps which led him as a child from his village among the Zarma-Sonrai on the banks of the Niger to the primary school of Tera, and from there

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<sup>23</sup>Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in French Africa, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

progressively on "la route sans retour de l'exil, maintenant certain" (T. 1, p. 81) that brought him eventually to Dakar and the Lycée William Ponty on Gorée Island and ultimately to France: "Gorée fut donc pour Kotia-Nima une rencontre, le creuset dans lequel se broyaient les civilisations de l'Afrique au contact des idées générales de la pensée occidentale" (T. 1, p. 113). So it is not surprising that countries like Upper Volta, Mali, Niger, and the countries of ex-French Equatorial Africa produced fewer writers than those whose doors had been open to the West for centuries.

It was this confrontation of two worlds which Boubou Hama first found as a student in the creuset of Gorée which the novelists of the 50's were to use as their source of inspiration, a source which dried up as we shall later see, with the disappearance of the colonist.

The first novel of significance to appear was L'Enfant noir by Laye Camara in 1953, and it has become a classic. An autobiographical evocation of the author's childhood, Camara's apparent lack of commitment to the polemics of anti-colonialism at first angered his contemporaries. They saw in his tender idyll a bourgeois reportage where, they strongly insinuated, there should have been a témoignage and indictment of colonialism. That these critics, in their concern for political commitment, were mistaken in their harsh judgment of Camara's contribution (or lack of it) to the cause of liberation is obvious. For by

his gentle portrayal of the stability of traditional African society, Camara offered the antithesis to the breakdown of that society which was everywhere evident in Africa, and led those who would to ponder on the real contradictions of colonization's mission civilisatrice. Among the themes to be developed are those of the values of traditional life, ceremonies and customs. Life is lived authentically in every sense and in seeming permanence of continuity. The importance of the collectivity, the communality of existence permeates the novel, a theme "unknown or virtually so, in autobiographies of white writers of the West."<sup>25</sup> An undercurrent throughout the novel is the theme of exile, for we know that the déracinement will occur and that impelled by the colonial policy of education, the child will embark on "la route sans retour."

Two other largely autobiographical novels continue on the path of the Bildungsroman begun by L'Enfant noir: Climbié by Bernard Dadié (1953) and Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir by Aké Loba (1960). In a manner reminiscent of Camara's work Climbié recounts first the childhood and traditional upbringing of a young Ivorian in a stable and collective society, but it also sets the tone for future novels of political and social contestation when the young hero later confronts the injustices of current colonial practices.

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<sup>25</sup>James Olney, Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature, footnote, p. 57.

Ce roman qui retrace l'itinéraire parcouru par bien des leaders africains--de l'école normale William Ponty au syndicalisme militant--permet en outre au lecteur européen de se faire une idée plus précise de l'écart, qui n'a cessé de se creuser pendant la période de l'entre-deux-guerres, entre les idéaux républicains de la métropole et la réalité de la colonie. Roman de formation d'un jeune ivoirien dans les années 30, Climbié témoigne donc également de la prise de conscience de sa condition par un Africain de la génération des indépendances.<sup>26</sup>

Dadié maintains a simple objectivity throughout his story which is much more compelling than an open manifesto of attack.

In Kocoumbo, the presentation of African life and customs diminishes still further, and the face of the hero is turned resolutely towards Paris where the bulk of the novel is set:

Tout un mois durant, Kocoumbo se mit à construire la ville dans son imagination et à s'efforcer de croire à la réalité de ses illusions. Il avait besoin d'en parler avec les jeunes gens de son âge, non seulement par vanité mais surtout pour vaincre ses propres doutes, pour renforcer son sentiment de sécurité qui chancelait parfois quand la pensée brusque de ce voyage inattendu lui venait à l'esprit. Le jeune homme arriva ainsi à se persuader que la loyauté et l'hospitalité des Parisiens étaient incomparables. Enfin, dans l'ensemble. Paris s'apprêtait à le recevoir. Ce dernier acte de foi avait le pouvoir magique de façonner tous ses espoirs. Kocoumbo, p. 32.

Alas, these hopes are soon dashed, and the hero of Kocoumbo is left to face the lonely struggle which furnishes the themes for many subsequent novels: isolation, solitude, and the disorientation of the African student in the enigmatic world of Europe.

The three giants of the African novel of French expression as littérature combattante appeared on the scene in the middle and late

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<sup>26</sup>Jacques Chevrier, Littérature nègre (Paris: Armand Colin, 1974), p. 153.

50's. They are Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono and Ousmane Sembène. All of their works have been thoroughly analyzed and criticized in numerous studies and articles, and it would be repetitious to present here any more than a general summary of certain themes and characteristics of their novels as they reflect the major preoccupations of creative writing in French of that decade and are indispensable to an understanding of the état présent of the novel in 1960. Among them they published ten novels in a half-dozen years, from 1954 to 1960.

Mongo Beti, whose novels are all set in Africa, within the specific confines of southern Cameroon, deals with the disintegration of traditional village life. The opposition of town and country is a fertile source for the novelist's satiric wit. The lure of the occident is always lurking in these towns in order to snare the unwary peasant and condition him forever against the more simple values of his home in the brousse. The basic and mutual incomprehension which exists between colonizer and colonized supplies another theme. When the value system of two such different worlds confront one another under a system as inherently paternalistic, rigid, and despotic as colonialism, the outcome is certain. Instead of a harmonious melding into what Senghor likes to call the "Civilisation de l'universel," the dominated society's values will crack and be torn assunder. The young generation will become alienated from the ways of their fathers in a sense more

profound than a normal "conflict of generations," and the bonds which held together the social and cultural order will be made meaningless. This is what Mongo Beti saw happening everywhere around him. And this is what he turned his pen against. His protest is no feeble pamphleteer's polemic, but a creative writer's J'accuse couched in a style, the verve and wit of which could only make his French readers wriggle in discomfort, as it turned his mastery of the French language back on them, to depict the tragedy which their colonial policy had wrought.

The first, and weakest, of Beti's novels was Ville cruelle which he published in 1954 under the pseudonym of Eza Boto. It tells the story of a young man's double humiliation and loss of self: as a dis-oriented peasant in the town and as an African in the face of white racism. Like that of Ville cruelle, the action of Beti's next novel, Le pauvre Christ de Bomba (1956) was set in the 30's and depicts, with considerable good humor, the problems of the evangelization of Africa. This is the first novel to use the journal form, the diary of a naïf, who ingenuously recounts the struggles of a poor white missionary to "civilize" a wayward congregation. Let there be no mistake, however, the humor is a two-edged sword, and the work is a sharp indictment of the pretensions of missionary activity. Mission terminée, Beti's third novel (1957), takes us along with its hero, Jean-Marie Medza, to the village of Kala, where

Jean-Marie has been sent to fetch home the errant wife of a distant relative. It was thought that Jean-Marie, with his superior European-style education (he has just failed his "bac"), would "épater les villageois," as indeed he does, because, as the elders who have sent him on this quest have noted, he speaks with "la voix du tonnerre": "Ta voix du tonnerre, sais-tu ce que c'est? Tes diplômes, ton instruction, ta connaissance des choses des Blancs." (Mission terminée, p. 31)

Jean-Marie is "l'étoile montante, le coming-man de la tribu" (p. 35), so off he goes, imagining that he is a conquistador, "Medzaro," mounted on the bicycle of the chief of the canton. He succeeds in his mission and returns home, only to find that he cannot come to terms with life as his father expects him to lead it. His encounter, as a young évolué, with traditional life has left him dissatisfied with himself and his aspirations, and he leaves again, for what new adventures we are not told. We only know that his mission to Kala became no more than "une étape dans ma vie:" "Si je m'étais arrêté tout de suite à cette étape, tout eût certainement été pour le mieux. Seulement, voilà: je ne m'y étais pas arrêté, et dès lors force m'était de recommencer une autre vie" (p. 249-250).

The lively pace and sense of the ribald side of the comic make this an entertaining novel, for which Beti won the Prix Sainte Beuve. We might wonder, however, at the perspicacity of the anonymous editor who wrote on the jacket of the Paris edition: "Voici enfin un roman africain qui n'a pas d'arrière-pensée politique . . ." In 1957 Mongo Beti brought



forth his fourth novel, Le Roi miraculé, and then lapsed into a silence which gave cause for concern and matter for speculation to critics for over a decade, and from which he has only just recovered (see Chapter 5 of Part Two). Translated into English as King Lazarus, Le Roi miraculé tells the story of a tribal chieftain who was seemingly revived from the dead by a fortuitous baptism, and who thereupon, under the instigation of a white missionary, renounces his pagan ways, defies the tradition of polygamy, and sends 22 of his 23 wives packing. What happens to the tribe as a result forms the drama of the novel. While Beti's comedy may be boisterous, the underlying theme is one of sadness: the conflicting pressures which an outside agent represented in this case by the missionary, Father Le Guen, exerts on a heretofore stable and valid society.

With Mongo Beti, the African novel of French expression passed from a stage where it expressed only the desire for Africa to affirm itself and to exalt its soul, or to find itself in an inventory of its past, and moved into a phase where it was obliged to take up action in order to guarantee this past and be present in the formulation of a better future. "L'oeuvre de Mongo Beti revêt donc une valeur exemplaire dans la mesure où elle rassemble en elle les traits fondamentaux du roman africain: la contestation de l'ordre colonial et l'impossible formation du héros aboutissant à l'angoisse devant un avenir tragiquement

bouché.<sup>127</sup>

Mongo Beti's fellow countrymen, Ferdinand Oyono, also turned his pen to the témoignage at about this time, and published three novels in quick succession: Une vie de boy and Le vieux Nègre et la médaille, both in 1956, and Chemin d'Europe in 1960. Oyono's talents, like Beti's lie in the satiric vein, but his satire is often bitter where Beti's is comic. A deeply-rooted and subtle irony pervades his work, inseparable from the surface matter of each story. Humor is there too, natural and earthy, and it serves to lighten the frequently brutal realism with which the novels attack the injustices of the colonial system. Oyono's commitment as an écrivain engagé to the novel of protest is more apparent at first glance than Beti's. He excoriates colonialism as an inhumanizing political force, which often turns his colons into racist stereotypes. The themes of humiliation and resignation run throughout his work along with a veiled pessimism that does not allow us much hope for a better future. The disappearance of traditional values with nothing to replace them but a sterile imitation of European ways and customs is for Oyono a source of genuine anguish. And he is even more anguished at the hypocrisy with which the Europeans accepted this sacrifice of self:

J'ai trouvé le régisseur de prison en train d' 'apprendre à vivre' à deux nègres soupçonnés d'avoir volé chez M. Janopoulos . . . C' était terrible. Je pense à tous ces prêtres, ces pasteurs, tous ces Blancs qui veulent sauver nos âmes et qui nous prêchent l'amour du prochain. Le prochain

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

du Blanc, n'est-il que son congénère? Je me demande, devant de pareilles atrocités, qui peut être assez sot pour croire encore à tous les boniments qu'on nous débite à l'Église et au Temple.

(Une vie de boy, pp. 116-118).

Oyono makes use of the stripped-down sentence, a clear, simple, direct language and a rapid rhythm which move the action forward. He does not waste time with nuances and subtleties but cuts immediately to the essential point in the progression of his narrative. Une vie de boy, like Beti's Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, is related in journal form, the intimate diary of a houseboy in a European household. Both boys are the prototype of the naïf, and share some of the characteristics of the picaresque rogue, but there the similarity ends. Oyono's hero, through no fault of his own, has been witness to an indiscretion on the part of "Madame," and for this he will ultimately pay with his life. The virtue of Oyono's second novel, Le vieux Nègre et la médaille is in its utter simplicity. There is not an excessive word or incident in this story. The colonial administration has decided to award a medal to the old peasant, Meka, during a 14th of July celebration because, as the native interpreter explained to him: "Tu as beaucoup fait pour faciliter l'oeuvre de la France dans ce pays. Tu as donné tes terres aux missionnaires, tu avais donné tes deux fils à la guerre où ils ont trouvé une mort glorieuse . . . Tu es un ami" (p. 33). But the ceremony turns into a kind of calvary for Meka and the celebration afterwards ends in humiliation. Perplexed and sorrowful, Meka drags his

old bones home to puzzle over the inconsistencies of those Whites:

--Nous ne pouvons rien sur ce qui est fait, les Blancs sont toujours les Blancs . . . , dit Meka en jetant un regard attendri autour de lui. Peut-être qu'un jour . . .

--Par ma mère! répondit Engamba . . . Les hommes naissent et meurent . . . Par ma mère! Comment finira le monde avec ces Blancs?

--A présent, je m'en moque, coupa Meka en crachant sur le mur.

Entre deux baillements il ajouta comme pour lui-même:

--Je ne suis plus qu'un vieil homme . . .

(Le vieux Nègre et la médaille, p. 221)

Barnabas, the hero of Chemin d'Europe, incarnates the character of the picaresque adventurer. His strange peregrinations carry him from school to school, from job to job, from village to town, but it is always Europe, the distant goal, that dangles its tantalizing image before him. Like so many young Africans, Barnabas has been educated in the image of "nos ancêtres les Gaulois." France is more real to him than his native Cameroon:

Je me sentais avec ce pays que je ne connaissais pas, et dont on m'avait appris à chanter le génie et la beauté depuis l'enfance, une affinité telle que je me demandais si je n'avais pas été français dans une existence antérieure . . .

(Chemin d'Europe, p. 49)

It was this kind of alienation which Oyono deplored, and which later novelists were to continue to exploit as a theme at once both tragic and humorous.

One essential difference between Beti and Oyono is exactly this sense of the tragic. Both freely make use of their satiric gifts to launch their attack on colonial Africa. Their mockery is a form of refusal, the moment of negativity when Africans began to realize that they could reject Europeans and their social order. But Oyono's satire, often acrimonious, conceals behind a sense of caricature that sometimes grazes the grotesque, a tragic perception of life which is inherent in the colonial situation:

La tragédie, au fond, s'observe dans la situation même de l'Africain qui est à la recherche de soi-même. Dans les romans d'Oyono, le tragique provient du fait que l'Africain se voit défini et chargé d'une identité bien différente de celle qu'il s'applique à lui-même. Dans un sens, le personnage découvre trois sortes d'identité qui existent en lui dans une structure de simultanéité. C'est d'abord l'Africain vis-à-vis de sa famille africaine, puis l'Africain tel qu'il se croit observé par le Blanc et enfin la vraie situation sociale--la plus brutale--de l'Africain dans ses rapports avec le colonisateur européen.<sup>28</sup>

Social criticism takes on a new aspect with the novels of Ousmane Sembène. An activist and adherent to the ideals of African socialism, Sembène takes as his major themes not the Black/White confrontation or the defeat of the individual at grips with the colonial system, but the power and duty of the collectivity to reject any aspect of subjection and to affirm its total emancipation by forging a new and purer Africa. Sembène's experience as a militant worker and union leader set him

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<sup>28</sup>Douglas Alexander, "Le tragique dans les romans de Ferdinand Oyono," Présence Francophone 7 (1973): 24.

apart from almost any other African writers, the majority of whom have academic backgrounds. His works are thesis novels in which "the main struggle is not against colonial powers but against the state of mind which years of white domination imposed on African workers."<sup>29</sup> Sembène's first novel, Le Docker noir, (1956) is autobiographical in form, drawn from his own experiences as a dock worker in Marseilles. The theme of fraternity and solidarity is an important one in the works of Sembène, and makes its first appearance here. It reoccurs as the argument de base of O pays, mon beau peuple! (1957) which recounts the struggles of the hero, Oumar Faye, to unite his people in a common endeavor for their own benefit. Faye returns home to his village in the Casamance of Senegal, after years in the service in France, with a white wife and an enthusiasm for progressive ideas, neither of which the villagers are prepared to accept. Faye's vision prevails, but only at the cost of his life. In a sort of eulogy after his burial at the end of the book, an old man speaks to the assembled people:

--Aujourd'hui, nous avons enterré un des nôtres, un fils de ce pays, frère des uns, cousin des autres, un ami, un conseiller un guide. Il y a deux ans qu'il était arrivé ici avec sa femme. On avait cru à ce moment qu'il avait renié sa race, qu'il n'était plus comme nous . . . Eh bien! non, Faye nous est revenu comme s'il n'avait jamais quitté ce pays. Il nous a montré, malgré sa jeunesse, que nous sommes des hommes. Il disait à mon fils: "Ce n'est pas d'épouser une femme qui fait d'un homme un homme, Pour être homme, il faut lutter durement. Il faut arracher à toute chose son secret et le faire sien, pour le bien de tous . . ." (O pays, mon beau peuple!, p. 232)

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<sup>29</sup>Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in French Africa, p. 118.

This spirit of all for one and one for all is the key theme of Sembène's third novel, Les bouts de bois de Dieu, which appeared in 1960. The title is taken, as Sembène tells us in a footnote on page 77, from "une superstition qui veut que l'on compte des 'bouts de bois' à la place des êtres vivants pour ne pas abrégé le cours de leur vie."

A roman-à-thèse, this is also an historical novel in that it recounts an historical event, the strike of the railway workers on the important Dakar-Niger line which linked Bamako in the interior of French Sudan (now the capital of Mali) with the coast. The workers are victims of the worst kind of exploitation by the "Régie"--management--at that time (1947) in the hands of the Europeans. Sembène uses his fictionalized version of the events to show how through self-sacrifice and a sense of the common good African workers can achieve a victory over forces which individually they would have little hope of overcoming. As in O pays, mon beau peuple!, it is not European technology or progressive ideas which are condemned, but the people's subservience to what they had long accepted as their fate, and their division over petty differences. When they find that in unity there is strength, their strike is forced through to a successful conclusion. There is more than a little to suggest La Condition humaine in Sembène's novel. In fact, Malraux's classic is preferred reading for Tiémoko, one of the militant strike leaders in Bamako. But the resistance of the strikers has more in common with the ideals of Martin Luther King than with the violent

methods espoused by Kyo and his companions, for Sembène is not au fond a revolutionary. His is a call for responsible action which will serve to confirm humanity's dignity:

--Tout à l'heure, poursuivit Fa Keita, j'ai entendu Konaté et Tiémoko qui parlaient de tuer le 'gendarme'. Mais s'il faut le tuer, il faudra aussi tuer les Noirs qui lui obéissaient et les Blancs à qui il obéissait et où cela finira-t-il? Si l'on tue un homme comme celui-ci, il y en a un autre pour prendre sa place. Ce n'est pas là ce qui est important. Mais faire qu'un homme n'ose pas vous gifler parce que de votre bouche sort la vérité, faire que vous ne puissiez plus être arrêté parce que vous demandez à vivre, faire que tout cela cesse ici ou ailleurs, voilà quelle doit être votre occupation, voilà ce que vous devez expliquer aux autres afin que vous n'ayez plus à plier devant quelqu'un, mais aussi que personne n'ait à plier devant vous. (Les bouts de bois de Dieu, p. 367)

The form of this novel holds our attention, as it reflects Sembène's early interest in the techniques of the film. The action takes place at three major centers on the railroad line: the two terminal points, Dakar and Bamako, and Thiès, some 50 kilometers from Dakar, the headquarters town of the railway management. And in flashback and flashforward, we move from one center to another as the drama of the strike unfolds. In and around the plot moves a large cast of characters, and the crowd scenes are managed with the hand of a master cinematographer which Sembène was to become. Descriptive passages are sharp in detail, picked out as they would be by the camera's eye. Unlike Beti and Oyono, Ousmane Sembène was to keep up his literary production throughout the 60's, and we shall have occasion to speak of this in subsequent chapters. His pre-independence novels had already established his concern: the problem of Africans face to face not just with the



colonial situation but with themselves and their place in the world.

Three other novels complete the list of what may be considered novels of protest of the period up to the time of independence. These are Coeur d'Aryenne by Jean Malonga (1954), Afrique, nous t'ignorons! by Benjamin Matip (1956), and Un piège sans fin by Olympe Bhély-Quénium (1960).

Jean Malonga of Congo-Brazzaville belongs to the older generation of novelists, those born in the first decade of the twentieth century. A contemporary of Ousmane Socé, Abdoulaye Sadju and Bernard Dadié, he has not the wit, nor the sensibility, nor even the mastery of French of these writers. Coeur d'Aryenne is, as A. C. Brench says, "a bad novel,"<sup>30</sup> but we cannot pass over it entirely, as it is the first to develop the theme of interracial love and the hopeless déchirement which results. Also, Jean Malonga is the only writer of the period up to independence to come from French Equatorial Africa. Bound by the tropical rain forest and cut off from the contacts with France which the colonies of West Africa enjoyed, Equatorial Africa was slower to develop, had fewer educational institutions, and a generally less enlightened colonial administration. Malonga's first novel was written during the 1940's when he was still relatively young, and the story displays a certain exaggerated style in which there are no subtleties. Characters are either very, very good or very, very horrid. Morax (even the name

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<sup>30</sup>A. C. Brench, Writing in French from Senegal to Cameroon, (London: Oxford, 1967), p. 64.

sounds nasty), the father of young Solange, the white heroine, is a racist of the worst kind, unrelieved by any hint of humanity. Mambéké, the African hero is brave and bold, innocent and tender. Since this is not an allegorical tale but a modern novel, such exaggerations tend to become tedious. Malonga made his best contribution to the anti-colonial novel with his treatment of an historical legend (see p. 53).

Benjamin Matip of Cameroon is better known as a poet and conteur than as a novelist. Afrique, nous t'ignorons! is his only work of prose fiction. His concern is with saving the African past, a theme which the Negritude poets had already taken up and which will recur with growing force in the novel as the younger generation becomes increasingly aware of the priceless heritage which is slipping away:

De tout ce passé dont l'Afrique pourrait se glorifier, s'écria Samuel, peut-être, il ne me reste donc rien, rien d'autre que ce spectacle honteux, ce vide et ce néant en face de l'éternité? Afrique, qu'as-tu donc fait de ton passé? Que caches-tu pour demain? Ton silence, est-ce une mort éternelle, une agonie lente, ou une simple pause? De ces pauses que connaît l'histoire de l'humanité. . . (Afrique, nous t'ignorons!, p. 27)

A much more complicated work is Olympe Bhély-Quénium's Un piège sans fin. This is a psychological novel of considerable depth and insight set in Bhély-Quénium's native Dahomey. Themes and symbols abound: fatality, the traps into which Man must inevitably fall, the supplice of the crucifixion, jealousy and vengeance, and a great immolation scene at the end. There are evocations of happiness too:

love, marriage, the birth of children, the joys of music. But they are relatively few compared to the pièges from which there is no escape. In an almost Camusian effusion, one of the character cries: "Tout est cruel, inhumain et absurde dans la vie. Je me suis rendue à cette évidence le jour où l'on a contraint mon mari à se suicider; mais puisqu'il faut vivre malgré tout, le mieux, du moins me semble-t-il, c'est de prendre telle qu'elle se présente à chacun de nous cette vaste absurdité qu'est la vie." (p. 63-64) The condition of women is another theme which will be treated again and again by novelists conscious of the tragedy implied in the role which has been traditionally applied to women: "Ne regrette rien, mon petit. Toute ma vie est une longue attente et une patience qui s'achèveront seulement dans la mort; c'est la condition des femmes dignes du nom de mères." (p. 93) The pessimism of this novel stems not from the atrocities of the colonial system although they are present, but from a seeming conviction on the part of the hero that everything that happens -- from the humiliation of being forced to labor for the colonizer to a plague of locusts or an epidemic of cholera -- is the inevitable wage of the human condition. This conviction grows from ". . . une idée assez réaliste et positive de la vanité de tout ce qui est l'homme, de l'inutilité de toutes les raisons d'être que nous nous faisons et nous imposons, de la viduité de tout dans l'existence humaine, enorme piège tendu à l'homme par Allah." (p. 142) The author does not tell us if he shares this feeling

of impotence, and we shall have to await Bhêly-Quénum's next novel (see ch. 2) to see if there is any light at the end of the tunnel. The structure of the novel is that of a récit in two parts. In the first part, the hero, Ahouna, recounts to a sympathetic listener his past life and the miseries which have led up to the present encounter. The second part continues the tormented life of Ahouna from that moment to his death. In a style which has become typical of many Africans writing in French, Bhêly-Quénum mixes traditional legends, songs, poems and proverbs into his story, along with picturesque descriptions of manners and customs.

It was not Bhêly-Quénum, however, but two other writers who gave us what may be considered the romans de mœurs of the pre-independence period. Le fils du fétiche by David Ananou of Togo appeared in 1955, and Abdoulaye Sadjî of Senegal published two novels, Nini, mulâtresse de Sénégal in 1955 and Maïmouna in 1958. The exotic details of life in Africa were aimed obviously at a largely European audience and were not concerned with protest or revendication, but with a realistic portrayal calculated to arouse sympathies and foster understanding. In a sense these are regional novels as well as novels of manners. The characters, events and settings are firmly anchored in the native terroir of the author, who observes and describes them all with the knowledgeable eye of an insider.

Sadji, whose early death in 1961 deprived African literature of French expression of a talented contributor to several genres (novel, nouvelle, traditional folktale), writes in Nini and Maïmouna of life in the vieilles communes. Life in these four favored microcosms of French civilization on the coast of Senegal: Dakar, Gorée, St. -Louis and Rufisque, reflected the evolution of a hybrid society which for over a century had benefitted from the rights of French citizenship and close contact with the métropole. Since 1904, furthermore, all of the other territories of French West Africa, had been governed directly from Dakar. The people of the communes had felt themselves to be "civilized," therefore, for a long time. There was, it was true, a clash of interest in the conflicting influences of Christianity and Islam, both of which proclaimed a mission civilisatrice ordained by God. But Islam had been there longer, and there was, by and large, a peaceful coexistence which contrasted sharply with French colonial policy in the Bantu territories where the Church and the colonial administration complemented and reinforced each other in undoing traditional animist society.

Both Nini and Maïmouna tell of the stresses and strains in the life of a beautiful young woman, each of whom has social aspirations far beyond her ability or station in life to realize. Nini's case is perhaps the saddest, for she herself is a hybrid, an almost white métisse for whom everything nègre is inferior, a cause for disgust and rejection. All of her efforts to Europeanize herself and to attract a

white man to marry her are pathetically blocked, and Nini is left to sigh after "la belle et douce France, objet de soupirs enamorés, patrie perdue." For Maïmouna it is not France, but the city of Dakar that beckons and she leaves her native village to tackle life in what soon becomes for her a "ville dangereuse, ville de perdition." Disfigured and disillusioned, she returns in the end to her village to take up life as a market woman: "Maïmouna se trouvait être la grande vaincue de la Vie, qui l'avait bafouée d'un bout à l'autre. Bafouée, vilipendée . . . Elle n'avait pas su dominer la Vie, lui faire donner ce qu'elle avait promis, la mettre au pas, lui faire rendre gorge." (Maïmouna, p. 248) Sadji writes as a moralist and social critic of the older school who views the problems of assimilation and progress lucidly but from a position of fatality.

David Ananou's Le fils du fétiche was an early attempt to present the "African reality" in an effort to win the sympathies of a European audience. The hero is Dansou, son of Sodji, born after years of sterility for his mother under the protection of the fetish Dan (the serpent). In a series of episodes, Ananou presents vignettes of traditional African life as it was led in Togo in the first third of the 20th century. The novel is an ethnologist's delight, but does not do very much for African literary studies except to establish some themes which will be treated with varying degrees of attention by later novelists. The most important of these have to do with the African concepts of marriage and the

family: the practice of polygamy and the problems of a polygamist household, the hantise of sterility, child rearing and education, ancestor worship, and the supremacy of the collectivity. The tone throughout is above all didactic and moralizing -- which in itself is a carry-over from the African oral tradition, the supreme purpose of which is didacticism. That Ananou was still playing the colonial game can be seen from this closing paragraph to the author's introduction:

Nous rendons hommage aux pays évolués qui continuent d'accomplir de grandes oeuvres en Afrique. Nous leur demandons de nous connaître et de nous faire mieux connaître. Ainsi peut-être en arriveraient-ils à nous aimer davantage et à se faire mieux aimer de nous. (Le fils du fétiche, p. 10)

What a difference between this and the novels of Oyono and Beti which were published at about this same time!

Traditional Africa was dealt with in a different and far more satisfying way by two authors of historical novels. The historical romance was one way for novelists to answer Negritude's challenge to recapture the African past; the historical epic was another. An example of each of these genres appeared in the 1950's and are still being reprinted and read with interest today.

Jean Malonga, whose Coeur d'Aryenne was mentioned earlier in connection with the discussion of the protest novel, also published an historical novel, La Légende de M'Pfumou ma Mazono, which appeared in 1954. Although "écrite en français assez douteux," as

Lilyan Kesteloot regretfully noted,<sup>31</sup> the legend is rich in images, descriptions and adventures taken from the history of Malonga's own tribe in the region of the Bas Congo. Using the oral tradition of his people as his source, Malonga tells how the tribe was founded by the legendary M'Pfoumou ma Mazono, son of a beautiful princess who had run off with a slave.

In the area of the Sahel, the keeper of the oral tradition is the griot, at once a poet, singer and chroniqueur whose position and responsibility are inherited from father to son. These 'documents parlants' traditionally formed an important caste throughout the region of what became the French Sudan:

Autrefois les griots étaient les Conseillers des rois, ils détenaient les Constitutions des royaumes par le seul travail de la mémoire; chaque famille princière avait son griot préposé à la conservation de la tradition; c'est parmi les griots que les rois choisissaient les précepteurs des jeunes princes. Dans la société africaine bien hiérarchisée d'avant la colonisation, où chacun trouvait sa place, le griot nous apparaît comme l'un des membres le plus importants de cette société car c'est lui qui, à défaut d'archives, détenait les coutumes, les traditions et les principes de gouvernement des rois.<sup>32</sup>

In Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue which was published in 1960, Djibril Tamsir Niane of Guinea presents what he claims to be the faithful

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<sup>31</sup>Lilyan Kesteloot, Anthologie négro-africaine, (Verviers, Belgium: Marabout Université, 1967), p. 199.

<sup>32</sup>D. T. Niane, Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960), avant-propos, pp. 5-6.



transcription of an ancient legend gathered from an obscure griot in the village of Djeliba Koro. The epic story is that of the legendary hero of the Manding, or Malinké, people, Soudjata Keïta, founder of the vast empire of Mali in the 13th century. Soundjata has been called the African Chanson de Roland, and indeed the anonymous griots who handed the legend on down through the centuries are soul brothers to Turolodus. Niane's treatment of the legend leaves out nothing of the prodigious and the marvelous which mark this as a true medieval epic. Niane uses the legend to prove to his readers that the African continent has the heritage of a past which knew moments of great glory: "Puisse ce livre ouvrir les yeux à plus d'un Africain, l'inciter à venir s'asseoir humblement près des Anciens et écouter les paroles des griots qui enseignent la Sagesse et l'Histoire." (p. 7).

It is a pity that the newer writers, with few exceptions, have not continued this trend of the historical récit to preserve the African past, for as it has been sadly observed, "chaque vieillard qui meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle."<sup>33</sup>

We will complete our consideration of the state of the novel of the time of independence with a look at two works which do not fit conveniently into any of the classifications developed above. The most abordable of these is Bernard Dadié's Un Nègre à Paris which appeared in 1959. Basically autobiographical, as was his earlier work, Climbié,

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<sup>33</sup>Quotation variously attributed to Amadou Hampaté Bâ of Mali and to Boubou Hama of Niger.

Un Nègre à Paris is nevertheless not an autobiographical novel with the structure of a Bildungsroman, but a series of impressions in the form of a long, rambling letter. The hero, Tanhoé Bertin, is a sort of African Rica who, like Montesquieu's Persian, recounts his wonderment and amusement at the strange ways of the Parisians:

Il n'y a pas de lieu où ils ne se livrent une guerre de courtoisie. Dans les hôtels, les restaurants, les boutiques; dans la rue lorsqu'ils se trouvent nez à nez. C'est à qui acceptera de passer le premier. C'est à qui aura l'honneur d'avoir été le dernier à passer. En ces heures, ils oublient leurs montres pour écouter uniquement la voix du sang des chevaliers, le sang gaulois qui coule à flots dans leurs veines.

--Allez-y, Monsieur,

--Je vous en prie.

--Faites, Monsieur,

--Après vous,

--De grâce!

--S'il vous plaft!

Et ils resteront là, des minutes entières à ne pas vouloir passer avant l'autre par politesse. (Un Nègre à Paris, p. 133)

As this Alphonse Gaston routine shows, Dadié writes more in the spirit of tolerance, wit and good humor than of bitterness. This is the accomplishment of a humanist who can observe, with a benevolent eye, the foibles of human beings whatever their color. Dadié is to this day unique among African writers in this achievement, although Mongo Beti came close in his novels of the 50's. The device of the African observer in Paris will, however, continue to be an important tool in the hands of later novelists.

Many critics have tackled Laye Camara's puzzling second novel,

Le Regard du roi (1954) in an effort to decipher the message. For A. C. Brench, "this novel looks forward to the time when Europeans would find an antidote to the sterility of Western materialism in the mysticism of Africa."<sup>34</sup> and for O. R. Dathorne it is a quest for humility in which the hero "reverses the historical roles of Europe and Africa and is symbolic of both as he attempts to right the wrongs perpetrated by the whites."<sup>35</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot sees in it an allegory, the secret meaning of which is that "le salut de l'homme réside dans le dépouillement des apparences et le don total de soi qui permet la communion avec les autres et avec Dieu,"<sup>36</sup> while Jacques Chevrier finds it "un genre insolite, à mi-chemin entre l'allégorie et le roman," related through the theme of anguish to Bhêly-Quénum's Un piège sans fin.<sup>37</sup>

The novel relates the highly ambiguous adventures of Clarence the white hero in search of a mysterious and briefly glimpsed African king whom he wishes to serve and in whose service he hopes to find peace and fulfillment. Clarence's encounter with the king at long last at the end of the novel has been interpreted by Janheinz Jahn to

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<sup>34</sup>A. C. Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in French Africa, p. 120.

<sup>35</sup>O. R. Dathorne, The Black Mind, A History of African Literature, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p. 376.

<sup>36</sup>Kesteloot, Anthologie négro-africaine, p. 193.

<sup>37</sup>Chevrier, Littérature nègre, p. 155.

mean "that even the white man in Africa can be redeemed and accepted when he shows his will to learn and not only to teach. And that Camara Laye in all his lessons does not consider the African way of faith and redemption the only one imaginable and superior. He wants to say that it is the only right way for Africa and that it is of equal value with any other way of mankind."<sup>38</sup> The theme is, then, that of reconciliation, and our brief survey of the colonial novel ends on this note of hope.

This then was the state of the African novel of French expression in 1960, the year by which the countries represented by all of the novelists we have discussed had acceded to full independence.

From a feeble start in the 20's and 30's, the novel came into its own as a valid literary genre among others, such as poetry and the traditional folktale, which African writers had been using successfully for some time. Before 1950, the novel was certainly secondary in importance to poetry. But the period of what Chevrier calls the "grande épiphanie poétique noire"<sup>39</sup> was on the wane. From its surge immediately following the war, Negritude poetry leveled off into a somewhat monotonous treatment of its established themes. It was time for the novel, generally more accessible to a wider audience through its

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<sup>38</sup>Janheinz Jahn, "Camara Laye: Another Interpretation," reprinted in Michael Cooke, Modern Black Novelists, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 146, originally in Ulli Beier, Introduction to African Literature.

<sup>39</sup>Chevrier, Littérature nègre, p. 125.

simpler form and more direct use of language. to prendre la relève. Changing political and social factors created conditions that made possible the publication and dissemination of ideas which prior to World War II would have been severely censored by the colonial administration. It was in this period of unrest that the anti-colonial novel was born and had its brief existence. After a tentative beginning in the early 50's, the rhythm of production greatly accelerated, so that by the end of the decade, all of the major types of the conventional novel were represented. Since the novel is a "borrowed" form in African literature, it is not surprising that there was no uniformity, no following of any of the major new trends in the 20th century novel in France, but rather a reliance on the forms and structures of the realist novels of the 19th century. It should be remembered that African writers who had been educated in colonial schools had received what amounted to a classical French education. Thus we find the autobiographical novel, the novel of formation, the psychological novel, the novel of manners and customs, the historical novel, the novel of social protest, and the allegorical novel. The narrative usually followed a strict linear chronology. The witness to the events may be a first person narrator and the narration will be in the form of a letter, a journal, a souvenir or récit, or an autobiography. Or the events may be related in third-person form with the omniscient author pulling the strings that animate his characters. Social comment and satire may occur in almost all of the types of novel mentioned above,

for we are in the period of commitment when, if there was no uniformity of style and form, there was at least uniformity of purpose, and that was to cover practically every possible approach to colonialism and reflect the Africans' reaction to it. Thus we find a certain number of recurring and common themes: the humiliation of the colonial man, racism, anguish, despair, cynicism, exile, refusal and revolt, alienation, nostalgia for the past, the disappearance of traditional values, the treasure of the African heritage, freedom and self-assertion, independence, and progress. For their stylistic effects, the African writers made good use of all the tools of the novelist's craft, and their mastery of French, with the possible exception of Jean Malonga, was exceptional. Irony, humor, and simplicity characterize some of the best works of the period. Since the novels all are concerned with Africans in African situations, the authors frequently have recourse to traditional genres which they insert in their works both as a device to give a little local color and authenticity, and as an authentic means of expression which occurs naturally at a given juncture in the plot. Legends, tales, proverbs, songs, poems, moral lessons, myths and superstitions have a unique place in the African novel of French expression. The didactic purpose of all art in African tradition is another characteristic to keep in mind. This didacticism was perhaps necessary in the roman engagé of the 50's where certain polemical

considerations were uppermost. But it tends to become tiresome to a Western reader, especially in the hands of a lesser talent, as some of the engagés of the post-independence period tend to be. Finally, characterization in the African novel, with few exceptions, tends to be flat, and this is another point we shall have occasion to study in the development of the novel.

From its tentative beginnings to its apotheosis at the time of independence, the African novel of French expression had come a long way. What would the post-independence years bring?

## Chapter 2: The period of decline, 1961-1965 \*

The surge of optimism which rose in Africa in 1960 was shortlived. The colonial power was gone, to be sure, but what was left in its place? "Il faut avoir le courage de le dire," lamented Amadou Hampaté Bâ, "nulle part en Afrique on n'a encore une structure politique tirée des réserves traditionnelles; tout fut calqué sur l'organisation du colonisateur. A ce jeu, on reste intellectuellement colonisé et on peut dire 'l'oiseau noir n'a fait qu'occuper le nid abandonné par l'oiseau blanc'."<sup>1</sup> Even as they recognized this dilemma, African intellectuals were obliged to acknowledge that they were incapable of totally rejecting the legacy of colonialism. Instead, they determined to seek ways in which to adapt themselves and integrate their young countries into the mainstream of the 20th century. Speaking to this effect, on behalf of African intellectuals everywhere, Joseph

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\*The novels studied in this chapter are Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L'Aventure ambiguë (Julliard, 1961); Seydou Badian, Sous l'orage (Présence Africaine, 1963); Mohamadou Gologo, Le Rescapé de Etylos (Présence Africaine, 1963); Jean Ikellé-Matiba, Cette Afrique-là (Présence Africaine, 1963); Ousmane Sembène, L'Harmattan (Présence Africaine, 1964); Nazi Boni, Crépuscule des temps anciens (Présence Africaine, 1962); and Olympe Bhêly-Quénum, Le Chant du lac (Présence Africaine, 1966). Quotations are identified in the text by page number in parentheses.

<sup>1</sup>A. Hampaté Bâ, "Les traditions africaines, gages de progrès," in Tradition et Modernisme en Afrique noire (Rencontres de Bouaké), (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1965), p. 42.



Ki-Zerbo, the Voltan historian, declared:

Je pense que nous ne pouvons pas 'laisser faire', nous confier au fil de l'histoire comme un bois mort et attendre que les choses élaguent certains aspects de notre civilisation et que, petit à petit, se constitue, par la force des choses, un état de fait nouveau. Ce serait une démission inadmissible.

Nous devons, au contraire, connaître et assumer tout notre présent et tout notre passé.<sup>2</sup>

Assuming the past did not mean the sterile retour aux sources which so many of the younger generation were coming to regard as a fruitless nostalgia, a deliberate mystification of the Negritude poets and writers. Rather it meant seeking in traditional African values those elements which would define African society as unique and contribute to the full storehouse of human values in the 'Civilisation de l'Universel.' It is possible that this antagonism toward Negritude was an over-reaction because already, as Lilyan Kesteloot points out in Négritude et situation coloniale:

Ce que tous ces écrivains réclament, ce n'est donc pas le rejet de ce que l'Occident leur apporta, ni le retour de l'Afrique à l'existence pré-coloniale, repliée sur elle-même, ce n'est pas non plus de pouvoir se construire un monde à eux, totalement séparé de celui du blanc. Leur désir est précisément inverse: celui de contribuer à la formation d'un humanisme universel, en collaborant avec toutes les races . . .<sup>3</sup>

Thus the new political leaders were just entering the path of a prise de conscience on which they had been preceded, by a decade or more,

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "La crise actuelle de la civilisation africaine," in Tradition et Modernisme en Afrique noire, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot, Négritude et situation coloniale, (Yaoundé: CLE, 1968), p. 83.

by the poets and novelists of French-speaking Africa.

The necessity to elaborate new political, social and economic structures to replace those left by colonialism imposed a heavy burden, for as Guy de Lusignan observed in his analysis of political evolution and economic development since 1958, "the legacy left by colonialism to the newly independent countries has been heavy. Not only did the colonial powers destroy the structure of native African society but they imposed their own traditions, ideas and ways of thinking. These ways and traditions today fashion the African people."<sup>4</sup> The tendency was to adopt wholesale the bureaucratic structures of government, the systems of urban and rural administration, public services, education, communications, the standards of diplomacy in the exercise of foreign affairs, the economic ideals of pragmatic determinism, all the institutions and institutionalized conventions which the French left behind. Not all of these were bad per se, of course. And as the newly independent African states had no hierarchicized structures on a national scale to put in their place, they served an essential purpose in getting the new governments started on a stable footing. On the other hand, however, a thoughtful observer such as Joseph Ki-Zerbo could see the ambiguousness of the situation: "On peut parler de certains résultats positifs, mais en général, les résultats de la colonisation ont un grand caractère d'ambiguïté, voire même

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<sup>4</sup>Guy de Lusignan, French Speaking Africa Since Independence, (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 45.

d'équivoque."<sup>5</sup> These ambiguities were to be found in all of the by-products of the colonial experience: the revealed religion of Christianity, technology, cultural integration, urbanization, the liberation of the individual, the money standard, and the depersonalization of society.<sup>6</sup> Together they constituted the problem of modernism in Africa. How the positive effects of modernism, which nobody wanted to reject, could be reconciled with the positive aspects of traditional culture without giving "un coup de grâce aux survivances africaines rescapées de la tourmente coloniale,"<sup>7</sup> was the subject of one of the first international conferences held within independent French-speaking Africa. In 1962, representatives of nine African nations<sup>8</sup> came together in Bouaké, Ivory Coast, to discuss their common problems. This was a meeting of intellectuals, and as such, had little power to effect any immediate changes, but it put its finger on the nature of the challenge facing Africa and urged political leaders to find ways in which to prevent Africa from becoming just a caricature of Europe.

This period, which one would have thought would be a period of intense creativity for writers, marked, on the contrary, an abrupt

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<sup>5</sup>Ki-Zerbo, Tradition et Modernisme en Afrique noire, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-126.

<sup>7</sup>Hampaté-Bâ, Tradition et Modernisme en Afrique noire, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup>Cameroon, Congo-Leopoldville, Dahomey, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Morocco, Senegal and Upper Volta. The conference was also attended by observers representing France, Brasil and the United States.

decline in the production of the novel. With independence now achieved and colonialism forever abolished, it was as if the novelists' raison d'être had vanished. It would be some time before they would reassess their position and perceive their new mission as social conscience against the proliferating abuses of neo-colonialism and dictatorial African regimes. At a colloquium on African literature of French expression held at the University of Dakar in March 1963, an effort was made to bolster the flagging sense of purpose of the African writer:

La tradition africaine, rationnellement thématifiée par l'intelligence, et la volonté d'évasion, se devra d'être assez forte pour triompher de 'l'angoisse d'être-nègre'. Le crier en poésie, ou dans les romans, consiste moins en une voie libératrice, comme on l'a voulu, comme on le veut, qu'en une dérobade littéraire et psychologique. L'avenir appartient au roman, non plus 'engagé', mais 'dégagé'. Le fait d'étaler des difficultés contemporaines basées souvent sur une crise trop récente pourra dès lors s'inscrire dans une période de l'histoire littéraire, vers de nouveaux commencements.<sup>9</sup>

But the call went unheeded, and the decline, which was, as Albert Gérard says, "tant quantitatif que qualitatif de la production littéraire en langue française,"<sup>10</sup> continued.

Nevertheless, a certain number of important and well-written works were published in the years between 1961 and 1965. Two of the

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<sup>9</sup>Monique Battestini, "L'angoisse chez les romanciers africains," Actes du Colloque sur la littérature africaine d'expression française, Université de Dakar: Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, Langues et Littératures, 14 (1965), p. 175.

<sup>10</sup>Albert Gérard, "La francophonie dans les lettres africaines," Revue de littérature comparée, 48, 3-4 (1974), p. 378.

most significant of these had been written during the 50's, but were withheld from publication by their authors who felt that the time was not yet right for their release. These two novels, L'Aventure ambiguë by Cheik Hamidou Kane of Senegal and Sous l'orage by Seydou Badian of Mali, really belong by virtue of their themes and subject matter among the novels of the first chapter. Since they had not been published by the time of independence, however, and could not therefore be considered in the mainstream of the anti-colonial novel, it seems more appropriate to deal with them briefly here.

L'Aventure ambiguë, which appeared in 1961 and won the Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire in 1962, is an astonishing work with a strange poetic quality. Written in 1952 when its young author was only 24 years old, it presents the conflicts, both internal and external, with which a young and sensitive individual must deal when he is caught between the two opposing philosophies of Islam and European materialism. The hero, Samba Diallo, is a prince of the Diallobé (Fulani of northern Senegal), whose family decides to take him out of the traditional Koranic school of his village and send him to European schools, first in the colony and then in France. This was in keeping with French colonial policy in Senegal first elaborated under the governorship of Faidherbe a century before. Faidherbe had the insight to realize that European civilization could not be introduced at the expense of the strongly ingrained Islamic beliefs and culture. He provided lay

schools for the sons of chiefs in order to allay their fears of the subversive religious influences of Catholic mission schools. Samba's education, the cause of his ambiguous adventure, is to permit him to advance the interests of the tribe by teaching him the secret of the whites, "l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison." (p. 53) Unable to find a compromise which will enable him to resolve the dilemma between his traditional values and the moral code of the West, Samba loses his faith in Europe and returns home, a victim of the crisis of assimilation. The only solution is death, which Samba meets, a sort of involuntary suicide, at the hands of a madman--the final ambiguity. The familiar themes of the shock of culture contact: anguish, alienation, exile and assimilation, solitude and withdrawal, appear here perhaps for the first time in the African novel of French expression if we take into account the date of first writing rather than the date of publication. A philosophic novel of ideas, it is concerned more with an ideological opposition between Europe and Africa than with a racial or ethnic opposition between black and white, more with the contrast between the spiritual unity of traditional African Islam and the fragmentation and superficiality of European modernism. Not a professional writer, Kane has produced only this one novel. We can regret that he did not turn his creative talents to an equally provocative portrayal of the tragic ambiguities which Africa faced in the post-colonial period.

Sous l'orage, by Seydou Badian Kouyaté ( a doctor by profession, he uses only the first two of these names as a nom de plume), was published in 1963. It was apparently written, however, around 1954, while the author was pursuing his medical studies in France at the University of Montpellier. The story of Sous l'orage is classic in its simplicity and ages old: a boy and a girl fall in love, her father opposes their union and tries to push his daughter into marriage with a man much older than she. Young love, after many vicissitudes, wins out. Central to the drama is the theme of a changing time. The old tradition that "toute la vie est régie par une seule loi, celle de la hiérarchie de l'âge, de l'expérience et de la sagesse" (p. 24), is being shaken by the young generation who have dared to question the absolutism of age which strict adherence to this tradition implies. The passive role of women in African society and the traditions of marriage are under attack. Badian also brings into account the delicate balance which must be struck between European and African civilizations if Africa is to face the future confidently. Unlike Samba Diallo, Badian's hero, Samou, who has also had a European education, is not rendered impotent and anguished by the ambiguity of his position astride two worlds. He will take his place in the new world which will be forged from these two, where "l'homme n'est pas seulement celui qui crée, mais celui dont l'oeuvre contribue à fonder la communauté humaine" (p. 124). The

reconciliation between young and old which is effected at the end of the novel sets the mood of hope for the future through personal, social, cultural and national liberation which will be characteristic of the few novels which were actually written as well as published in the first years following independence. Although he continued writing political and social commentary as well as a play in the post-colonial period, Badian never produced another novel. Like so many other young African intellectuals, his energies were spent in creating a new nation, in living the Malian proverb which says that "de la racine à la feuille la sève monte et n'arrête jamais" (Sous l'orage, p. 151).

Still the profound decline into which the African novel of French expression sank in the years immediately following independence continued to puzzle critics who had expected that, freed from the constraints of colonialism, the novelists would rise to greater heights of self-expression. Instead, they remained silent. Albert Gérard has proposed one reason for this silence: the cultural alienation which during the Negritude phase they were able to exploit in the struggle of anti-colonialism, but which left them even more alienated after independence:

Efficacement assimilés, profondément francisés par un endoctrinement pédagogique d'une exceptionnelle rigidité, ils se trouvaient tout aussi profondément aliénés par rapport à l'expérience quotidienne vécue des peuples dont ils étaient issus.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 380.



It might be also that Parisian publishers, who had cashed in on the "radical chic" which supported the vogue for African novels in French before independence, were now reluctant to risk involvement with authors the merit of whose work would have to be judged solely on literary standards. And besides, the European public was bored with Africa -- They got their independence, so now let's see how they get along without us . . .

Présence Africaine tried to leap into the breach, and all of the novels which are the principal concern of this chapter were published there in the years between 1962 and 1965. The default of the major French publishing houses at this time, therefore, helped to confirm the international reputation which Présence Africaine had been building since its founding.

While this period seems, in the main, a fallow period of disorientation and confusion of purpose among creative writers, it is possible to disengage from five major works the beginning of a search for new themes and of commitment to a new vocation. All of these novels have to do with liberation in one sense or another, either figurative or literal, and reflect the spirit of exhilaration and hope which the first few years of independence brought to Africa. They affront the crises of modernism either symbolically or realistically in order to deal with the basic dichotomy of life in Africa which created a situation in which "un vieillard qui fait parfois 50 kilomètres de pistes

en brousse pour arriver dans une ville africaine parcourt non seulement un espace géométrique mais une distance historique. Il parcourt parfois plusieurs siècles d'évolution. "<sup>12</sup>

Let us now consider these novels in more depth and detail than we have allowed in our survey of pre-independence works.

1. Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos

The drama of this long autobiographical account is that of a personal liberation from the curse of alcoholism. Published in 1963, it related the long battle of the author to overcome the social problem which was beginning to afflict the new elite of African society. Strong drink had always been available to those who wished it, and the novels of Mongo Beti, among others, introduce some prodigious bouts with the potent native palm wine distilled in parts of Africa. But Europe had introduced the whiskies, liqueurs and vin rouge which were the preferred libations of those Africans who could afford them. Alcohol was one of the armes silencieuses of colonialism which Mamadou Gologo in his avertissement au lecteur warns must still be combatted:

En effet, il reste encore à combattre le colonialisme dans un domaine plus subtil, celui où a été construit son arsenal doté de ses armes les plus perfectionnées et les plus meurtrières.

Il s'agit d'armes silencieuses, opérant avec précision, aussi nocives que les virus cachés dans un organisme convalescent reconnu 'blanchi' par les cliniciens. (p. 8)

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<sup>12</sup>Ki-Zerbo, Tradition et Modernisme en Afrique noire, p. 125.

Gologo, a Malian, drafted the pages of his struggle at a time when Mali was still part of the central Sudan, and he offers his work in the early days of independence in the hope that it will put Africa on guard against the corrosive effects of modernism, of which alcoholism is only one manifestation. Africa must take a stance, he is saying, to assure its salvation by relying on traditional concepts of morality.

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters and follows the conventional linear structure of the novel of formation. After recounting the legend of the griots concerning the founding of his village in the pays bambara three centuries ago, and the tales of his grandfather of the arrival of "les hommes aux oreilles rouges" (Europeans), the narrator, Mamadou, or Douglas as he seems to have been called while a student, takes up the time of his happy childhood when "aucune des obsessions des temps modernes ne nous étreignait" (p. 32). But like Climbié and Samba Diallo, like Kocoumbo and l'enfant noir, he soon finds himself "à l'école des Toubabs":

Papa était intègre, pratique et foncièrement convaincu des avantages que confère l'enseignement des hommes aux 'Oreilles rouges'. (p. 36)

The recruitment of children for the village schools was obligatory under the colonial system, but there were ways of getting out of it. Families could bribe the native interpreter attached to the chef-lieu who then conveniently forgot to report the child to his superiors:

En ces temps-là, seuls allaient à l'école les enfants issus de citoyens qui ne pouvaient payer de rançon à Monsieur l'interprète. Ces enfants ayant été obligés de fréquenter la classe forment de nos jours la majorité des fonctionnaires de l'administration générale et ceux des entreprises privées. On peut donc dire en leur faveur 'que tout est bien qui a mal commencé'.  
(p. 38)

In Douglas' case, however, it seems that "tout va mal qui a bien commencé." Having decided on a medical career after studies in Bamako and at the Ecole William Ponty on Gorée, he enters the school of medicine in Dakar where, in his fourth year, he is lured into temptation and begins the long road downhill, assisted along the way by alcohol and unscrupulous women: "Avis donc, chers amis! Etre ivre de boissons et d'amour est la pire des calamités pouvant se balancer au-dessus de la tête d'un homme" (p. 149).

Upon completion of his medical studies, he begins his career as a doctor, but dependence on alcohol is aggravated by every contretemps he encounters. Soon is he moved from town to town, from clinic to clinic, occasioned by some brouille or other with his superiors which results in his suspension and returns him again to the bottle to drown his fury at his impotence to counteract the effects of what he sees as a malignant destiny. Fate has even wished on him a wife whom he does not love, but whom he felt obliged to marry because she had borne him a child. He suffers in his decadence from a feeling of separation from grace and from society:

Il n'existe rien de plus grave, de plus humiliant pour un être pensant, que d'être convaincu de sa déchéance, de se sentir définitivement avili, d'être persuadé qu'il est à jamais exclu du reste de la société! Il peut être alors poussé à des extrémités dont nul, même lui, ne saurait entrevoir l'issue. (p. 284)

The theme of alienation from the collectivity takes on new meaning and importance in this novel. Alienation had heretofore been treated as a result of forces operating from without the individual and over which he had no control: the crisis of assimilation, the colonial experience, the humiliation of racism, culture conflict. The aliéné who turned inward to solitude and despair was not a victim of his own doing, but of historical circumstances. In turning the drama to a personal conflict, Gologo introduces for the first time in African literature the autobiographical confession in the manner of Rousseau. It is the profoundly human side of his situation which touches us, even while we may be provoked with him for his weaknesses and whining.

But help and hope arrive in the form of his old mother just at the moment when living in "l'état morbide du défaitisme," he could no longer "espérer un secours quelconque, d'où qu'il pût venir." (p. 292) The rather melodramatic rescue is affected by the fidelity, devotion, love and support of his mother, and the process of disintoxication begins. Faith leads him back to virtue and a joyous return to the bosom of his family.

The moral of the story is of course as clear as its didactic

intent. Gologno never lets up for an instant in his unrelenting drive to hammer home a lesson. But the lesson is repeated so many times that by the time he reaches page 378, the reader may be somewhat weary of being convinced. In an early application, the lesson borrows from African oral tradition by citing a proverb:

Un proverbe de chez moi dit: 'On ne récupère jamais le contenu d'une jarre fendue'. Chaque fois qu'un homme s'écarte de la position que lui confèrent ses qualités et sa naissance, chaque fois qu'il ne saura pas résister à la tentation de glisser sur la mauvaise pente, toutes ces fois-là, il perdra un fragment de son précieux patrimoine. . . (p. 114-115)

African oral tradition is incorporated in other ways, too, throughout the novel: legends, such as the one at the beginning which recounts the history of the founding of the narrator's village, ethnic histories and customs of various peoples of the Sudan, stories of heroic resistance to the first invasion of the Europeans, the complainte sung by the boatmen who navigate the Niger:

. . . Pousse, pousse, brave rameur,  
 Le jour viendra où ton enfant  
 Assis sur le trône, écoutant  
 Tes récits pleins de rancoeur  
 Remerciera le Ciel d'être issu  
 D'un brave qui n'avait rien reçu  
 De bon, de joyeux, de solide  
 Que ce coin désert au sol aride . . . (p. 355)

An occasionally florid style counterbalances the moralistic severity of the novel's message. The extravagant language of the following passage seems to have been borrowed from some roman

passionnel. Mamadou remembers his fatal first night with Fatou, the woman he calls a "modern Delilah":

Elle poussa un cri lorsque je l'étreignis, et ce cri accrut ma furie de mâle déchaîné après une période de continence éprouvée. Le flux d'une passion jusqu'ici inhibée déborda, rompit le barrage de timidité qui freinait les assauts dont j'étais seul capable d'évaluer la violence. Le potentiel d'amour, de dévotion et d'élan réprimés que j'avais emmagasiné jusqu'ici à force de chasteté, venait de disposer d'un déversoir . . .

Ce fut une nuit inénarrable, qui s'écoula sans qu'il me fût possible d'en mesurer la durée. (p. 109)

Sex is usually handled discreetly, if not prudishly, by Western standards, in the African novel of French expression. A certain modesty or reticence is characteristic of the rare descriptions of charnal encounters. Ouologuem excepted, whose lurid contribution to the field will be considered in the next chapter, it is difficult to think of any other African writing in French who even approaches the suggestiveness of Gologo's confession.

The heavy symbolism of night versus day and the triumph of light over shadows with the image of the dawn permeate the novel. The "nuit inénarrable" is descriptive not just of Mamadou's personal descent into alcoholism and debauché, but of the situation of the whole of colonial Africa, where people live like those of the town of Sikasso who "à force d'avoir été persécutés en sont encore au stade des individus que la 'nuit a surpris dans une région dangereuse', mais que le lever du soleil étonne plus qu'il ne les satisfait." (p. 257) Victory is not just

Mamadou's rebirth through faith as a new man, but the resurrection of Africa, which like the Niger is heading for the sunrise:

Avec nonchalance, sûr d'une force que lui a garantie l'implacable indifférence des siècles, le Niger continuait sa route, imperturbable, toujours en direction du nord-est, c'est-à-dire toujours sensiblement vers le lever du soleil; vers l'aurore, symbole de la renaissance de tous les temps, de tous les lieux et dans tous les esprits. (p. 160-161)

"Il est toujours reconfortant," he tells us, "de pouvoir assister à la victoire de la lumière sur les ténèbres." (p. 325)

This is a message of hope for the future, of confidence in the regenerative forces which operate deep within all those who suffer and persist. Gologo's account of a personal struggle and his very sincere warning against alcoholism, then, can be taken to a higher degree and interpreted as a message to all of Africa:

--Poussez vite, braves rameurs! L'aurore de la Justice et de la bienveillance pointe à l'horizon.  
 --Poussez vite, braves rameurs, mais combien elle est lente à venir cette aurore de la délivrance!  
 Comme sa silhouette est encore imprécise . . . Pourtant, elle viendra quand même. (p. 356)

Liberation had come to Africa when this novel was published. The new day had dawned, and the message was apt. Optimism was the order of the day for the early years of the 60's, and the theme of liberation and hope would be expanded by the next two major novelists of the period to cover the reconstruction of a new social and political order.



## 2. Cette Afrique-là

Like L'Aventure ambiguë, Sous l'orage and Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos, Cette Afrique-là made its appearance some years after it was first written. At the end of the final chapter is the date line "Song-Ndong, ce 26 janvier 1955." Thus, by date of actual composition, it belongs, as do so many other works of the early 60's, in the period of the pre-independence, anti-colonial novel. And at first glance, we might think it rejoins this period by subject matter, too. But when the themes and the tone with which they are treated are analyzed, it becomes clear that here is a very different work from that of the writers of the littérature de combat of the 1950's. Jean Ikellé-Matiba, a sociologist rather than a novelist by profession, has written a work of rare objectivity, and for it he won the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1963, the date in which the novel appeared. A Cameroonian, Ikellé-Matiba deals factually and dispassionately with documenting the recent history of his country, to produce what the publisher, Présence Africaine, called "un film sur l'histoire du Cameroun":

Les temps ont changé. L'Afrique est enfin libre ou en passe de l'être. Tout cela a apporté de profondes transformations: politiques, économiques et sociales.

Le plus difficile était d'opérer la réconversion des idées. C'est-à-dire le passage de la condition de l'homme qui subit à la condition de l'homme qui pense. Cette Afrique-là essaie d'apporter sa modeste contribution à cette oeuvre gigantesque qui s'offre à la génération nouvelle: la restructuration.  
(jacket presentation to PA edition)

So through the theme of liberation and hope for the future, "l'aube

d'un renouveau" (p. 13), repeating the symbol of dawn and a new beginning, Ikellé-Matiba departs significantly from the standard anti-colonial themes of the protest novels of his compatriotes, Oyono and Beti.

Part documentary, part biographical novel, called a "chronique," Cette Afrique-là is actually more an historical novel in the form of personal memoirs. It traces a pageant of fifty years in the life of the first person narrator, Franz Mômha. In this dramatic half-century, the peoples of the Cameroons were traumatized by a succession of changes and events which all but destroyed their traditional ways of life. Ikellé-Matiba reports these events calmly:

Mais une chose est intéressante à étudier: alors que nous avions une civilisation harmonisée, l'Occident a eu une civilisation stabilisée.

Chez nous, tout tenait à tout et il fallait tout envisager globalement. Dès lors qu'un maillon était enlevé, la chaîne ne se refermait plus . . . c'est la transformation des structures économique-sociales qui nous ont été imposées qui nous a donné le coup de grâce. (p. 52-53)

The coups de grâce which broke the chain of centuries-old tradition were multiple. The first was the arrival of the white colonizers, who in this part of Africa were German. In the early part of the 20th century, "Kamerun" was a German colony.<sup>13</sup> And the 'Ndjamann' are remembered there as the "bons colonisateurs." The first part of

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<sup>13</sup>The Germans first entered the area in 1885; recognition of German possession of the territory dated from 1902.

Mômha's souvenir is a somewhat nostalgic account of the German settlement and system of education. The Germans were feared, to be sure, but they were also admired for their organization and sense of fairness. But the First World War brought occupation of the Cameroons by French and British troops. Germany was stripped of her African colonies by the Treaty of Versailles, and the part of Cameroon in which Franz Mômha grew up passed to France as a mandate under the League of Nations. The theme of nostalgia for the "good old days" of the Germany colonization comes as somewhat of a surprise. It is based on reality, however, and we will find it repeated in later works by Cameroonian authors.

The French seemed capricious to the Cameroonians of Franz Mômha's youth. They could be warmer than the Germans, who were always rigidly "correct" but they could also display inconsistencies of behavior which left the colonized peoples perplexed. Still, there followed years of what were for him relative peace and prosperity. Ikellé-Matiba introduces the themes of traditional life, social and religious customs, marriage and tribal values. This was the period in the history of the French Empire in which the Code de l'indigénat -- the Native Code -- was in force. The indigénat was a collection of texts and laws which defined the Statute for Africans in the French Empire before World War Two. Included in the Statute was a system

of compulsory duties generally classed as "forced labor." When war broke out again between France and Germany, many Cameroonians believed it meant the Germans were making an effort to regain their lost colony, and many of them sincerely hoped this would happen in order to free them of the hated bagne. Calmly and objectively, Ikellé-Matiba documents all the atrocities, injustices and exploitations of the war years. His presentation is all the more effective and harrowing for being factual. The same subject will be treated later in a nouvelle by Henri-Richard Manga Mado, Complaintes d'un forçat (Yaoundé, CLE, 1970), which, while undoubtedly true in many respects, makes us disbelieve the horror because of its highly propagandistic nature in which all the whites are presented as brutal sadists, all the Africans as honorable and dignified human beings. 1970 is a little late for such hysterics. The more measured tone of Ikellé-Matiba is moving in a way that no outpouring of hate can ever be:

Plus le temps s'éloigne, plus la colère s'apaise, plus la haine s'atténue. L'histoire est donc devenue légende, et cette légende, je vous la conte avec calme, mais non sans amertume.  
(p. 197)

Following the war, the 1946 French constitution established the French Union. Forced labor was abolished and African territories were granted consultative assemblies at home and parliamentary representation in France. The theme of nationalism appears in the

novel, as the hero-narrator becomes more and more aware of his national identity:

Je me sentais de plus en plus Camerounais. J'étais complètement détribalisé. Tout au long de mes études, je m'étais mêlé à diverses tribus, j'avais pu apprécier les valeurs des uns et des autres . . . on faisait tout pour tuer en nous le petit sentiment de régionalisme. Comme conséquence, la conscience nationale est très ancienne ici . . . la naissance d'une nation camerounaise ne sera pas difficile. (p. 113)

When this was written, if we are to believe the date line, Ikellé-Matiba was only 19 years old (he was born in 1936 in the pays bassa of French Cameroon).<sup>14</sup> Nine years later, Ahmadou Ahidjo, the president of the Republic of Cameroon would be writing:

Si nous voulons faire de la nation camerounaise une réalité sociologiquement plus complète, à la fois objective et subjective, rationnelle et affective, formelle et concrète, nous devons, par conséquent, la doter d'un contenu culturel plus riche, mais fécondé par ces valeurs traditionnelles où s'enracine la vie la plus authentique du peuple camerounais. En un mot, il s'agit de rassembler et de transcender les patries tribales au sein de la nation camerounaise et de susciter ainsi une seule et unique patrie: la patrie camerounaise.<sup>15</sup>

Ikellé-Matiba has given us an important sociological and historical document, "But," we may ask with O. R. Dathorne, "has

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<sup>14</sup>According to Jacques Rial, Littérature camerounaise de langue française, footnote, p. 32: Robert Pageard in Littérature négro-africaine gives his age as 26, but that would have been his age at the time of publication, which was in 1963, if Rial is correct.

<sup>15</sup>Ahmadou Ahidjo, Contribution à la construction nationale (Présence Africaine, 1964), quoted in Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, p. 118.

he written a novel?"<sup>16</sup> The answer is yes and no. There is a story with dramatic themes of great power; there are moving portraits of individuals who live and suffer. But there is a subordination of characterization to documentation and of plot to information. African literature of French expression has not yet produced a really good historical novelist who can treat historical facts imaginatively. Ousmane Sembène, whose L'Harmattan we shall consider next advances the genre considerably however, and perhaps it should be expected that Africans will bring a new dimension to the treatment of historical subject matter which derives from the didactic and ritualized style of the oral tradition. This trend is already indicated in Nazi Boni's Crépuscule des temps anciens which will be studied later in this chapter. Ikellé-Matiba saw the direction in which the literary treatment of historical text was heading when he wrote in Cette Afrique-là:

De plus en plus le grand public s'intéresse à l'Afrique. Il cherche à la connaître, à la comprendre, à percer son mystère. Des livres, de valeur inégale, sont publiés et ont parfois un certain succès. Mais le lecteur commence à se lasser du folklore, de l'exotisme, du Nègre extraordinaire, sorte de héros romantique en marge de l'humanité. Il désire une information objective, des personnages intègres qui discutent de plain-pied avec les autres hommes afin de leur apporter une certaine vision du monde. C'est un travail enivrant pour les générations nouvelles. (p. 13)

This was a commitment to the future which the few novels published in the early 60's all reflected. Commitment and responsibility,

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<sup>16</sup>O. R. Dathorne, The Black Mind. A History of African Literature, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p. 394.

for the two were inseparable. The new roman engagé was committed to awakening social consciousness in the construction of a new political and social order. Its aim was to become the griot of the new time, and to record for future generations the realities of an age. So Ousmane Sembène tells us in the avertissement de l'auteur of the work we shall consider next:

Je ne fais pas la théorie du roman africain. Je me souviens pourtant que jadis dans cette Afrique qui passe pour classique, le griot était non seulement l'élément dynamique de sa tribu, clan, village, mais aussi le témoin patent de chaque événement. C'est lui qui enregistrait, déposait devant tous sous l'arbre du palabre les faits et gestes de chacun. La conception de mon travail découle de cet enseignement: rester au plus près du réel et du peuple. (L'Harmattan, p. 7)

Contemporary history and current social reality structure the subject matter of what Georges Ngal, professor of African literature at the University of Zaïre, calls the "roman de la métamorphose,"<sup>17</sup> Literature serves to reflect the mutation of African societies, to pose the problems of constructing the modern nation, and to search for moral solutions to these problems. Ousmane Sembène is representative of the new wave of realism which is based on this very particular conception of literature; that is, that "en Afrique elle fait partie intégrante des problèmes nationaux, de la culture et de l'éthique du peuple."<sup>18</sup> Continuing in the path traced by O pays, mon beau peuple!

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<sup>17</sup>Georges Ngal, (Ngal Mbwil a Mpaang), Tendances actuelles de la littérature africaine d'expression française, (Kinshasa, 1972), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

and Les bouts de bois de Dieu (see Ch. 1), his next work confirms Gerald Moore's prediction made in 1963 that "we should expect a reduction in the mystique of Africa . . . , and a greater trend towards realism, towards the detailed observation of modern Africa and the direct recording of experience."<sup>19</sup>

### 3. L'Harmattan

Projected as a trilogy, L'Harmattan was to deal with the winds of change sweeping over Africa. The harmattan, an Ashanti term in the Twi dialect, is a hot, dry and dusty wind that blows from the east or north-east, from the interior regions of the Sahara, towards the Atlantic. From November or December to March, it holds all of West Africa, as far south as Douala in Cameroon, in its enervating grip, as the dust cloud which blankets the sun rises miles into the air. The end of the harmattan season brings release from the oppressive atmosphere and the promise of clear days. The image is a well-chosen one for Sembène's concern with the dawning of a new social and political order in Africa:

Et au dessus des têtes, ce roux violet, comme un nuage, c'est l'Harmattan. Ce n'est pas seulement un vent sec et chaud! C'est un sanglot! Un sanglot de quatre siècles, soufflé par des millions et des millions de voix ensevelies. Un cri intârisable à nos oreilles, venu des nuits anciennes, pour des jours radieux. Voilà ce que dit l'Harmattan. (p. 203)

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<sup>19</sup>Gerald Moore, "Towards Realism in French African Writing," Journal of Modern African Studies I, 1 (1963): 61-73.



Here Lèye, the poet and painter in Sembène's novel is explaining the significance of one of his paintings to Charlotte, a Frenchwoman.

The trilogy never materialized, however, and we are left with the first volume, subtitled Référendum, which appeared in 1964, while Sembène turned to other things. The historical setting of this story draws on a very recent political event, the referendum of 1958, in which African colonies were asked to decide by a vote of yes or no whether they would join the French Community. The struggle for independence in Africa had made steps since the establishment of the French Union by the 1946 Constitution which figured in Cette Afrique-là. The loi-cadre of 1956 offered a sort of relative internal autonomy to overseas territories; the 1958 Constitution, by allowing the territories the right to decide whether or not to join the French Community, gave each, in effect, the right of secession and immediate de facto independence. Militants in the struggle for freedom in Africa were naturally actively agitating for a no vote. The novel deals with the forces at work in a nameless African country to promote or to resist the immediate secession which a no vote would entail. Guinea alone of the states of the French Union declined to become part of the Communauté. It was a triumph of the oui in all the other states of

French Africa on September 28, 1958,<sup>20</sup> "Voilà que toute seule, comme une pierre tombée de l'édifice, la Guinée se détachait." (p. 290) The Front returns to the struggle for independence which would not be achieved for another two years.

As a social reformer, Sembène was naturally on the side of the no vote. Anti-colonialism was one of his established themes. He was not satisfied, however, to let his anti-colonial protest remain in the phase of negativity, but insisted on the positive value of enlightened responsibility and action. His most attractive characters are all energetic, modern, and forward looking. They defy the stereotype of the lazy, superstition-ridden, shiftless and ignorant Black, as they militate eagerly for an African role in the world of the future. His characters are doctors, nurses, artists, teachers, mechanics, workers at all trades and skills. They represent an opening wedge in the dark night to which Africa has been traditionally consigned, the night of superstition and terror which is symbolically portrayed in the prologue:

Comme de l'encre de seiche, l'obscurité succéda à la lumière crue du jour défunt. Le silence s'établit en une seconde. Avec lui prenait naissance le sentiment du vide, de l'arrêt de la vie. Pourtant, tout était là, présent, immense, sans échos, sans reflèt, envoûtant et vorace. Les eaux, les plantes, les bêtes, les reptiles, les hommes, tous allaient vivre leur vie nocturne. (p. 23)

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<sup>20</sup>Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Dahomey, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Mali (Sudan), Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Upper Volta elected to join the Communauté française. Cameroon and Togo were held as trust territories under the United Nations which succeeded the Mandate of the League of Nations after World War II, and did not therefore participate in the referendum.

In a frustrated rebellion against the modern revolution which denies him the right to his traditional hunting ground, Digbé the hunter kills Antoine Faure, the French game warden, with an arrow he has had poisoned by the sorcerer Bitá Hein. This act of defiance in the prologue reflects the stubborn resistance to change and the incomprehension of traditionalists and reactionaries against which those committed to a new social order must fight. The emancipation of Africa and of the African is the future goal to which the militants of the Front are pledged. It is a goal which will be achieved only through intense effort involving the creativity of all elements of the new society.

Ce n'était plus l'homme noir, passif, répandu ailleurs: c'est la semence de l'homme de demain. Ils sortaient des canons de la passivité pour conquérir leur moi. Ils écoutèrent comme tous les matins depuis la création du Front --les différentes interventions en langue du pays. Ils étaient jeunes. Il leur fallait l'étendue de l'Afrique, pour assouvir leur soif de créer.  
(p. 85)

The novel deals with the portrayal of the various social and political dilemmas which shift and recombine to form new dilemmas as the historical moment of the referendum approaches. The characters are caught in the action as it evolves toward this end; their personal dramas coincide with the social and political events whose circumstances shape their lives. The majority of the chapter headings confirm this intimate coordination of person with circumstance: "La sage-femme"; "Le médecin"; "Le Front"; "Les coloniaux"; "Les

colleurs d'affiches"; "Charlotte"; "Le catéchumène"; "Les marieuses"; "Le Premier Ministre". There is no bridge between chapters, and the effect is episodic, made even more so by the frequent use to conclude a chapter of a short final sentence depicting motion or motion away: "Elle se redressa et se dévêtit." (p. 44); "Il s'éloigna du véhicule, à la recherche d'un conducteur." (p. 67); "Tangara sortit, suivi de son groupe. Ils allèrent vers la salle des femmes." (p. 111); "Ils s'installèrent sur le perron, en attendant Tangara." (p. 131); "Elle franchit avec peine la petite distance qui la séparait de sa chambre." (p. 159); "Ouhigoué lui indiqua la maison où elle trouverait le féticheur." (p. 173); "Tioumbé passa son bras sur l'épaule de sa mère: elles prirent le chemin de la porte." (p. 244); "La jeune fille serra les mâchoires et, d'un pas ferme, elle se dirigea vers la sortie" (p. 276). The next chapter begins abruptly somewhere else and with some other character. There has been no transition, and the movement indicated in the final sentence of the preceding chapter has been, in a sense, movement into the void. The technique is unusual in itself, and causes momentary dislocation and disorientation on the part of the reader. But it is explained by Sembène's preoccupation with film. The close connection between the techniques of the cinema and the techniques of this novel offers a clarification of the esthetics of style with which he is experimenting.

The roles played by individuals are less significant than the symbolic roles played by a collectivity: the Front, the Colonials, the Forces conservatrices, the Family, but there are certain individuals who stand out, such as Lèye, the artist-poet, for whom "écrire en français, c'est enrichir la langue française. Mais la couleur n'est d'aucune nation." (p. 71). Modeled on the militant poets of the Negritude movement, his collection of poems is entitled Garce d'Afrique; or Manh Kombéti, the practical old midwife attached to the native hospital of Dr. Tangara:

Sur la chaise longue, Manh Kombéti, immobile, tel un totem vidé de son pouvoir, tournait et retournait des pensées dans sa tête. Chacune apportait sa découverte et lui fournissait matière à méditer. Les sujets ne venaient pas d'elle, elle les puisait à l'extérieur, des rives lointaines de sa connaissance. (p. 26)

or the Premier Ministre, an évolué who sees his privileges, guaranteed under the perpetuation of the loi-cadre, threatened by the referendum.

Into the main theme of political action are introduced several sub-themes: social idealism, opportunism and self-interest; moral decay and corruption, urban problems and the changing status of the family, the condition of women, forces of tribalism, the colonial mentality and black/white relations. The main action centers on the work of the Front to assure a no vote in the referendum; subsidiary action revolves around two personal dramas of a very different nature.

The first is the affection which has developed between Charlotte and Dr. Tangara. Charlotte, the widow of the game warden who was murdered in the prologue, has been staying in Dr. Tangara's home to convalesce from an appendix operation. She is one of the rare white women to be portrayed really sympathetically in the French-African novel. Like Oumar Faye's wife in O pays, mon beau peuple!, she is sensitively aware of her position in Africa:

Elle se voyait insignifiante: la couleur des autres lui renvoyait la sienne, avec son escorte de préjugés. Ce n'était pas le physique des autres femmes qui violentait le calme de son esprit: c'étaient plutôt les considérations, conçues à partir de son épiderme, de son éducation, de son appartenance à une race cultivée qui s'étaient en peu de temps, effondrées. Cet effondrement était comme une dévastation. Un vide vertigineux naissait. Une morsure cruelle entamait les principes de sa supériorité. Elle se sentait deux fois étrangère: par le divorce des tons et par la mode de vie. (p. 116)

The romance of Charlotte and the Doctor is never resolved because exterior events intervene. The doctor has his credentials revoked and is forced out of his hospital on the pretext that he is a member of the Front (he is not, but he is sympathetic to their cause) and has been advising a no vote on the referendum. His last meeting with Charlotte ends on a note of ambiguity, and leaves open the possibility of their eventual union. Perhaps Sembène was to have carried on this theme in the subsequent volumes of the trilogy which never appeared.

A more dramatic confrontation is that of Tioumbé, the young school mistress, with the reactionary force of tradition represented

by her father. Tioumbé is torn between two senses of duty: that which she owes to her family and that which she has committed to the cause of the Front. An active member of the Front, she is obliged to defy her father at every turn. His only response is to beat her brutally; their incomprehension is mutual:

Son regard, plein de haine, déchirait son père. Il sentait que le cortège habituel des lois qui régissait traditionnellement la famille avait été ébranlé. Hier, il n'avait qu'un vague sentiment, mais ce matin la certitude. En dépit de son acharnement maladif à vouloir faire taire sa fille, il se voyait bafoué. Non seulement le pouvoir responsable, mais l'exécutif et le législatif qui lui étaient échus, parce qu'il était le père, lui échappaient. Sans se confier à personne, il éprouvait les rudes coups de boulot du temps présent, du temps à venir, sur la vieille forteresse familiale. (p. 237)

There is no reconciliation possible with the old order of things for Tioumbé. The real victim of the tragedy is Tioumbé's mother, Oubigoué. Tioumbé can flee her father's home, but her mother, who has intervened in her behalf, must remain, the suffering hostage of the new order to the old:

--Tioumbé, je meurs à petit feu! Qu'attends-tu de moi? Je ne comprends plus la vie . . . la vie présente. Avant, je savais ce que c'était la vie, la famille. Maintenant, je ne sais plus. J'ai résisté à ton père. Tu comprends? J'ai même élevé la voix. (p. 240)

Sembène does not burden us with value judgments on the death of tradition. The old ways are not necessarily the best, and a romanticized view is not always the most objective way of looking at them. Instead, he presents the crisis which breaking with the old traditional

hierarchy of family represents in the life of a modern young woman:

La mère et la fille n'appartenaient pas au même monde, ne partageaient plus le même monde. La mère ne pouvait comprendre que l'uniformité, la règle du temps--son temps--ce temps qui passait. Tioumbé ne pouvait plus accepter l'uniformité et cette règle du temps écoulé. Elle rejetait, pour enfanter un autre monde, un temps nouveau. (pp. 243-244)

The rupture is a bitter one for both mother and daughter, and represents more than just the conventional "generation gap." When she returns to the house to get her registration card for the election, Tioumbé must confront her father once more. This time when he menaces her with a whip, she strikes back, an unheard-of thing for an African child to do, even in self-defense. Her father's authority over her has been completely repudiated. But she herself has been forever cut off from the security and stability which the family represents.

Tioumbé, sa carte à la main, la triturait. Elle serrait les poings. Elle reprimait, dans sa poitrine haletante, un cri. Un cri de révolte contre elle-même, d'avoir violé l'ancienne structure familiale. Tour à tour, ses yeux se posaient sur les co-épouses, sur sa mère pétrifiée. (p. 275)

Tioumbé is left at the end of the novel to carry on the struggle for liberation with her companions of the Front; solidarity within the cause has become for her the new family structure. Together they will forge a new Africa imbued with the values of the old, of a time when, as the old musician Fousseynou sang to the accompaniment of his kora, hard work "n'était pas de la besogne, c'était la vie! Des



hommes, des femmes, ensemble, créaient en riant. Derrière eux, la terre généreuse et luisante, se désaltérait du soleil . . ." (p. 191).

After the Harmattan comes the time of renewal:

'Vieux temps de la vieille Afrique! Temps des Ancêtres qui renaît de la cendre de l'Harmattan!' . . . Le musicien fit de nouveau entendre l'Harmattan. Il ne parlait que de la vie, de la vraie vie, de la vie de tous les jours. Les hommes et les femmes, disait-il, chanteront, eux, la vie . . . Rien ne pouvait rompre le cordon ombilical entre les hommes et leur terre natale. (pp. 190-191)

The theme of regeneration is applied here not just in a national sense, but in a supra-national one as well. The period when African states were emerging into national consciousness was also a time of idealism and hope for African unity. Pan-Africanism would bring the continent out of the fragmentation and disunion caused by traditional tribalism:

Cette Afrique où l'homme est créateur de Dieu! Comme une gigantesque bourrasque, elle se dressait, s'éveillait à la réalité. Ses enfants se levaient et brandissaient la force, la tenacité, la détermination. De partout craquaient les années et les années qui les étouffaient, étouffaient injustement leurs voix. Devant cette prise de conscience s'écoulaient aussi les anciens modes de vie, les lois anciennes de la tribu, du clan, se perdait aussi le droit total d'être seulement aîné: ce droit qui conférait autrefois une autorité. (p. 145)

Sembène was in the forefront of politically committed writers of the time. L'Harmattan takes on added significance as a manifesto for Pan-Africanism. The novelist's mission is not just to tell an interesting story, or to portray realistic characters. His charge, in keeping with the mood of the time, is to present tomorrow, to point

the way in the search for a new political reality. The names of the characters in L'Harmattan are themselves Pan-African; some are Senegalese, some typically Dahomean or Malian. Others could come from Upper Volta or the Ivory Coast. The anonymous country in which they live out the drama of the referendum is, then, symbolic of the whole of French West Africa. When he returns to his homeland after the triumph of the no vote there, Sori, the one member of the Front from Guinea, leaves behind his comrades for whom "Français de protection" is still the nationality indicated on their identity cards. The history of their liberation had yet to be written.

Sembène is an écrivain engagé whose concept of the role of the writer is enunciated by one of the characters of L'Harmattan:

Mais quel est l'homme qui pourrait apprendre l'homme à travers sa charpente, son état d'âme, sa grandeur, sa faiblesse? Qui nous parle de demain, sinon l'écrivain? Lui seul peut fouiller les consciences, celle de l'agronome, du médecin, du forgeron, du cordonnier, de nos dirigeants actuels. L'écrivain n'est pas un type unique. Il est la multitude d'un peuple. (p. 137)

Sembène is at all times faithful to this credo. His concern is with contemporary issues and social realities. A collection of short stories brought out in 1962 under the title Voltaïque, shows his talent for slice-of-life realism and vivid portraiture. He is the only fully professional writer of the period we are considering who is still writing today and whose international reputation has been firmly established.

#### 4. Crépuscule des temps anciens

Another treatment of the historical theme, more closely related to Paul Hazoumé's Douguicimi, to Jean Malonga's Légende de M'Pfoumou ma Mazono or Niane's Soundjata, is this work by Nazi Boni of Upper Volta subtitled "Chronique du Bwamu." Although it reaches back in time nearly three hundred years, the main story centers on a time lapse of approximately fifty years, from the end of the 19th century through approximately 1916, date of the tribe's final suppression at the hands of the white colonizer. Although the text is historic, the characters which animate it are purely imaginary, and in this respect the author deviates from the portrayal of factual and/or legendary heroes which had been the method of his predecessors.

When this novel appeared in 1962, Nazi Boni, who was born in 1910, was over 50. He belongs therefore to the older generation of novelists, those writing in the 1930's and '40's, and it is not surprising that he uses the device of the retour aux sources to inspire his theme. The exaltation of the past had already been rejected by Ikellé-Matiba, and would find no partisan in Ousmane Sembène. However, the ideal of the patrimoine of traditional values was still a fertile source of inspiration. The goal of recapturing the past before it disappears completely, even if it did lead to a certain mythification, was still a valid one. And it was no empty nostalgia which led this civil servant of his country to choose the historical mode. He saw, like Sembène,

that the peoples of Africa at the moment of their independence needed a new sense of pride to draw them from their decades of subjugation and colonial mentality. Instead of looking to tomorrow, to the awakening of nationalism and Pan-Africanism and the African presence in the modern world, he turned to yesterday, to a time since revolved when the values of the past were meaningful and more than just a picturesque recollection of an old story-teller. Therein, he felt, would this pride find a sturdy base:

En moins d'un demi-siècle, depuis le temps où de veloces véneurs plus rapides que leurs chiens rattrapaient à la course des lièvres et des biches, depuis ce temps des grandes battues et des chasses à courre jusqu'à nos jours, que de métamorphoses! Que de nobles principes enfouis! Que d'excellentes pratiques abandonnées! Que de progrès dans la destruction de l'originalité africaine!

. . . Et cependant il faut qu'elle renaisse, s'adapte, se réalise . . . En cette heure de libération des pays subjugués . . . s'impose à nos élites l'impérieux devoir de s'atteler à la redécouverte de la vieille et authentique Afrique. (pp. 17-18)

Leonard Sainville has called this novel "une leçon de patriotisme et de négritude,"<sup>21</sup> an apt synthesis of Nazi Boni's main intent. The author's style, like his preoccupation may seem somewhat pompous and didactic, but it follows closely the style of the traditional conteur whose exclamations and exhortations to his listeners were part of his elaborate declamation.

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<sup>21</sup>Leonard Sainville, Anthologie de la littérature négro-africaine. Romanciers et conteurs, (Presence Africaine 1963), II, 98.

The novel, for such it is, has three aspects. It is first of all an historical novel, "l'expression de la vie paysanne, religieuse, guerrière et sentimentale d'un peuple en action à une époque antérieure à la colonisation!" (p. 19). It narrates the decline and fall of these people, the Bwawa of the pays Bwamu, a traditional society of age classes and rigidly structured hierarchy where there prevailed what Sembène decried in L'Harmattan, "le droit total d'être seulement aîné: ce droit qui conférerait autrefois une autorité." (L'Harmattan, p. 145). Secondly, it is an ethnological novel, incorporating elements of culture, language, rites, customs, beliefs and mythology; and elements of the oral tradition, récits, legends, enigmas, proverbs, and so on. Finally, it is a romantic novel, the love story of Térhé, the incomparable warrior, and Hakanni, the incomparable beauty. Their story and that of the people of Bwamu are related by the old chief, l'Ancêtre Gnassan ("ancestor" here designated the members of the oldest age-class, the anciens of the village). He recounts the changing seasons, the hivernage with its excessive rains, the dry season, time of the harmattan, the exploits of the warriors and the hunters, the ritualistic competitions through which the junior age class must pass in order to wrest the right to power from the senior class and become Yenissa, "les détenteurs de la force." The simple story of the love of Hakanni and Térhé, the hero of the tribe, is as ageless and poignant as that of Tristan and Iseut. Their marriage is forbidden

because tribal custom considers them too closely related. (His maternal great grandfather and her paternal great grandmother were cousins. According to the laws of consanguinity of a tribe which practices strict exogamy, their union would be adulterous). In keeping with tradition, Térhé is polygamous, but Hakanni, his bien-aimée cannot become his wife although she is tolerated as his mistress. In order to consecrate their love beyond death, Hakanni asks Térhé to join in a blood pact:

--Je voudrais avoir l'assurance . . . de mourir avec toi afin qu'ensemble, la main dans la main, nous partions pour Nihamboloho, la cité des fantômes. Je te demande ce service. Si tu m'as réellement dans le coeur, tu ne saurais me le refuser. Il suffit que tu acceptes l'incorporation de mon sang dans tes veines. Une fois l'opération réalisée, ta mort éventuelle entraînerait fatalement la mienne. (pp. 156-157)

Life continues in its timeless way for the Bwawa until a series of events signals the twilight of an age. The disasters begin with the death of Kya, the guetteur or sniper, whose duty it was to kill anyone from a neighboring tribe unlucky enough to stray into the land of Bwamu. This misfortune is followed by an invasion of locusts which devastates the crops, a famine, and an epidemic of smallpox. But it is the arrival of the whites, the Nansarawa which marks the beginning of the end for the Bwawa:

--Yéréké! Quel miracle! On comprend maintenant pourquoi nos fétiches, nos génies, nos dieux ne se manifestent plus. Une nouvelle puissance arrive qui les oblige à se terrer. Le monde

est en train de changer. Le Bwamu va connaître un nouveau soleil. --Les temps du vieux Bwamu s'enfuient. (p. 217)

This reaction on the part of traditional Africans of the interior who, unlike those of the coast, had never been exposed to influences from Europe is a new treatment of the theme of culture contact. How could their traditions stand up under the onslaught of this terrifying presence? Nevertheless, they undertook a defense against all odds:

Alors les Anciens jurèrent qu'au grand jamais la profanation de la 'Terre des Ancêtres' ne les trouverait ou ne les laisserait vivants. Plutôt Humu-la-Mort que Wobamu-l'Esclavage! (p. 233)

In emphasizing this struggle against the colonizer, Nazi Boni introduces a theme which could only make its appearance after independence had been achieved: that of armed resistance. The conquest and pacification of this and other parts of Africa involved much bloodshed, and the heroism of Térhé in this unequal fight provides an image of nobility and grandeur aimed at reawakening the pride which had lain dormant since those days. But history must be transcribed, as Boni says in his preface, "sans rien farder," and the glory of the land of Bwamu was ultimately and forever destroyed. Térhé dies, poisoned by a jealous tribesman, and the crépuscule is followed by the dawn of a new and hostile time:

--la mort de Térhé, ne cessait de répéter Mb'woa Gnassan, ce serait la fin de la gloire du Bwamu, la fin de notre 'soleil', de notre ère et l'avènement de nouveaux temps qui réaliseront la féminisation des hommes. (p. 245)

Ending on the theme of defeat and death, this is nevertheless

a novel with a message of liberation and hope for the generation just then acceding to independence, for they would, like Téréh by his death, be able to renounce the false dawn which the colonizer had brought: "Symbole de gloire, d'honneur et d'amour, partez, tournez sans regret le dos à l'aurore des temps nouveaux, et abandonnez à son triste sort l'étrange monde des m'as-tu-vu." (p. 256) But this strange world was also doomed to meet its twilight as the colonial day declined. Let Africa now recognize in its heroes of the past the models on which to build its future.

Nazi Boni died in 1969 in an automobile accident near Ouagadougou without having produced another novel. Crépuscule des temps anciens, however, opens a field which future novelists have yet to exploit fully: the historical romance, using historical facts as a background for fictional characters. It may be that the lack of written history on which to base their works has proved an inhibiting factor. But as Boni has shown, the very rich oral traditions should provide inspiration enough for those who would take the time to collect and preserve them.

##### 5. Le Chant du lac

When he reviewed it in African Forum, Thomas Cassirer remarked of Le Chant du lac, "the extraordinary richness of levels in this novel--its blending of folk legend, social criticism, symbolism,



and allegory--makes it stand out among modern African fiction,<sup>22</sup> Olympe Bhêly-Quénum's second novel appeared in 1965, half-way through the first decade of independence, and its reforming tendencies, in spite of the mythification with which they are surrounded, are quite clear. Le Chant du lac was awarded the Grand Prix de littérature d'Afrique noire in 1966.

In this novel, Bhêly-Quénum turns away from the kafkaesque world of Un piège sans fin with its themes of fatalism and the hantise of the absurd, to a fable for the changing times with a message of hope and cultural liberation. The story is relatively simple, a parable of the New Africa awakening and caught between the old gods and the new enlightenment: In the bottom of the great lake, surrounded by fishing villages, dwell two terrible gods, monsters symbolic of the terrors and darkness of the old traditions and superstitions. One night in a terrible storm and heavy fog when the lake howls "le chant du lac," a hardy band of students sets out to destroy the monsters; armed with guns and electric torches, and animated by a fierce determination, they represent the new intelligentsia. But it is a brave market woman with her two children and valiant piroguier who, caught in the middle of the lake, succeed in overcoming and slaying the gods, thus suggesting that it is the masses themselves who will eventually bring the new order to Africa.

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<sup>22</sup>African Forum 2, 4 (Spring 1967): 134-136.

The action of the story has been compared to that of Hemingway's The Old Man and The Sea. The comparison may also be extended to touch on the allegorical aspect which we impute to both works and which relates them both to Moby Dick: the solitary struggle to overcome the forces of evil. The highly symbolic tale of Le Chant du lac deals with fears and superstitions, the will to survive, the paralyzing effect of some old traditions, the positive nature of some old values, and the animation of the new political order.

The setting and action of the novel are linked adroitly to that of Un piège sans fin by the novelist's device of a recurring character. Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono had made use of this technique: Father Le Guen of Mission terminée had first appeared in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, and in Une vie de Boy we first meet Father Vandermayer and the police chief, "Gosier-d'oiseau" who subsequently appear in Le vieux Nègre et la médaille. In this case the character is a dead one, and the circumstances of his death are related by the students returning from France to pass their vacation in the village of Wésê. Houngré, as he was named, had murdered Ahouna, the desperate hero of Un piège sans fin, to revenge the latter's senseless slaying of Houngré's sister. For this deed, Houngré was deported to France where he served with distinction in World War II and later in Viet Nam. Pardoned by France, a hero to his people, he was returning to Dahomey on the same ship as the students when he died of a mysterious fever. The students recount how on his death bed, in his delirium, he

remembered his cry of revolt: "Tout n'est pas fini! je reviendrai!" and the mission which he feels he must still accomplish in his native land:

Ma jeunesse morte en Afrique a été enterrée en France. Et je suis seul, seul comme je suis né seul et mourrai seul . . . et pourtant la houle m'emporte vers la terre natale dont je transformerai la face. Je reverrai Zoumin, j'irai à Wésê, village de ma mère, je détruirai les dieux, je tuerai ceux du lac. Oh! grands dieux du lac qui ne chantera plus! . . . Je guérirai les gens de la peur et ils vivront libres! Oh! libres merveilleusement" . . . (p. 21)

This is the call to action which Houngbé left as his bequest to the people. Courage and steadfastness are the weapons with which the struggle will be armed. The students -- representative it seems of the student generation anywhere these days: "Ils s'étaient habillés de blue-jeans, de chemises usées et avaient chaussé leurs chaussures de basket-ball" (p. 12) -- are ready to jump into the fray:

L'Occident n'avait pas aboli en eux tout sentiment patriotique: 'un cordon ombilical' les liait irrévocablement à la terre natale, et il leur apparut soudain qu'ils devaient, même s'ils ne voulaient pas être des 'moutons' ni des 'paons', contribuer efficacement à donner un nouveau visage à leur village. (p. 89)

But youth cannot face alone the "forces mystérieuses" which oppress the village. The traditionalists try to restrain them when they set out to rescue those trapped on the angry lake, and Hounsi, member of the Parti National, symbol of the new politician who seems to be lending a hand, is in reality doing everything in his power to pull the other way:

Les jeunes gens devinrent méfiants. A quelle coterie appartenait cet homme? Cela les intriguait. Klingbé commença de surveiller la façon dont l'homme plongeait sa perche dans l'eau et s'aperçut que les gestes de ce guide généreux contre-carraient les siens. Obscure densité de l'Afrique éternelle . . . Ruse congénitale de la race noire . . . Véritable incompatibilité de rythme s'opérant au coeur de l'acte opératoire. O lutte singulièrement inégale . . . (pp. 92-93)

This is the first sign, of which we shall see many more in the novels to follow, of the state of affairs which exists between the intellectuals and many of the new political leaders of independent Africa who seem to be putting their own self interests and a grandizement before the common good.

The revolt against the gods of the lake is at last undertaken by Mme Ounéhou and her children, aided by the brave boatman Fanouvi, because they have no choice: it is either resist or succumb. Like the heroes in all of the novels of the new liberation which we have been studying, they choose resistance.

Ils n'avaient plus peur du sacrilège de ne pas s'être humblement livrés à la merci d'une puissance jusqu'alors obscure et suprême. Ils ne redoutaient plus de lutter contre un dieu, de le vaincre, de le tuer et le jeter dans l'eau. Décidés avec leurs consciences maintenant merveilleusement tranquilles, ils se sentaient libres . . . (pp. 127-128)

Because they have chosen freely to fight, they win and the gods are destroyed. This destruction is symbolic of the death, not of traditional values, but of the oppression of fear and superstition to which Africa was in thrall. The cultural liberation is to be effected by the people themselves when they renounce that which terrorizes them.

Mme Ounéhou realizes the significance of her victory:

Avoir eu affaire à ces monstres était pour elle à la fois une révélation et une desillusion; elle se demande encore comment pouvait bien être le dieu qu'elle adorait; il lui sembla soudain qu'il devait y avoir quelque chose de trop dans chacun des dieux de son pays, un superflu dont elle aimerait qu'on les débarrassât enfin pour seulement s'attacher à ce qui en valait la peine. 'Le mystère, mais non la terreur'. (p. 143)

A sense of the mysterious is Africa's precious heritage. For as Fanouvi points out to the little boy who concludes that venerating the mysterious is stupid:

--Ce n'est pas bête, mon petit homme: tu ne peux reprocher à personne de croire au mystère, même si c'est un homme qui l'incarne: tu comprendras cela plus tard. Ce qui est inconcevable, terrifiant et absurde, c'est d'adorer ce qui vous dévore. (p. 150)

This is the message which the release from the tyranny of the monsters represents: the theme of cultural reform to enable Africa to step into the modern world of technology and progress with her old values intact, but freed of the baggage of centuries of fear.

An important sub-theme is that of the conflict of generations. The young are animated by a spirit of reform and a sense of mission. Bhêly-Quénum seems to be saying that their protest is reasonable and that the wall of incomprehension against which they hurl themselves must be torn down. This theme will continue to be a major one in the development of the novel, along with modernism and the concern for a viable future:

La tyrannie et le manque d'humanité des dieux du lac, voilà ce contre quoi protestaient ces jeunes gens et jeunes filles qui, forts de leur confiance en l'avenir, cherchaient à faire naître chez leurs compatriotes la compréhension, la sagesse et l'amour

susceptibles d'établir l'entente et l'équilibre entre les Africains de bonne volonté, et de servir de charte dans l'étude des relations humaines entre l'Afrique et l'Occident. Aussi voulaient-ils en finir avec certaines habitudes d'esprit et faire sortir leur village natal de sa gangue d'un passé révolu. Mais par quelque côté où ils essayaient d'entreprendre leur tâche, ils ne rencontraient qu'embûches, pièges et échecs soigneusement préparés par ceux qui se contentaient d'épousseter le passé au lieu d'affronter l'avenir. (p. 96)

Elements of animism and folklore embellish the narrative, the tone of which is often extremely didactic. The conversations of the two mythical monsters at the bottom of the lake add a note of the fantastic. Bhêly-Quénum's style is best when he is not being too cosmic and writes in short, rhythmic sentences, such as this image of morning activity on the lake shore:

La rive commençait d'être animée de ses activités coutumières. A genoux par groupes de cinq autour des petits puits creusés çà et là, des jeunes filles faisaient déjà la lessive. Nues jusqu'à la ceinture, elles se penchaient sur leurs bassines ou sur leursalebasses, et leurs seins volumineux et fermes palpitaient par à-coups quand elles frottaient le linge. (p. 36)

The action of the struggle on the lake, which encompasses a day and a night, gives a singular unity of time and place to the main drama. And when the night of terror is over at last, the symbol of the sunrise greets the victors and taunts the fétichistes who have come down to the lake to mourn the passing of their gods.

La lune au-dessus de l'eau n'était plus coruscante; elle disparaissait du côté de Déhâ, et l'incendie allumé à l'horizon depuis plus d'une heure par l'invisible soleil de l'aube semblait avoir progressé. Le ciel et le lac et l'horizon tout autour des voyageurs étaient violemment empourprés, et la barque, avançant comme dans un univers de sang en s'approchant de la rive,

descendait à un niveau d'où l'on ne pouvait observer du lever du soleil, que son manteau de froide et immense incandescence. (p. 151)

The place of man in the universe and his relation to its mysterious forces are treated by Bhêly-Quénum in this novel from the African standpoint. Man is one with Nature, but his duty as a rational being is to pierce the primitive darkness that shrouds this union, to scatter the elements of destruction which have prevailed, and to illumine the modern age of materialism with a new concept of spirituality. Progress and traditional animism can go hand in hand only when the cruel and inhuman gods have given way to a new faith in the humaneness of creation. The traditional rapport of man with nature in Africa is characterized by an attitude of communion rather than of domination. This philosophy of l'être-dans-le-monde will, if freed of its primeval terrors, provide a balance to Western materialism where there has been established "une dualité, voire une dichotomie, entre l'homme et l'Univers [qui] se caractérise par l'esprit prométhéen, la volonté de dominer le monde . . ." <sup>23</sup>

Throughout this chapter we have followed the steady development of the theme of liberation in the novel. The theme has been treated with the optimism which prevailed in the early years of independence, and

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<sup>23</sup> Marcien Towa, Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle (Yaounde: Eds. CLE, 1971), p. 28.

contrasts with the general tone of pessimism which prevailed in the novels of the 50's. The motif of revolt has taken on an active nature of reaffirmation unlike the passive or subversive nature of the interiorized revolt which characterized the anti-colonial novel. The genre has been stretched to include five distinct types: the political novel, represented by L'Harmattan; the epic novel, represented by Crépuscule des temps anciens; the historical novel, of which Cette Afrique-là is an example unique for its measured tone of objectivity; the autobiographical confession, represented by Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos; and the allegorical novel, exemplified by Le Chant du lac.

Respectively, these novels deal with man's identification and place in the world of the new political order; the traditions of time; the emerging nation; the concept of self; and the world of nature. Over all hovers the mystique of "la Grande Afrique." Within them all moves the spirit of unanimism. The theme of fraternity, solidarity and the community of destiny recalls the primacy of the collectivity in African society. A new social consciousness transcending tribalism and colonial domination pervades these works and places them in the forefront as witnesses to a new era. All are characterized by an unmistakable didacticism, of which reform is the message. This tendency, borrowed from the oral tradition, reduces the novels sometimes to the level of a documentary which the exaltation of tone only accentuates. Faith, virtue, hope, social commitment, traditional



values are the keys to unlock the future of African independence and the novelists' challenge to the period.

None of the novels studied can be considered great, or even lasting, literature. There are flaws of construction or characterization, and the themes are too limited to be universal. Yet all of them have something of value in that they reflect a common purpose: to document the many aspects of the drama of a new prise de conscience. A whole continent is now in the process of passing from a tradition of oral literature to a form of written literature. Using the French language as a vehicle, men of talent and insight such as Sembène, Bhêly-Quénou and Ikellé-Matiba have preserved stages of the transition of Africa into the modern world which should be as precious as the novels of Balzac or Zola as témoignages of an era.

Unfortunately for future students of the evolution of a society, the literary production of this period is slight, and is indeed limited to these three novelists, plus Gologo and Boni, for all practical purposes. Of the remaining few "novels" published between 1961 and 1965, five, by the same author, Felix Couchoro of Dahomey, appeared only in Togo-Presse as romans-feuilleton and are not available today. Three more, which some bibliographic studies list as "novels" are of fewer than 100 pages and can be considered rather as short stories. Others are more in the nature of souvenirs, such as Bernard Dadié's

Patron de New York which was published in 1964. Rather like Un Nègre à Paris in intent, it is a humorous account of his discovery of the city during a stay of four months. The curious nature of Americans, the race problem, and the disquieting effect of a materialistic society are studied and commented on. Sans rancune, by Thomas Kanza of Zaïre, the former Belgian Congo, was published in London in 1965, diffused in Paris by Présence Africaine and in Brussels by Remarques Congolaises. It recounts the experiences of a young Congolese, first in his native land and then as a student in Belgium. The author, who was in charge of foreign affairs in Stanleyville (now Kisangani) escaped through Nairobi after the "events" of the rebellion, and has been living since in exile in London. He has not published another novel. Other works of the period are too minor to have merited mention in anything other than general bibliographical listings. The decline of the novel at this time, then, is a fact which can be verified. It was not, however, extinct. The idea of nationhood was uppermost in the minds of most African intellectuals, and they turned their creative talents toward the more absorbing functions of political or diplomatic involvement. Since, as Edris Makward has remarked, "modern African literature is no mere product of political emancipation in Africa --or vice versa for that matter--although both developments are interrelated and mutually stimulating,"<sup>24</sup> we can

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<sup>24</sup>Edris Makward, "African writers share basic themes and concerns," Africa Report 16, 3 (1971): 28.

expect to find a new attitude toward literature waiting in the wings as the elaboration of a new national consciousness is formed. Caught in the dynamics of growth and change, it would be more realistic, as John Ramsaran suggests,

. . . to consider African literature as the result of a continuous process due to cultural and historical forces, one consequence of which is the establishment of the new and independent states of the Emergent Africa of the twentieth century. It is important to emphasize that the process is a continuing one and will not have spent itself until the creative mind of Africa ceases to exist.<sup>25</sup>

In the third chapter we shall consider the changes which the new society is operating on the literary genre of the novel.

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<sup>25</sup>J.A. Ramsaran, New Approaches to African Literature, A guide to Negro-African writing and related studies (Ibadan, 1965), p. 3.

Chapter 3: The Years of Disillusionment, 1966-1969 \*

The extinction of the African novel of French expression as a major literary genre was almost an accomplished fact in 1965. While African literature in English was surging ahead with new themes, new concerns, and an exciting new treatment of the language of expression, the creative vitality of African literature in French which the Negritude poets and the anti-colonial novelists had kindled so brilliantly had diminished perceptibly. Everyone was surprised by this sudden demise of creative vocation which had certainly seemed authentic and lasting. Critics began looking around for reasons which would permit them to live comfortably with the fact that the literature they had praised so

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\*The novels studied in this chapter are François Evembé, Sur la terre en passant (Présence Africaine, 1966); Charles Nokan, Violent était le vent (Présence Africaine, 1966); Malick Fall, La plaie (Albin-Michel, 1967); Guy Menga, La palabre stérile (Editions CLE, 1968); Laya Camara, Dramouss (Plon, 1966); Ahmadou Kourouma, Les soleils des Indépendances (Editions du Seuil, 1970); Yambo Ouologuem, Le devoir de violence (Editions du Seuil, 1968); Rémy Gilbert Medou-Mvomo, Afrika-Ba's (Editions CLE, 1969); René Philombé, Sola, ma chérie (CLE, 1966) and Un sorcier blanc à Zangali (CLE, 1969); Francis Bebey, Le fils d'Agatha Moudio (CLE, 1967). Quotations are identified in the text by page number in parentheses.

effusively yesterday now seemed to have no tomorrow. The success of the independence movement was usually the most convenient explanation. The impetus which colonialism had given to literary expression had no more force; anti-colonialism was no longer the inspiration motrice. The general mood of pessimism which the novelists had exploited, had changed in the early years of the 60's to one of euphoria. The few successful novels were, as we have seen, those in which a new attitude of hope for a better future were uppermost. The novel was beginning a shift from what Abiola Irele identified as its single direction, "a comprehensive exploration of the implications, social and spiritual, of the African encounter with the west," to a more diverse path on which it would need to confront "new themes in which the continent and its peculiar problems are presented in themselves and as arising out of an autonomous human situation."<sup>1</sup>

Politically, furthermore, things were just not favoring the novelists' customary morgue. It had been easy to roast the colonialists, their atrocities and their racist administrations, but what to say about the present situation in which wars, tribalism and corruption were introducing horrors which were often worse than anything colonialism had had to offer. When the exhilaration of the first years of liberation wore off, it became clear that the political currents and the novelists' commitments were running at counter purposes. The dream of

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<sup>1</sup>Abiola, Irele, "A new mood in the African novel," West Africa, Sept. 20, 1969, p. 113.

African Unity was fast fading as Pan Africanism succumbed to spreading nationalism. As Thomas Cassirer pointed out in assessing the predicament of the African writer in 1967, "both tribalism and the separation of Africa into a multitude of states run counter to the writer's allegiance to Africa as a significant cultural whole."<sup>2</sup> Even worse, perhaps, was the collapse of the whole mystique of Negritude. The idea of the âme noire and the glorification of traditional values which contrasted the spirituality of Africa with the brutal materialism of Europe were dealt a severe blow. The "classical" Negritude of Senghor which the poet-president defined as an ontological humanism no longer appealed to a decade which was now riven by disunity. L'esprit nègre was only a myth, even, the Marxists would aver, a deliberate mystification in order to maintain the masses at a level of neo-colonial mentality which the new African elite could continue to exploit. In summing up the problem at the end of the decade, Albert Gerard wrote:

L'indépendance politique priva les écrivains anti-colonialistes de leurs mobiles essentiels; plus insidieux, le néo-colonialisme se prêtait mal au traitement lyrique ou romanesque. Par ailleurs, les actes les plus tapageurs de l'Afrique indépendante, la tragédie du Congo, les affrontements tribaux dans les nouveaux Etats, la corruption généralisée des politiciens et des fonctionnaires, les coups d'état militaires, tout cela rejetait dans les limbes d'une mythologie romantique sans contact avec le réel, non seulement l'idéologie politique du panafricanisme, mais aussi l'idéal lyrico-philosophique de la négritude.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Cassirer, "Politics and Mystique--The Predicament of the African Writer," African Forum 3, 1 (1969): 28.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Gérard, "Littérature francophone d'Afrique: le temps de la relève," La Revue nouvelle 49, 2 (1969): 198-199.

Still, some novelists were bold enough to conceive of a new mission: a more realistic portrayal of the problems and tensions in African society. The mood which succeeded the pessimism of the pre-independence period, and the forward-looking optimism of the first years of independence, now shifted to one of bitterness and criticism toward the social and political realities of Africa. The novelists of the remaining years of the decade will return to themes of alienation and disillusion, solitude and sterility, desolation and deception, and apply them to the condition humaine in the African context. The despair that some of these novels manifest is occasioned by the situation in which the novelist finds himself vis-à-vis the regime of his homeland and the new society of which he is writing. One cause for bitterness is the new image of the people which his novel must reflect if it is to deal honestly with contemporary reality:

Le peuple redevient soudain indolent, effronté, jouisseur et hostile à la discipline. Il affiche une mentalité d'assisté et voudrait se faire entretenir par les hommes en place. C'est la crise de la décolonisation et des premières années l'indépendance des pays africains.<sup>4</sup>

If, as Iyay Kimoni suggests, the novelists' main preoccupation then was to "faire sortir le peuple de la torpeur,"<sup>5</sup> a great many changes would have to be forthcoming. Chief among these was the hostility

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<sup>4</sup>Iyay Kimoni, Destin de la littérature négro-africaine ou problématique d'une culture (Ottawa: Editions Naaman, 1975), p. 228.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

which the writer-as-critic met in his own country from the intellectuals who had assumed political power. The writer was in immediate personal danger if he overstepped the bounds prescribed by strict censorship and control. The dilemma was a poignant one because frequently "the most immediate threat (was) that the political leaders of his country, who yesterday were his comrades in the battle against colonialism, today [became] his oppressors."<sup>6</sup> In this crisis of the novel, "the total effect of the social situation and of the political threat of prison or exile is to abrogate the freedom of expression so recently won."<sup>7</sup>

The position of the writer in modern Africa was the subject of an international conference sponsored by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies held in Stockholm in February 1967. The dominant theme of the conference was "the writer in the modern African society, his individuality and his social commitment."<sup>8</sup> It is significant that all but a few of the African writers in attendance were from the anglophone countries; the francophones were conspicuous by their absence or by their silence. It remained for Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian novelist and dramatist, to place in perspective the failure of the modern African writer. Charging that the writer had abdicated

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<sup>6</sup>Cassirer, African Forum, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>See Per Wästberg, ed., The Writer in Modern Africa, papers from the African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1969).



his responsibilities and was generally lacking in vision, Soyinka deplored the circumstances which had made of "the average published writer in the first few years of the post-colonial era . . . the most celebrated skin of inconsequence to obscure the true flesh of the African dilemma"<sup>9</sup>:

The distractions away from vision were, of course enormous, the distractions away from a vision clarified in human terms and not in dogma. And they were such as gave full scope to the exploitation by demagogic opportunists of the new aggressive national consciousness. Reality, the ever-present fertile reality, was ignored by the writer and resigned to the new visionary-- the politician.<sup>10</sup>

Soyinka's reinterpretation of engagement in the face of the collapse of ideals has meaning for all African writers of the 60's. The tragedy of the Biafran civil war was soon to engulf his own country, and Soyinka would spend much of it in prison for having tried to live up to his standard of commitment.

The novelists of French expression seem to have been reassessing their themes in the spirit of Soyinka's challenge. They sought to tear away the illusions which had blinded the public to the destruction of humanism and humanity that was going on wholesale all over the continent. For some this meant exile as the price of freedom to publish, but the novel as genre started to show signs of regeneration. The

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<sup>9</sup>Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in Wästberg, *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

decline of the early 60's gave way in the latter half of the decade to a renewal of interest in fiction as a medium through which to express the corrosive realities of the African scene. Nine major novels were published abroad in the four years between 1966 and 1969, and five were brought out in Africa by the young publishing house of Editions CLE, of which more will be said in chapter 3 of Part Two. Besides *Présence Africaine* in Paris, there was something of a renewed interest among Parisian publishers. Novels appeared bearing the imprint of Plon, Albin-Michel and Seuil, and Ahmadou Kourouma's novel, Les soleils des Indépendances, made its first appearance in Montreal. A new littérature de combat was in progress.

The theme of disillusionment, which seems to be a very important current running beneath the surface themes to be treated in the novels of the last years of the 60's, takes on two aspects. Both have to do with a sense of alienation which the elaboration of a new society was imposing on Africans. In the first, it is the individual who is alienated and who suffers from the prostitution of values and the callousness of the social order. In the second, the alienation is that experienced by the collectivity faced with social disintegration. In the traditional milieu, each person's clearly defined social role permitted the individual to exist as it permitted the collectivity to exist. The bonds which linked the child to his culture and the culture to the common good of the collectivity were tightly drawn. The rupture

caused by colonialism was one of the favorite themes of the pre-independence novelists. A new rupture was now operating within African society, that of urbanization and a loss of group identification. Nation-building was recombining the elements of traditional society in ways which would create what Bernard Mouralis in his interesting study of the Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française called "le désir perpétuel d'autre chose."<sup>11</sup> This unassuaged desire gives rise to a new series of novels of anguish which it is convenient to study under the two aspects of alienation: that of the individual and that of the collectivity. It will be seen that there are relatively few common themes with which the matter of alienation or anguish is treated. Rather, each novelist has his own approach to the subject, and the move is toward greater national identification. Form and structure evolve in tandem with the new themes, and the period presents some very unconventional works, at least when we consider them in comparison with the varieties of the novel form which had heretofore been the novelists' standard of expression.

Another tendency in the novel of this period is toward regionalism and the portrayal of manners and customs interlaced with sociological observations. A third section of this chapter will examine this development.

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<sup>11</sup>Bernard Mouralis, Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française (Abidjan:Annales de l'Université, 1969),

Crisis of the individual

Solitude, the condition of the individual who has become a stranger to his world, is not a new theme in the African novel of French expression. Samba Diallo's anguished cry in L'aventure ambiguë--"Maître, appela-t-il en pensée, que me reste-t-il? Les ténèbres me gagnent. Je ne brûle plus au coeur des êtres et des choses" (p. 190)--reflected the alienation of the évolué caught between two worlds. Ahouna in Un piège sans fin, condemned to penal servitude in the quarries, symbolic of the human condition, confronted the absurdity of life itself:

--Mais la véritable mort commence ici-bas; je dirais même que son domaine est sur la terre et non ailleurs, et il faut que tu subisses l'épreuve, Ahouna. Tu iras travailler dans les Carrières; tu vas y suer, jusqu'à ce que tu te sentes devenir un rocher comme cet assemblage de granit que ta pioche brisera avec furie, avec une haine sans nom parce qu'elle sera absurde. (p. 211)

But the treatment of the theme of solitude and anguish had been motivated by the colonial situation. It required a new generation of novelists to fit this theme into the perspective of independent Africa. Four novels, appearing between 1966 and 1968, seem to capture the somber mood of despair and disillusion which prevailed, and we shall consider them now in order of date of publication.

1. Sur la terre en passant

A journalist, François Borgia-Marie Evembé of Cameroon, published his first, and so far only, novel in 1966. Sur la terre en

passant is really little more than a novelette, but its strange hallucinatory quality and intense tone of despair give it a power to disturb which in a longer work would either be tiresome or overwhelming. The hero is a very young man, Gilbert Iyoni, who is dying of stomach cancer. The very nature of the illness itself is symbolic of the diseases of corruption, arrivisme, nepotism, and self-interest which are gnawing at the innards of the new society. Gilbert is as much a victim of these diseases as he is of the physical malady which is consuming him, and when he dies, it is alone, in a gutter, vomiting from the corruption which has been working to destroy him from within and from without:

Iyoni est mort. Il est parti alors qu'il entrerait dans la période féconde de sa jeunesse. Ce genre de personnes d'ailleurs ne vivent jamais longtemps. On a l'impression qu'ils sont sur la terre, en passant. (p. 111)

Iyoni's calvary begins one morning with a severe recurrence of the illness from which he has been suffering intermittently. Horrified by this "grève dans l'usine de son corps," he rushes to the hospital, but the indifference and neglect which he meets there are symptomatic of the prostitution of human values which is operating throughout the new society:

Ecoeurante, la prostitution des valeurs intrinsèques à la nature humaine. Mais bon Dieu, qu'est-ce que c'est que l'homme? Ne serait-il que celui qui tue, celui qui vole, celui qui sait haïr perpétuellement, qui trouve sa joie à marcher sur les sentiers détournés du mensonge, celui qui se couvre d'un manteau aux couleurs de la lâcheté et des préjugés! Mais pourquoi sommes-nous sur cette terre? Pour rien, disent certains! (p. 56)

This bitter assessment is made in despair and anguish as he confronts not only the callousness of those who are supposed to be devoted to preserving human life, but also the inhumanity of the bureaucracy which is supposed to be serving the good of society. In his revolt, he realizes that he is alone and that the modern world is a place in which the alienation of the sensitive individual is an accomplished fact. This is not a challenge which the present-day African welcomes with the glad cry of a black Rastignac, "A nous deux, maintenant!", rather he accepts it with resignation and a profound sense of loss. Conditioned since childhood to see himself as part of a larger community--the family, the clan, the tribe--he is disabled and disoriented by the break-up of these units which have not yet been replaced by the greater unit of urban community, state or nation. It is an identity crisis which the massive and impersonal machinery of modern materialism cannot alleviate. Iyoni realizes that he has only himself to fall back on, and self-reliance is not necessarily a virtue in an African context:

. . . maintenant, au moins, je sais que dans la joie comme dans l'adversité, il ne faut compter que sur soi-même. La difficulté est de garder sa foi en l'homme, c'est-à-dire d'être bon tout en sachant qu'il ne faut pas compter sur autrui. C'est là, je pense, toute l'école de la vie! La vie en somme! (p. 57)

This terrifying isolation is even worse because it is imposed by conditions created not by some outside power like colonialism, but by Africans within their own society. In the novel this theme is

incarnated in the person of Nkilviagah, the self-serving politician and bureaucrat, a supposed friend of Iyoni. Evembé paints the excesses of the bureaucracy grimly, without a whit of humor.

Where is the dream now of l'innocence nègre? What has become of the spirituality of Africa which was to be a message to the world?

Ecoeurant! C'est dur de boire la lie qui est au fond de la vie, vraiment dur. Nos ancêtres étaient-ils comme cela? Quelle est cette espérance que l'Afrique apportait au monde? Que l'Africain avait en lui, que le Noir incarnait? Comment fera-t-on pour le reconnaître en soi d'abord et pour l'imposer à l'humanité ensuite si chaque jour on doit vivre avec des gens comme Nkilviagah, ou pires que lui? (pp. 59-60)

In the new order, racism has become classism, and a different kind of prejudice has established barriers between human beings.

Given a job in the Ministry of Tourism, Iyoni observes the hierarchy of privilege which extends from the Minister on down to the planton. And when he himself is finally named attaché de cabinet, a well-salaried post, he is all of a sudden surrounded by "friends" because he has, in their view, "arrived."

But it is too late for Iyoni, who was already well advanced along his chemin de croix, to accomplish his mission here on earth. The selfish forces of the new gods of Africa: carelessness, inefficiency, indifference, indignity and inhumanity, had conspired to isolate him and alienate him forever from those whom he wished to serve:

Tout ce qu'il voulait dans la vie, c'était montrer aux hommes que la valeur morale vaut bien mieux que tous les diplômes réunis; que malgré les spectres mouvants, insaisissables, les silhouettes

irr\u00e9elles, ind\u00e9termin\u00e9es du tableau que pr\u00e9sente la vie, l'homme a une mission ici-bas et que cette mission s'appelle la bont\u00e9.  
(p. 64)

This evangelical tone is, it must be noted, rare in the French-African novel. But Cameroonians, even when they treat the theme of evangelization satirically, as in the novels of Mongo Beti, have always displayed a genuine comprehension of and sympathy for the message of the Evangile. The humanism of true Christianity, represented by the spirit of the Beatitudes and not by the misguided missionizing of that witless companion to colonial Administration, the Church, has been honestly appreciated. And many writers, like Evemb\u00e9, recognize that it is the loss of all Mankind that the message of love one another has not been heeded:

Il y en a encore un que la terre et les hommes voudraient ignorer, c'est un pauvre nazar\u00e9en, clochard qui, para\u00eff-il, avait la force de soulever des foules, de marcher sur l'eau, de faire taire ou parler le ciel, d'appara\u00effre et de dispara\u00effre, de MOURIR, de RESSUSCITER. Il \u00e9tait venu sur la terre, en passant, apporter quelque chose, que les gens s'acharnent \u00e0 vouloir perdre.  
Dommage! (p. 97)

It should by now be redundant to point out the didacticism which is inherent in every African novel. It is impossible, at least in the present stage of African writing, simply to tell a good story. There must be a lesson somewhere, and so we won't forget to look for it. Evemb\u00e9 leaves us with a last rhetorical question, "Iyoni est mort. Mais les probl\u00e8mes qu'il se posait ont-ils trouv\u00e9 un d\u00e9but de solution?" (p. 111). The effect of this is to detract from the ghastly final scene of his solitary death and to diminish somewhat the pity we feel for his



isolation. It turns the poor young man into a symbol with a message and it is just this feature of the African novel of French expression which impoverishes characterization. Characters become either stereotypes or caricatures. This gives a certain purity to the intrigue since they always behave true to form. Iyoni is the solitary voyager on a lonely quest in hostile seas. Another such hero is Kossia in Violent était le vent who also in his native land, "tente de trouver une solution aux problèmes posés par le temps nouveau..." (preface, p. 8).

## 2. Violent était le vent

Also published in 1966, this is the work of an Ivorian, Charles Nokan, who has chosen to live in exile in Paris rather than to confront the compromise with the revolutionary ideal which contemporary life in the Ivory Coast represented for him. Violent était le vent was Nokan's second work to be published by Présence Africaine. The first, Le soleil noir point, which was written in 1959 and appeared in 1962, was a literary creation of uncertain, or at least mixed, genre. In a series of 64 short tableaux the themes of love, hate, rebellion, hope and despair were presented through the medium of letters, dreams, poems, narrative descriptions and dialogues, all of a generally autobiographical nature. Robert Pageard says of the work, "Le soleil noir point est l'expression d'un romantisme juvénile, au langage boursoufflé, que l'Europe goûta au siècle dernier et dont elle

est lasse."<sup>12</sup> The question which may of course be asked is did he, in fact, wish to write for this bored European public? And it may have been comments similar to Pageard's (which itself appeared subsequent to the publication of Violent était le vent) that led Nokan to explain both his aim and his technique in the preface to his new work. The genre is that of the novel, but one, we are told, which obeys "l'esthétique baoulée"<sup>13</sup>:

Chez nous, la danse satisfait à la fois l'ouïe et la vue grâce à son pouvoir de faire apparaître les beaux masques, de répandre les chants.

J'ai tenté ici de mêler la poésie à la prose à la musique pour ressusciter les voix des tamtams qui ont bercé mon enfance... (pp. 8-9)

The theme is a familiar one, that of the development of an individual who sees his hopes for a better future dashed by the emergence of a dictatorship which only continues the exploitation of the masses begun by colonialism. The manner of treatment of this

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<sup>12</sup>Pageard, Littérature négro-africaine, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup>The Baoulé, or Baule as it is written in English, are an ethnic group of the Ivory Coast. Their dance masks are among the most imaginative and expressive of all African sculpture. The masks were meant to be seen in motion, in the ritual dances when the wearers of the masks were believed to be flooded by forces which came from the spirits the masks represented. Baule masks, along with those of the Dan, Senufo and Fang peoples of West Africa caused a sensation when they first appeared in Paris in the early 1900's. Their stylized forms were instantly admired by experimental artists such as Picasso and influenced Cubism.

theme rather than the theme itself is what holds our attention, for the structure is unique among the novels represented in this study. In a style which recalls that of Le soleil noir point, Nokan mixes poetry with prose and first person narrative. The novel is divided into five prose parts, preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue in verse. Of unequal length, the prose parts are themselves divided into scenes, impressions, descriptions, reflections, dialogues and tableaux cut occasionally by poetic fragments or the chant of a griot. The whole effect is one of ritualized movement. The characters have no personality which comes alive and develops. Rather they move like masked dancers with the rhythm of the drums, either frenzied or deliberate. They join the dance for a time, play out the role personified by the mask they wear, and then fade back into the circle of darkness from which the author has called them. Thus Kôtiboh the Dictator:

Le soir tombait. Assis, Kôtiboh remontait les vagues anciennes de sa vie. Il se rappelait son enfance, les esclaves de ses parents, le visage de son grand-père labouré par le temps, l'arrivée des Blancs, la guerre contre ces derniers...

Kôtiboh, après de brillantes études, dirigea maintes écoles primaires. Puis, il succéda, sur la trône, à son père défunt. Les Blancs firent de lui un chef de tribu. La nuit vint. L'esprit de Kôtiboh se promenait, non sans tristesse, dans ce temps disparu. (p. 85)

The language, it will be seen at once, is simple to the point of abstraction. The short, direct, transitive sentences which carry the action, the intransitive verbs which set the scene ("Le soir tombait",

"La nuit vint"), are characteristic. But the very essence of the novel is one of realism which seems to be at variance with its multi-genre structure. This is, however, realism in the African sense, where no distinction is made between "real" and "unreal" modes of expression. All art represents a form of "reality" and all art is both symbolic and didactic. The confrontation which Nokan presents in Violent était le vent is a realistic one reduced (or one might say enlarged) to its symbolic dimensions: "Kôtiboh représente le passé qui résiste, avec une force infernale, à la jeune Afrique; Kossia et ses camarades sont les flambeaux du présent " (Preface, p. 9).

Now let us examine the development of this theme to see how the portrayal of the crisis of the individual, in this case, Kossia, is accomplished on the various levels of "l'esthétique baoulée."

The prologue is a short poem which first salutes the martyrs of the African revolution, "Biadou, Zaguie, Lumumba, /Ruben Um Nyobé, Mounié, Fabia, /vous tous qui êtes morts pour notre patrie, /j'ai trempé ma plume dans votre sang pour écrire/ce livre " (p. 13); affirms solidarity with all the people who suffer; and in a peroration acclaims the future of Africa: "Bonjour Afrique aux visages multiples, /Afrique unifiée. / Que la voix de ton tam-tam/réveille les paresseux et/annonce les temps nouveaux!" (p. 14).

Kossia the Hero comes on in the first part in his child's mask. He is with his mother, with his father, with the other children around

the fire. The rhythms are happy, the sounds harmonious: "Les enfants en savaient gré aux parents, à la tribu protectrice, généreuse; ils respectaient les personnes âgées, les sages, ils leur obéissaient " (p. 27). But the idyll was short and the child's universe enlarged to encompass the ambiguities of white civilization and the Christian religion, the curious satisfactions of school and an idealized love.

In the second part, Kossia is joined by Djahah the Friend on "le chemin de leurs destinées"--that long road of exile to France on which so many heroes of African novels before Kossia had embarked. The studies were prolonged, and the crisis of the évolué, that alienation of mind and body forced by a university curriculum and a white sweetheart, declared itself:

L'image poétique que j'avais gardé de mon Afrique mourait; je percevais le changement du paysage humain, la prosaïsation de mes rêves. Comment l'être nouveau qui m'habite regardera-t-il cette réalité? Vivrai-je comme un étranger dans mon propre pays? (p. 58)

Djahah, in taking a white wife, succumbs to permanent exile, but Kossia never loses sight of the fact that "nous étions venus voler une partie de la lumière des Blancs pour la projeter sur notre peuple. . ." (p. 50). To remain in Europe is a form of betrayal:

Djahah, mon ami, tu n'as pas confiance en ton peuple, tu ne crois pas qu'il puisse s'émanciper. Tu te francises exagérément. Quant à moi, je dois lutter pour la vraie liberté de l'homme qui attend les siècles d'amour. Et les peuples chanteront et danseront ensemble. Et la paix sera la maîtresse du monde. (p. 49)

So Kossia ends "la partie bourgeoise" of his existence in order to

begin his "nouvelle plongée dans la misère africaine." (p. 69).

These themes which are by now commonplace in the African novel of French expression are treated by Nokan in as spare a form as possible. The chapters, or natural divisions since they are not numbered as chapters, of each of the first two parts rarely exceed two pages each. The narrative is a first person récit, and where dialogue is used, it is linked directly, without any intervening indication of the speaker. The reader must make the transitions:

[...]--Je ne vois pas le monde comme toi.  
 La misère divise les hommes...  
 --Oublie tout cela, mon ami, aimons-nous et soyons heureux.  
 --J'ai mon peuple, la race des misérables à défendre.  
 --Ton peuple sera le mien.  
 --Pourras-tu quitter ton pays? Arriveras-tu à modifier ta mentalité?  
 --Je te suivrai partout; je vivrai avec toi dans le désert le plus aride.  
 --Aux riches le désert... Nous les pauvres, nous adorons les plaines.  
 --Tais-toi. Prends-moi. (p. 55)

The stripped-down style of the dialogue, like that of the narrative, reduces the text to its bare essentials, so that the conversation between Liliane, a latter day Ruth, and Kossia, has the call-and-response rhythm typical of African chants or songs.

Another mask moves to the center in the third part. It is Kôtiboh the Dictator, and the mood changes from one of nostalgic melancholy to one of bitter denunciation. Divided into 16 brief numbered chapters of a page or two at most, the third part recounts

the rise to power of a black demagogue. It is likely that this was meant to be an attack on Houphouët-Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast, so Nokan's exile in Paris may be as much a matter of political expediency as of voluntary disaffection. But the criticism is intended equally to hit all of the new political leaders whose bourgeois pretensions lead them to act and live like Europeans while the misery of the masses increases. Resisting the route of African socialism, they have become collaborators with white neo-colonialism and exploiters of their "frères noirs." This at least is the mask worn by Kôtiboh, whose rise from deputy to president through the struggle for independence is assured as he adroitly manages to turn everything to his advantage and operate the creation of a personnage mythique. He leaves the scene to the accompaniment of a typical praise song intoned by a griot:

Celui que nous attendons est arrivé  
 Ecoutez sa voix salvatrice;  
 regardez notre Sauveur.  
 Comme il est noble!  
 Gloire à Kôtiboh!  
 Guide éclairé, nous vous remercions,  
 nous vous souhaitons une très longue vie  
 afin que vous brisiez les chaînes  
 de tous les pauvres.  
 Gloire au grand Kôtiboh! (p. 110)

The fourth part, in seven short pages, describes the world of his childhood village as Kossia found it on his return: "C'était un monde inerte, un monde de misère permanente. Ce présent

ressemblait à un assez récent passé. " (p. 117). Hope has been dissipated, the sense of community is evaporating, resignation has taken the place of the will to resist. Kossia the Man vows to fight the stagnation which has gripped his people and reintegrate them in the collective dance:

La danse la plus exaltante, c'est celle qui réunit maintes gens.

La chanson la plus agréable est chantée pour tous.

Les paroles destinées à tout le monde ont un sens profond.

La vie solitaire n'a que l'ombre pour parure.

La chanson sublime est écoutée par tous.

(p. 120)

In the fifth part the movement of the masks becomes more frantic. Kossia is joined by Samois the Revolutionary and a group of Friends who will carry out the transformation of society. They are engaged in a class struggle which will eliminate the inequities of existence and bring justice and peace to all people. The naïve goal of their clandestine organization: "Nous désirons à la fois une Afrique laborieuse et une Afrique joyeuse où tout le monde puisse danser . . ." (p. 139). The fifth part is composed of 33 tableaux which like a stylized pantomime trace the final crisis of Kossia. His agony and apotheosis is so full of Christian symbolism that it seems hardly likely it could be coincidental. Nokan has not explained how that fits into "l'esthétique baoulée," but it is possible to assume that like Evembé he is so haunted by the image of the Christ figure



as the saviour of Mankind that the death and transfiguration of his hero follow naturally from the child Kossia's first encounter with the Christian message:

On me raconta que jadis un bébé naquit dans une étable; devenu grand, il aima tous les hommes; ceux--ci le tuèrent parce qu'il les gênait. Mais il nia la mort en ressuscitant. Il s'envola, tel un oiseau et rejoignit son père au ciel, laissant sur la terre une grande famille... Je voulus ressembler à Jésus. (p. 29)

Arrested and jailed as a political prisoner, following a betrayal by one of his group, Kossia undergoes the suffering and humiliation, temptation to save himself, renunciation, trial, judgment and condemnation to death that echo the Passion of Christ. Crucifixion being too barbaric even for the new Romans of Africa, Kossia meets his death more in the manner of Saint Sebastian, being shot with poisoned arrows. The tableau of his execution has a certain austere grandeur which the technique of the unfleshed sentence accentuates:

On me deshabilé. A présent, je suis entièrement nu. Des deux mains, les femmes se couvrent le visage. On donne l'ordre. Les flèches partent et je tombe. J'en ai trois dans les cuisses, six aux jambes, deux dans le cou, une dans l'oeil gauche. L'autre oeil contemple les pleurs d'Amakos.

Le poison brûle ma chair. Le vide commence à descendre dans ma tête alourdie. 'Je vous aime tous. Je vous demande de lutter pour un monde meilleur, une existence plus sereine et plus belle.

'Camarades, la victoire est à nous, à vous; courage! courage! courage!' (p. 160)

The récit of Kossia is at this point taken up by Samois, who swears a kind of symbolic resurrection for the martyr: ". . . tu

resteras, pour tes camarades, un compagnon plus vivant qu'eux-mêmes " (p. 161). The tableaux which complete the fifth part join the masks in a slow-motion dance of sadness and mourning for the fallen hero:

Tam-Tams trouant  
le silence du soir,  
tambours africains  
ayant le langage  
des lagunes lascives,  
danses ne prenant fin  
qu'au premier chant du coucou,  
comme m'est doux votre souvenir!  
Tristesse sans cesse noyée  
dans la joie renaissante,  
musique bien-aimée,  
vous évoquez à la fois  
la brume et la lueur de mon coeur. (Tableau XXX,  
p. 172)

The last message is hope. In the poem of the Epilogue, Nokan passes in review all the old themes of the Negritude poets: Africa the terre natale, slavery, the glories of the past, colonization, revolt, fraternity and solidarity of the oppressed, in the manner of Aimé Césaire and Jacques Roumain. The image of the dawn should guarantee that Kossia's sacrifice has significance and that the period of disillusionment and despair will pass: "Nous marcherons dans la nuit dense / vers une aurore inouïe " (p. 178).

This is a difficult novel to classify. Is it a novel of social reform? Its message, though somewhat obscured by its unusual form, would seem to indicate so. It also has elements of the psychological novel in its examination of the rise to power of Kôtiboh. Kossia's

own selfless motivations are never quite as convincingly explained, and he remains a shadowy figure, as befits a martyr. The socio-psychological novel found its best representative of the period in a novel which was published a year after Violent était le vent, and which we shall examine next.

### 3. La plaie

A poet before he was a novelist, Malick Fall of Senegal continues the line of poets and writers from that country who tied the most African of impressions and aspirations to a fluent and innovative treatment of French as the language of expression. La plaie, published in 1967, places the author "à la limite de la poésie et du récit"<sup>14</sup>, a category in which the characteristic technique and style have come generally to be regarded as very African. Charles Nokan is the best example we have so far seen of this Africanization of the novel form. The structure of Malick Fall's novel is however far different from that of Violent était le vent. There is no deliberate shift of genre to intrude on the reader's involvement with the intrigue. Characters are no longer ritualized, although they remain, in a sense, symbolic. Their lives and concerns are painted realistically and in depth. In the case of the hero, especially, we are plunged into the examination of an état d'âme which makes this novel a benchmark

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<sup>14</sup>Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, p. 31.

in the development of the psychological novel. It may be seen, as Mohamadou Kane of the University of Dakar pointed out,<sup>15</sup> as a transitional work, a survival of the roman engagé in which the deepening of personal themes marks a new orientation toward the development of the roman de l'individu. The social tendencies of the novel of reform are present, but the major themes have to do with the problems of the individual: failure, solitude, exile, suicide, despair, the search for fraternity. The investigation of the inner crises of the hero is accomplished through the device of the interior monologue and the dédoublement of his personality to produce a false dialogue. Malick Fall has been well served by his poet's sensitivity to the tragic condition in which the outcast of the modern world finds himself. The symbol of the wound is explicit.

La plaie is divided into two parts, a simple structure corresponding to two pivotal aspects of the hero's life: prison and liberty. The action takes place in and around N'Dar (Saint Louis), chiefly in the colorful and animated market. Magamou, "l'homme-à-la-plaie," is the clochard of the market who lives by thieving and whose disagreeable presence is only barely tolerated by the market women. Magamou is divided between a sense of isolation from society, which

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<sup>15</sup>In a personal interview, August 23, 1973; see also "L'actualité de la littérature africaine d'expression française" by M. Kane (Présence africaine, special number, 1971).

has become a perverse source of satisfaction to him, and the need to belong which makes him seek small tokens of his membership in the race of human beings:

A y bien réfléchir, je ne commettais pas ces larcins par nécessité, ni par vice. C'était un des subterfuges auxquels j'avais recours pour m'introduire dans la société. En parlant de moi, en se plaignant de moi, elles reconnaissaient mon existence, m'acceptaient en quelque sorte. De mon côté, en grillant le reste du tabac qu'elles avaient fumé, en mangeant un morceau de poisson pêché par leur mari, je me sentais plus près des hommes. (p. 50-51)

In the first part, Dr. Bernardy, Magamou's adversary, has ordered his arrest, and Magamou is locked up among the madmen in the prison. Bernardy, the white doctor, is a die-hard old colonial motivated more by sadistic than by humanistic instincts, who has adjusted badly to independence. His role is that of the (symbolic) torturer. In prison, Magamou reviews his past life, how he left his native village, the truck accident in which he received the wound which became the festering and malodorous sore in his leg, his arrival in N'Dar where the only niche he could find was among the other "bêtes rôdeuses" of the market:

Avoir quitté mon village dans l'espoir de m'accomplir et en être réduit à vivoter, attentif aux seuls instincts animaux! Avoir entr'ouvert les portes du paradis! Me voici voué au dessèchement et à la flétrissure. Je ne suis désormais qu'un mort en sursis. (p. 49)

The only living creatures who could stand him, it seemed, were the starving dogs which slunk around the market and the vermin that

infested his body. But Magamou recognized that his isolation made it possible for him to fulfill an essential role in the society of men:

"J'étais la proie de l'ironie, de l'énervement, de l'agressivité.

J'étais le souffre-douleur du marché " (p. 50). Thus Magamou did

not entirely despair until his imprisonment cut him off from even

this tenuous contact. Unable to bear this enforced alienation, Magamou manages to escape.

In the second part the themes of freedom and solidarity are interwoven with those of solitude and exile. Magamou returns for a time to the market but fear obliges him to remain hidden and eventually drives him into exile. Through the intervention of a Moslem holy man who takes pity on him, Magamou has his wound healed. Transformed, he returns to the society of the market, but no one will believe it is actually he, Magamou, the "maître-fou du marché." Even his dogs avoid him. The isolation of the individual who has lost his role in the collectivity is complete. He tells himself:

Ton isolement est total. Même si les hommes te réintégraient dans leur propre univers, tu passerais encore inaperçu, insignifiant, anonyme. Au cours de ta promenade au marché, rappelle-toi, nul ne s'était inquiété de ta présence: tu étais une fourmi parmi d'autres. Cela t'avait fait mal... Avoue que tu avais été gâté avec ta plaie. Tu avais été, à ta façon, le centre de toutes choses. Tu avais intéressé tous ces vauriens, las de leur ennui. Voilà. Et maintenant? Tu perds tout intérêt: tu es une goutte d'eau dans le marigot. Il te manque tes titres de noblesse: ta plaie, ta vermine et ta puanteur. (pp. 171-172)

The idea of suicide obsesses him. Rare in the African novel

of French expression, the theme of suicide represents a last resource for characters who have been tried beyond all capacity to endure by an alienation from life and society which they feel is complete and without recourse. Ousmane Sembène has used the theme in two short stories, Véhi Ciosane and La Noire de...; the death of Samba Diallo in Kane's L'aventure ambiguë is a kind of metaphysical suicide; characters commit suicide in Socé's Mirages de Paris, Malonga's Coeur d'Aryenne and Bhêly-Quénou's Un piège sans fin. Magamou's first attempt at suicide is symbolic of the role he had assigned himself in society: he lets himself be beaten almost to death in a brawl. The effort is foiled, however, and Magamou is saved and restored to health by Dr. Baillet, the young and idealistic head doctor of the hospital who has a more compassionate notion of his calling than Dr. Bernardy. The contradictions of Magamou's behavior becomes an idée fixe for Bernardy. All his certitudes are shaken by Magamou's obsession with suicide at a moment when his reintegration into life seemed possible. Dr. Baillet reflects on the meaning of this bizarre conduct:

--Sombre et extraordinaire destin que celui de ce malade, Il nous force à regarder au dedans de nous-mêmes, à ramener à la surface nos cloaques, à nous mépriser. Si vous comprenez le sénégalais!...

--Je ne suis plus sûr de rien, reconnut Bernardy.

--Le courage est de remettre en cause nos certitudes. Mais qui l'aura, ce courage. . . ? (p. 211)

Magamou's persistent efforts to kill himself all fail. The anguish of his isolation is so great that at last he determines to effect

a "retour à la vie". With a knife, he butchers his leg at the place of his old wound and collapses before the astonished eyes of the market people.

The pitiful fate of Magamou, the vagabond philosopher, is symbolic of all suffering in the world and the psychologic need that there be a sort of symbiotic relationship between sufferers and those less badly off. In his study of Alienation, Fall has also pinpointed the absolute need of all men for some individualizing characteristic, even if it is a festering wound, which will relate them to a specific role in society. The deeper significance of the novel is to portray the role of Africa in the world--to make the rest of the world look within itself, to question its certitudes. On another level, Magamou's suffering may symbolically refer to Africa itself and to the aspirations of nationalism and self-determination in the modern world raised by the independence movement and subsequently thwarted or disappointed. If so, this is indeed a bitter and pessimistic outlook reflecting the disillusionment characteristic of the late 60's. Indifference and hostility rather than solidarity and brotherhood are the fate of all the walking wounded of the modern world.

In the next novel, the essential theme is again the individual's need to belong, to be accepted, to devote oneself. The symbol of a visible wound is replaced by that of a wound which is invisible and thus more terrible: sterility.



4. La palabre stérile

A dramatist and radio-television journalist, Gaston-Guy Bikouta-Menga (Guy Menga) of Congo-Brazzaville, published his first novel in 1968. He thus joins the growing list of African writers in French whose first novels have also been their only novels.<sup>16</sup> La palabre stérile was awarded the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1969, which only attests to the lack of competition, for this is a flawed book. From a Western critical standard, the style is generally awkward and stiff, the characters are wooden, the action is discontinuous and the contrived end is too abrupt and unreal a dénouement. In spite of these defects, the novel presents a certain interest for a study of the development of the African novel of French expression. The theme of the individual's place in society and the nature of his participation in the transcendent goals of the group relate this novel to Sur la terre en passant, Violent était le vent and La plaie. Alienation and exile result when the individual does not conform to the norms, and this causes crisis and suffering in the victim. In La palabre stérile the physical problem of the hero's supposed sterility represents both his symbolic alienation from the community and his very real exclusion

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<sup>16</sup>This is not intended as a criticism. The novelists' vocation is not a particularly lucrative one in Africa where the lack of both public and publisher makes writing for a living precarious at best. René Philombé and Ousmane Sembène are the only "professional" writers included in our study, and even Sembène has turned to other things.

from the lignage of the ancestors. Sterility cuts the bonds which link the present with the past and guarantee the future. The sterile individual is not to be pitied but reviled because he represents a break in the great chain of being which is the clan's source of vitality.

Menga's novel is also indicative of another trend begun with Cette Afrique-là, that of developing events in the life of the hero along with events of recent African history. The novel begins around 1937 or 1938 in French Equatorial Africa and ends in post-independence Brazzaville, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It tells the story of Vouata, exiled from his village for having shown grief at the death of his father who was poisoned during the "séance d'épuration," called Nkassa, when he succumbed to the "poison d'épreuve."<sup>17</sup> Vouata finds a friend, Sita, in town with whom he stays for a while until he can establish himself in a job as a "pousseur." Eventually he marries Loutaya, but their childlessness is a cause of conflict. When she announces that she is at last going to have a child, Loutaya leaves her husband, claiming that Vouata is not the father. The affair is brought before the Chief, Kitengué. Loutaya accuses Vouata of sterility and names Malonga (who had helped Vouata after an accident with his

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<sup>17</sup>In some African societies, a purification ceremony would be held periodically to exorcise evil influences. Those accused of malefic trafficking would be subjected to a trial by poison. If they survived they were innocent; if they succumbed, their guilt was proved and thus also punished.

"pousse-pousse") as the father of her child. In an effort to bring some sense of meaning to his life, Vouata begins to frequent Massiota and becomes associated with the matswanistes, the cult of André Matswa, martyr of the pre-independence freedom-fighters. Arrested and exiled to Chad, Vouata remains there for fifteen years. After independence he is freed and repatriated with his son, a boy of six years who is revealed to him in a coup de théâtre as he is about to leave and whom the niece of his guard bore him, all unknown to Vouata! More surprises await him when he returns to Brazzaville to fall into the arms of his elder son (by Loutaya--her accusation was false) and his daughter (by a young woman he met with the matswanistes). Happy at last, the myth of his sterility exploded, Vouata is reintegrated into society.

The crisis of the individual faced with rejection and humiliation is the central theme of the novel, and the essential point is that the individual without some allegiance to a larger concern than self has no lasting claim on existence. In devoting himself to the cause of the matswanistes, Vouata is seeking to compensate for the sterility which has alienated him from the traditional family unit:

Ainsi donc tout n'était pas perdu. Il pouvait encore trouver de la famille. Une famille au sein de laquelle il ne ressentirait peut-être pas la même chaude affection, la même prévenance, mais une famille quand même. Lui, vomé et haï par les siens, abandonné par sa femme, mis en quarantaine par la société, il pouvait encore, s'il le voulait, connaître la joie de partager son allégresse et sa souffrance avec d'autres. Et puis s'offrir corps et âme à la cause de la patrie n'était-ce pas se rendre aussi utile à celle-ci qu'un homme qui l'enrichirait d'un être

humain de plus? Pourquoi ne le ferait-il pas? De cette manière peut-être oublierait-il son passé. Son corps, inutile tas de chair, servirait-il peut-être à quelque chose. (pp. 115-116)

Needing to feel himself a useful member of society, Vouata becomes an engagé. Isolation and alienation threaten again when he arrives one evening late at the cult's temple to find that the others have been rounded up and arrested. Crying "Mes amis, attendez-moi. Ne me laissez pas. Je dois mourir avec vous, pour Matswa, pour le pays! Attendez-moi! . . .", he rushes off to the police station and demands to be joined to the others.

The novel incorporates a number of scenes dealing with traditional life, black/white relations, colonization, marriage and family customs. By and large the treatment is banal and offers no new approach to the themes of African life which have become the stock of the novel. One effect of style, however, merits a closer look. Several lengthy sections are devoted to the palabre which is used to regulate affairs between the characters. This device in the African novel is itself, according to Professor W. Umezina of the University of Zaïre, a superimposed creation. He studied the palabre in the works of Oyono, Beti, Sembène, and some of the anglophone novelists, and concludes that:

En même temps que le romancier développe [ses] thèmes il crée quelques personnages qui participent avec lui à la création artistique. Ils s'occupent principalement de prolonger la durée du roman en faisant du discours... leur palabre [...] est une véritable création qui vient de superposer à la structure du

roman.<sup>18</sup>

The palabre has played a social role in African society for centuries. Each participant is allowed to express himself freely and openly in the course of the discussion. There is no abridgment of the right to speak. Repetition, rhetoric and digression contribute to what Professor Umezina calls their "caractère non-linéaire et cyclique." That the palabre occupies an important place in Menga's novel is already indicated by the title. Pages are devoted to seemingly fruitless discussion which do little to advance the action. The novelist has abandoned, for a time, "la pensée linéaire" in order to present as many different facets of an element of the situation as possible. Vouata's banishment from the village and his break with Loutaya are accomplished in scenes of a traditional palabre. Even his dealings with a Haoussa trader, his affiliation with the Matswanists and his release from prison are advanced through a kind of palabre. The technique is quite different from that of the standard dialogue and imparts a fresh and very African aspect of realism to the novel.

Menga's work confirms in a decisive way the trend which others have noted "towards a more attentive and more immediate concern

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<sup>18</sup>Wilberforce A. Umezina, "La palabre comme création superposé dans le roman africain", paper presented to the 13th Congress of the International Federation of Modern Languages and Literatures in Sydney, Australia, August 1975. I am indebted to Professor Umezina for a mimeographed copy of his as yet unpublished paper.

with the African world seen, as it were, on its own terms, and almost exclusively from the inside."<sup>19</sup>

Social realism of the period of disillusionment was not just concerned with the crisis of the individual, however. Four very different and dramatic novels take up the theme with attention focusing on the crisis of the collectivity.

### Crisis of the collectivity

The collective experience underwent great upheavals with the arrival of the Europeans in Africa and subsequent colonization. Even greater upheavals shook the foundations of society in the days after independence as governments tried to forge a national identity. Crumbling social structures were operating an alienation within the collectivity to which the people seemed either indifferent or resigned. The collective enthusiasm of Les bouts de bois de Dieu had dissipated and the dream of a united Africa was fading. Alarmed at the indications of complacency that he saw around him, "le romancier devient plus conscient de sa responsabilité envers le peuple; il se conduit en porte-parole de ses désillusions et de ses peurs."<sup>20</sup> It was time also for a new objectivity. No longer could literature remain, in the terms of

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<sup>19</sup>Irele, West Africa, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup>Anozie, Sociologie du roman africain, p. 225.

Yambo Ouologuem, "la littérature du 'bon sauvage', du gentil, frais et naïf 'y'a bon banania'--littérature de folklore ou de tirailleurs, ou d'écoliers appliqués..."<sup>21</sup> The writer had the duty not only to create "la réalite africain," but to express "la vérité africaine," however painful and demythifying that may be. His responsibility was to "faire sortir le peuple de la torpeur."<sup>22</sup> Free to work within his own concept of artistic creation, the novelist nevertheless felt the obligation of this responsibility. The four we shall now consider are as different as possible in style, form and manner of expression, yet they are related in their concern for the crisis of the collectivity.

#### 1. Dramouss

Laye Camara's third novel appeared in 1966, 12 years after Le regard du roi. Depending on which critic one prefers, Dramouss is either Camara's best or his weakest novel. It is, at any rate, his most enigmatic. In a work which combines flights of poetic imagination with passages in which the didactic prose resembles rather more a political tract, the Guinean author paints a picture of the disaffection of his society from the dream which African liberation represented. The real and the surreal are blended in such a manner as to encompass at once the actual present, the mysticism of the occult and the

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<sup>21</sup>Yambo Ouologuem, "Situation de la littérature africaine," France-Eurafrique, 199 (October 1968): 27.

<sup>22</sup>Kimoni, Destin de la littérature négro-africaine, p. 228.

supernatural, and the symbolism of the vision. In accomplishing this tour de force Camara makes use of the first person narration, the souvenir, the chant of the griot, the palabre, and the dream. Although the language of the conversations in the novel has been called "stiff, " "wooden, " "unlikely, " and "unreal, "<sup>23</sup> the language with which Camara expresses his nostalgia and his vision, the language which he uses in describing the color of the African scene or the beauty of the African woman, is vividly real and picturesque:

La mer semblait en fureur; la marée montait et les vagues, comme des béliers blancs, galopèrent vers nous et venaient, avec un bruit d'orage dans la forêt, s'écraser contre le rivage. Après s'être fracassé contre les roches, ce grondement se transformait en mille petits bruits, lesquels, au fur et à mesure que les vagues les transportaient loin du rivage, se dissolvaient et se fondaient dans une symphonie pastorale, avec ses balafons, ses coras, ses flûtes et ses tam-tams. (p. 26)

Here the style is light. Local color and a restrained vocabulary endow the scene with the fresh quality of a watercolor seascape. A ponderous style and unnatural language are characteristic of the dialogues or passages in the novel where the author is too obviously trying to emphasize a point or impart information of a didactic nature; then the intent is to show an example, to teach rather than to please by the beauty of language or image.

With Dramouss we return to the autobiography which Camara began in L'enfant noir. Fatoman, the hero, is the "dark child" who,

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<sup>23</sup>Olney, Tell me, Africa: An Approach to African Literature, p. 148.



having gone to Europe to study, returns after six years to witness the painful disintegration of the stable society he had known as a boy. Old values have been replaced by empty political mouthings just as the carefully fashioned works of the artisans have been replaced by the pacotille of the Lebanese traders. It is all camelote, a cheap imitation of the real thing. Fatoman foresees disaster:

La vengeance du Ciel nous menaçait. D'où le pourrissement commençant de notre vie artisanale et de notre vie sociale, d'où le braillement frénétique que je venais d'entendre et ces rugissements de maisons de fous, au moyen desquels on prétendait éduquer une société qui ne demande qu'à manger et à vivre en paix... (p. 187)

The structure of the novel can be divided rather naturally into three parts. The first recounts Fatoman's return to Guinea, the changes he finds in Conakry, his reunion with Mimie, his childhood sweetheart, and their return to Kouroussa, Fatoman's native village. The second part is composed of Fatoman's recollections, during "une nuit blanche," of his years in Paris. The picture is a familiar one and its themes will continue to fill African novels as long as there are African students in Europe and sensitive writers to recount their years of alienation and exile: the cold, loneliness, impersonality of the city difficulties with studies, misery and impoverishment, moments of happiness and friendship, and always in the background the haunting dream of Africa. The third part introduces the new theme, that of the alienation which is threatening an entire society. In Kouroussa Fatoman becomes aware of how deeply the changes which are at work

within society have penetrated. His artisan father is no longer called on to sculpt the totems of the clan as did his ancestors, but to turn out wooden deer for the tourist trade. The time when sculpture had a ritual meaning has vanished. As he explains to Fatoman,

C'était un temps où la biche qui surgissait sous l'herminette servait au culte, à la magie. Un temps où le forgeron-sculpteur était sorcier, était prêtre, et où il exerçait plus qu'une pure activité artisanale, par le fait d'un art qui était constamment en relation avec le feu, pour la fusion du minerai, d'abord, pour le travail du métal, ensuite. L'arme qui sortait de ses mains était une arme qui blessait non pas seulement parce qu'elle est tranchante et bien maniée, mais parce que le pouvoir lui avait été accordé de blesser et de trancher. La houe du paysan n'était pas seulement l'outil qui remuait la terre, mais le talisman qui commandait à la terre et à la moisson. (p. 166)

Impotence and lack of control had also entered political life in Guinea, as Fatoman finds out during a visit to an evening meeting of the Comité du Parti. Disgusted with the vainglorious palabre he has just heard, he cries:

. . . il faudra un jour que quelqu'un dénonce tous ces mensonges. Il faudra dire que si la colonisation, vilipendée par ce comité, a été un mal pour notre pays, le régime que vous êtes en train d'y introduire sera, lui, une catastrophe, dont les méfaits s'étendront sur des dizaines d'années. Il faudra dire qu'un régime qui se bâtit dans le sang, par les soins des incendiaires de cases et de maisons, n'est qu'un régime d'anarchie et de dictature, un régime fondé sur la violence, et que détruira la violence. (p. 185)

Renewing his experience with Africa, Fatoman finds himself "a stranger looking at a world he knows imperfectly."<sup>24</sup> The scene

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<sup>24</sup>Hans Zell and Helene Silver, A Reader's Guide to African Literature (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1971), p. 152.

has become almost totally alien. A society is in the process of creation which Fatoman fears will repudiate every element of tradition, every standard of honest behavior, every vestige of mutual respect and fraternal love. The themes which Camara deals with here reflect the novelist's disenchantment with the Africa of the future he apprehends. He feels with Fatoman that the world of the dark child is betrayed by any show of compromise with the new regime:

Chose étrange, jamais, autant que ce soir-là, je n'avais senti et compris combien j'étais un homme divisé. Mon être, je m'en rendais compte, était la somme de deux 'moi' intimes; le premier, plus proche de mon sens de la vie, façonné par mon existence traditionnelle d'animiste faiblement teinté d'islamisme, enrichi par la culture française, combattait le second, personnage qui, par amour pour la terre natale, allait trahir sa pensée, en revenant vivre au sein de ce régime. (p. 186)

Haunted by what has become of the communal life he once knew, Fatoman wonders what will be the future of his country. In a mystical dream, full of symbols, induced by a magic "boule blanche cernée de cauris" which his father has given him to slip under his pillow, Fatoman has a vision of a terrifying future. The human condition is misery, a prison closely guarded by a giant jailer. The people are transfixed by fear:

Notre humanité présente est pétrie de peur. Au-dessus de nos têtes gronde la peur. Dans nos regards perce la peur. Sous nos pas gronde la peur. A nos portes, à la porte de nos geôles, veille la peur. Dans notre sang, coule la peur. Oh, que nous avons peur, dans cette prison lugubre! Peur de nous promener dans la cour, peur de recevoir une balle dans le dos, peur de mourir! . . . (p. 213)

Solidarity and community of effort are all that would be required to escape:

Ce qu'il fallait pour nous libérer, c'était agir tous ensemble, unir dans un même élan tout le peuple de prisonniers contre le géant, briser, en conjuguant nos milliers de volontés, nos milliers de bras, l'horrible muraille . . . (p. 215)

But instead, the people engage in a fratricidal revolution in which they turn their weapons on one another. Dramouss, a personification of the spirit of Africa, who is alternately a large black serpent and a beautiful woman, reveals the agonies to come. The dream finishes in a marvelous ascension towards progress led by the "heroïque et sage Lion Noir":

Nous montions toujours. Et déjà les cloches avaient retenti dans les cathédrales, dans les églises; le muézzin avait repris ses appels; car les mosquées, elles aussi, étaient rouvertes. Les forêts sacrées, les biens spoliés étaient restitués à leurs propriétaires; la famine le céda à la prospérité, l'illégalité à la légalité, la barbarie à la civilisation. Et la vie, qui avait été pour nous, jadis, un mélange de tristesse, d'absurdité et d'angoisse, était redevenue toute de joie et de rires. (p. 230)

But the dream has yet to be realized. Laye Camara's answer to the dictatorship which in Guinea was substituted for the leadership of the wise and heroic Black Lion, was exile in Senegal. In writing about Dramouss, James Olney said, "if Dark Child describes the separation of the individual from the body and from the life of the community, A Dream of Africa presents the alienation, accomplished during Fatoman's absence, of an entire people from their own traditions

and from their corporate self."<sup>25</sup> The themes of disillusion and the degeneration of society find their continuation in the two most powerful novels written in French Africa in the late 60's, Ahmadou Kourouma's Les soleils des Indépendances and Yambo Ouologuen's Le devoir de violence. Joining Dramouss, these most "African" of novels form a trilogy of defeat and despair which translate the novelists' bitterness and anger that the promised new dawn had not brought a brighter day.

## 2. Les soleils des Indépendances<sup>26</sup>

Published subsequently by the Editions du Seuil (1970), Les soleils des Indépendances first appeared in 1968, in Canada at Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, and won the Prix de la Francité awarded by the review, Etudes Françaises, in the same year. The author, a Malinké born in the Ivory Coast, has not produced another novel. This is surprising, for Ahmadou Kourouma revealed a fresh and original talent in Les soleils... which was hailed with widespread critical acclaim. "Ce roman," wrote Mohamadou Kane in Présence africaine, "reprend et accentue toutes les orientations nouvelles

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<sup>25</sup>Olney, Tell me Africa, p. 146. A Dream of Africa is the title of the English translation of Dramouss.

<sup>26</sup>Page references will be to the Seuil edition; in Malinké the word for "sun" has the second meaning of "day." Soleils therefore also refers to a succession of days.

du roman africain. <sup>27</sup> And, we should hasten to add, it incorporates a few innovations of its own. The essential theme is a confrontation of the past and the present, especially as it is symbolized by the loss of spirituality of the former and the sterility of the latter. The parallels are drawn between "une société traditionnelle harmonieuse, fortement hiérarchisée, où l'homme trouvait sa place dans un ensemble cosmique et cohérent, et la société africaine moderne où l'homme se dessèche, où un semblant d'ordre est substitué à l'harmonie d'autrefois." <sup>28</sup>

The work is essentially a pessimistic one in which Kourouma, in the manner of a traditional story-teller, occasionally addresses his audience from his privileged position: "Vous paraissez sceptique! Eh bien, moi, je vous le jure, et j'ajoute. . ." (p. 7). More epic than episodic in its dimensions, the novelist's technique combines realism with traditional elements of oral literature and blends the whole in a reworking of the French language which has outraged some and delighted others. In explaining his style, Kourouma said,

Ce livre s'adresse à l'Africain. Je l'ai pensé en malinké et écrit en français en prenant une liberté que j'estime naturelle avec la langue classique:

L'inexistence ou la prétendue inexistence d'une tradition écrite est à mon avis un faux problème. La langue, quelle qu'elle soit, est un moyen d'expression pour qui la maîtrise,

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<sup>27</sup> Mohamadou Kane, "L'actualité de la littérature africaine d'expression française", (Présence africaine, 1971), p. 235.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

c'est l'essentiel. . . Qu'avais-je donc fait? Simplement donné libre cours à mon tempérament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s'y meuve. J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain. <sup>29</sup>

That this could be done attests to the changes that were working within "la francophonie." An African was using French like an African! And it was not the "petit-nègre" patois which served as a lingua franca for French-speaking Africa in much the same way as pidgin English did in the anglophone areas. Evidences of African orality had always been present in the literary production of francophone novelists, but this was something different; it was a deliberate reevaluation of the use to which the language could be put in addressing a literate African public in order to attune it to that audience's sensibilities and sense of esthetics. His effort was a success. The Senegalese critic Mohamadou Kane exclaimed, "Kourouma a osé user de la langue française en Africain . . . à parler Malinké en français . . . Quand on lit son livre, c'est une voix africaine que l'on entend."<sup>30</sup> Western critics were equally susceptible to the charm of this iconoclastic approach. They wrote: "on ne peut pas dire que Kourouma respecte les sacro-saintes formes de la bienséance littéraire, mais sa manière donne au spectacle un caractère immédiat et suggère l'image avec

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<sup>29</sup>Kourouma quoted in Moncef S. Badday, "Ahmadou Kourouma, écrivain africain," Afrique littéraire et artistique 10 (avril 1970): p. 7.

<sup>30</sup>Kane, Présence africaine, p. 240.

force";<sup>31</sup> or less guardedly, "Kourouma ne violente pas les usages littéraires de son propre héritage. Il bouscule le verbe du français pour rester fidèle dans son écriture à des considérations plus rigoureuses qui dictent son style d'auteur. Il violente les 'usages' français pour ne pas violenter les usages africains";<sup>32</sup> and even more enthusiastically, "Kourouma has taken up this language, twirled it around like a magician, and put it down again in a totally fresh way."<sup>33</sup>

Not since Mongo Beti and Oyono had a satiric writer of talent approached the African scene with as much wit and bitterness as Ahmadou Kourouma. The mélange of genres is deftly handled so that fables, folktales, legends, proverbs, dreams, mingle with the récit and conventional narration in such a way as to weave a fine literary tapestry, witness to the disillusion and degeneration of an entire society:

Bâtardise! Vraiment les soleils des Indépendances sont impropres aux grandes choses; ils n'ont pas seulement dévirilisé mais aussi démystifié l'Afrique. (p. 149)

The rising sun of independence introduced grim days indeed, at least for Fama Doubouya, hereditary prince of the Horodougou, last in

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<sup>31</sup>Badday, Afrique littéraire et artistique 10, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup>Eric Sellin, "Ouologuem, Kourouma et le nouveau roman africain," Littératures ultramarines (Ottawa: Editions Naaman, 1974), p. 48.

<sup>33</sup>Anita Kern, "On 'Les soleils des Indépendances' and 'Le devoir de violence'," Présence africaine 85 (1973), p. 219.



line of legitimacy, who, reduced to beggary, lived in the capital of the "République de la Côte des Ebènes" with Salimata, his wife of 20 years:

Les soleils des Indépendance s'étaient annoncés comme un orage lointain et dès les premiers vents Fama s'était débarrassé de tout: négoce, amitiés, femmes pour user les nuits, les jours, l'argent et la colère à injurier la France, le père, la mère de la France. Il avait à venger cinquante ans de domination et une spoliation. Cette période d'agitation a été appelée les soleils de la politique. Comme une nuée de sauterelles les Indépendances tombèrent sur l'Afrique à la suite des soleils de la politique. Fama avait comme le petit rat de marigot creusé le trou pour le serpent avaleur de rats, ses efforts étaient devenus la cause de sa perte car comme la feuille avec laquelle on a fini de se torcher, les Indépendances une fois acquises, Fama fut oublié et jeté aux mouches. (p. 22)

Fama's shame and disillusion are aggravated by the persistent sterility of Salimata. This recurring image of sterility which haunts the African novel of French expression invades Kourouma's work at all levels. It takes on an aspect both real, as in the case of Salimata, and figurative, as in the problem of the Malinké reduced to ruin by the limitations on their traditional way of life which the artificial borders of national independence had imposed:

Le négoce et la guerre, c'est avec ou sur les deux que la race malinké comme un homme entendait, marchait, voyait, respirait, les deux étaient à la fois ses deux pieds, ses deux yeux, ses oreilles et ses reins. La colonisation a banni et tué la guerre mais favorisé le négoce, les Indépendances ont cassé le négoce et la guerre ne venait pas. Et l'espèce malinké, les tribus, la terre, la civilisation se meurent, percluses, sourdes et aveugles . . . et stériles. (p. 21)

Recalled to his village by the death of his cousin who had usurped the position of chef coutumier, Fama makes a hasty journey

to Togobala which the fortunes of independence have placed on the other side of the frontier in the "République socialiste de Nikinai." He finds the village in ruins and dying. The images of decay and degradation again echo the theme of sterility:

Au nom de la grandeur des aïeux. Fama se frotta les yeux pour s'assurer qu'il ne se trompait pas. Du Togobala de son enfance, du Togobala qu'il avait dans le cœur il ne restait même plus la dernière peste du dernier pet. Et voilà ce qui existait. De loin en loin une ou deux cases penchées, vieillottes, cuites par le soleil, isolées comme des termitières dans une plaine. Entre les ruines de ce qui avait été des concessions, des ordures et des herbes que les bêtes avaient broutées, le feu brûlées et l'harmattan léchées. De la marmaille échappée des cases convergeait vers le camionnette en criant: 'Mobili!', en titubant sur des jambes de tiges de mil et en balançant de petites gourdes de ventres poussiéreux. Fama songea à des petits varans pleins. Enfin un repère! Fama reconnut le baobab du marché. Il avait peiné, était décrépit lui aussi; le tronc cendré et lacéré, il lançait des branches nues, lépreuses vers le ciel sec, un ciel hanté par le soleil d'harmattan et par les vols des vautours à l'affût des charognes et des laissées des habitants se soulageant derrière les cases. (pp. 105-106)

Scenes of similar desolation are painted throughout the novel in order to emphasize the crisis which has struck the traditional collectivity. The tragedy of the alienation of an individual pales before this apocalyptic of alienation of a total society.

Duly constituted chief, the required ceremonies accomplished, Fama returns to the capital accompanied by Mariam, the widow of his cousin whom he has, according to custom, taken as a wife. But his affairs do not prosper. There is strife between Salimata and Mariam. Fama becomes involved in politics, is arrested for complicity in a

plot to assassinate the president and condemned to prison for 20 years. Pardoned in a general amnesty and freed unexpectedly, Fama immediately leaves the capital for good to return to Togobala. But the bridge across the river which marks the frontier is closed. Hostile guards face each other on either side. Ignoring this new "bâtardise" of the "soleils des Indépendances," Fama proudly crosses the bridge on foot. Pursued by a guard, he has no choice on finding the barrier closed on the other side but to jump from the parapet into the river where the huge sacred crocodiles are floating, for "les caïmans sacrés du Horodougou n'oseront s'attaquer au dernier descendant des Doumbouya." (p. 200). That they do is a last sad indication of how alien the world has become. The last prince arrives in his village escorted not by his griots and féticheurs to the glad sounds of balafons and coras, but in an ambulance, dead, accompanied by medical attendants:

Fama avait fini, était fini. On en avertit le chef du convoi sanitaire. Il fallait rouler jusqu'au prochain village où on allait s'arrêter. Ce village était à quelques kilomètres, il s'appelait Togobala, Togobala du Horodougou. (p. 205)

The collapse of a whole universe is presaged by the death of Fama. The demise of the collectivity is assured.

The power of this novel is at once in its use of language and in its structure. The foundation on which Kourouma builds his picture of the years following independence is realism onto which he applies a fresco of customs, descriptions, popular psychology,

meditations and sketches of life that give the novel what Eric Sellin called its "allure kaléidoscopique."<sup>34</sup> The whole is invested with violence and the image of blood, from the blood of Salimata's traumatic excision to Fama's gory finish in the crocodile pool. The blood of the sacrifice is evoked in this scene.

De grands couteaux flamboyants fouillèrent, dépêchèrent et tranchèrent. Tout cela dans le sang. Mais le sang, vous ne le savez pas parce que vous n'êtes pas Malinké, le sang est prodigieux, criard et enivrant. De loin, de très loin, les oiseaux le voient flamboyer, les morts l'entendent, et il enivre les fauves. Le sang qui coule est une vie, un double qui s'échappe et son soupir inaudible pour nous remplit l'univers et réveille les morts. (p. 147)

This extraordinary image finds its twin in Yambo Ouologuem's novel published in the same year. Les soleils des Indépendances seems indeed to be a continuation of the violent destruction of society begun in Le devoir de violence. In reversing their chronological order, we will take Le devoir de violence in flashback, as it were, as a kind of portent of the situation in contemporary Africa which Kourouma's novel revealed.

### 3. Le devoir de violence

Winner of the coveted Prix Renaudot in 1968, this novel was hailed everywhere as evidence that African literature of French expression had come of age. In reviewing the English translation, titled Bound to Violence, the reviewer for Time magazine called it

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<sup>34</sup>Sellin, Littératures ultramarines, p. 48.

a "minor masterpiece on man's ingenious cruelty to man" (3/15/71). And Mohamadou Kane labeled it "le geste de l'Afrique à travers les ages" and "l'oeuvre . . . le plus africain qui puisse être."<sup>35</sup> The enthusiasm died down considerably when it was revealed by Eric Sellin in Research in African Literatures<sup>36</sup> that Ouologuem's novel was related in no small way to André Schwarz-Bart's Le dernier des Justes. The cry of plagiarism went up and was exacerbated by an article which appeared in the Times Literary Supplement on May 5, 1972, that in chilling detail compared a page of Ouologuem's text with a page of Graham Greene's It's a Battlefield, published in 1934. Possibly the critics felt a little silly, for they reacted violently, even jubilantly, to this revelation of "fraud" and sale of the novel was, for a time, stopped. It might have behooved them more to have behaved with the magnanimity of Mr. Schwarz-Bart who, it seems, had been advised by his publishers (who were also Ouologuem's) in the same year that Ouologuem's novel appeared, that there might be a few "echoes." Mr. Schwarz-Bart wrote the Editions du Seuil, in 1968:

. . . I have always looked on my books as appletrees, happy that my apples be eaten and happy if now and again one is taken and planted in different soil.

I am therefore deeply touched, overwhelmed even, that a black writer should have leant on Dernier des Justes in order to write such a book as Le Devoir de Violence. Thus it is not

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<sup>35</sup>Kane, Présence africaine, pp. 233 and 234.

<sup>36</sup>"Ouologuem's blueprint for Le devoir de violence", Research in African Literatures II, 2 (1971).

M. Ouologuem who is in debt to me, but I to him.<sup>37</sup>

Everyone would have benefitted from a close reading of Ouologuem's Lettres à la France nègre published in 1969. In one of the "Letters" entitled "Lettre aux pisse-copie Nègres d'écrivains célèbres," he very obligingly details the mechanics of how to create "un milliard de romans sans peine." The technique is to combine and recombine elements taken from famous authors. Here he is facetiously telling how to turn out successful detective stories, using a little Simenon here, a little James Hadley Chase there, a dash of Agatha Christie, and so forth. But this facetious and cynical advice on how to become the "Nigger of the celebrated writer" is fascinating in the light of revelations on the derivations of Le devoir de violence:

Sous cette forme, chère négraille, pour qui exécute ce travail avec une conscience très lucide de la demande du marché, être le nègre d'un écrivain célèbre, c'est se donner, comme une liberté, la clé d'un langage envisagé dans ses puissances combinatoires--mises à la disposition de la clientèle. C'est un peu de l'algèbre, mais de l'algèbre pour petits enfants. (Lettres, p. 175)

La "demande du marché" was for blood, sex and violence, and this is exactly what Ouologuem gave it in abundance in Le devoir. That was where the money was--"être le nègre d'un écrivain célèbre est payant --et tout aisé--si vous monnayez l'attachement du public: en fixant sur chaque ligne l'attitude et les formules qu'il convenait d'adopter"

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<sup>37</sup>From a letter to Seuil, quoted in a letter by Paul Flamand by the Editions du Seuil to the editor of the TLS, May 19, 1972. (Published by the Times in English translation.)

(Lettres, p. 177). That his calculations were eminently successful may be attested to by the award of the Renaudot. Ouologuem had judged his public well.

But it would not be fair to neglect Ouologuem's singular talent as a writer in the smokescreen of the plagiarism issue. After the hullabaloo had calmed down, critics began taking a more measured look at Ouologuem's accomplishments. James Olney called him "a sensual mystic"<sup>38</sup> and concluded that he is a "stranger and more bizarre--and more brilliant--writer" than his past critics understand.<sup>39</sup> Evaluating the literary genealogy of Le devoir, Seth Wolitz places it in the tradition of neo-african literature, "c'est-à-dire une synthèse de deux visions globales: l'occidentale et l'africaine." "Nier ce fait," he continues, "et exiger des sources purement africaines d'une création littéraire néo-africaine risque d'abaisser à un niveau provincial, sinon folklorique, une jeune littérature. . ."<sup>40</sup> And Anita Kern made the final point in dismissing the plagiarism issue when she wrote, "All this to-do. . . is highly regrettable [because it] detracts from the proper and close appreciation of the author's argument,

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<sup>38</sup>Olney, Tell me, Africa, p. 209.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>40</sup>Seth Wolitz, "L'art du plagiat, ou une brève défense de Ouologuem," Research in African Literatures 4, 1 (1970): 134.

which is, or ought to be, the main concern of readers and critics."<sup>41</sup>  
 So it is to this closer appreciation of the argument that we propose  
 now to turn.

Le devoir de violence is a brutal, violent, cruel and enigmatic  
 novel of the tradition of brutality, violence, cruelty and enigma which  
 Ouologuem contends was the African epic from the thirteenth century  
 to modern colonialism and beyond. It is in turns wry, bitter, sar-  
 castic and ironic, always vivid, and offers "en effet le spectacle  
 hallucinant d'une humanité entièrement livrée aux forces de l'angoisse  
 et du mal."<sup>42</sup> In an expansive and panoramic novel, the one continuous  
 thread is the exploitation, suffering and alienation of the collectivity,  
 the "négraille." Violence is characteristic of every transition in the  
 history of the masses. They have been brutalized by it and formed by  
 it since earliest times. It has become for them "une condition  
 ontologique."<sup>43</sup>

Ouologuem traces the phases of this violence in a vast sweep  
 that moves from the legendary fresco of a fabled empire, to the chronicle  
 of the period of the slave trade, to the dramatic and historic events of  
 recent colonialism. Always it is the "négraille" which is the victim,

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<sup>41</sup>Kern, Présence africaine, p. 227.

<sup>42</sup>Chevrier, Littérature nègre, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup>Anozie, Sociologie du roman africain, p. 253.



whether the violence comes from African or from European sources of oppression. In panoramic style, the novel traces seven centuries in the history of a fictitious Sudanese empire, from 1202 to the middle of the 20th century. The first part, "la légende des Saïfs" (A title of nobility used by Ouologuem to designate the rulers of his fictitious empire), opens on a feudal age which the griots and conteurs of the modern Western Sudan look back upon as a golden age. It was a period when the great trading empires flourished, when the fame of Mali, Songhai and Kanem-Bornu rivaled that of medieval Europe. But Ouologuem's legend takes a behind-the-scenes look at these glories which D. T. Niane's Soundjata avoided. His empire of Nakem, an anagram of Kanem, was founded by the colonialism of the African Notables whose armored cavalry terrorized villages in the central Sudan for two hundred years. To recount the splendor of that empire is, Ouologuem insists, mere folklore; it is the suffering and dislocation of the people which is the real story:

Ce qui frappe, lorsque, le regard béant sur des solitudes amères, anciens, notables et griots parlent de cet Empire, c'est, devant la 'bénédiction' implacable de Dieu, ouallahi! la fuite désespérée de sa population, baptisée dans la supplice . . .  
(p. 9)

In a few brisk pages he moves from the bloody suppression of the native populations by the conquering hordes of the Saïfs to the arrival of the first slavers and the barbarity of the slave trade:

Ce fut alors, de par presque tout l'Empire et ses dépendances, un bain de violence sans précédent. La capture des tribus rebelles,

des hommes libres, des guerriers vaincus et faits prisonniers, le sacrifice de leur chef dont la chair était festoyée, devinrent des actes rituels, qui passèrent dans la coutume des frétilants négrillons, dont la barbarie répondit à l'attente de l'empereur et des notables . . . (p. 20)

Ouologuem was not the first to introduce the theme of native African violence. Paul Hazoumé's Douguicimi, in 1938, narrated the events of an expedition of Dahomean kings against a neighboring tribe. But it had vanished from African literature of French expression in the period of Negritude and the anti-colonial novel when it was more important for African protest and solidarity that the myth of l'innocence nègre be maintained. The reappearance of the theme here in a post-independence novel is an indication that a more honest and objective look at all aspects of the traditional heritage is not only possible but required.

In the second part, "L'extase et l'agonie" (has anyone pointed out that a hint of Ouologuem's recipe for being the "nègre" of an "écrivain célèbre" exists in this inversion of Irving Stone's title for his biography of Michelangelo?), the novel moves into the 19th century, the European conquest, when the empire was pacified and divided up among the various colonizing interests. As always, it was the mass of the population which suffered:

Et ce fut la ruée vers la négraille. Les Blancs, définissant un droit colonial international, avalisaient la théorie des zones d'influence: les droits du premier occupant étaient légitimes. Mais ces puissances colonisatrices arrivaient trop tard déjà, puisque, avec l'aristocratie notable, le colonialiste, depuis

longtemps en place, n'était autre que le Saïf, dont le conquérant européen faisait--tout à son insu! --le jeu. C'était l'assistance technique, déjà! Soit. Seigneur, que votre oeuvre soit sanctifiée. Et exaltée. (p. 31)

In Ouologuem's version, the extension of colonialization and pacification by the Whites was received as a sort of salvation by the "négraille" because it stopped the slave trade and curtailed the tyranny of the Saïf. However, Ouologuem introduces here a new theme which he will develop in the remainder of the novel: the idea that the game of the European colonizer was played and often turned to personal advantage by sly African chiefs and rulers, always at the expense, of course, of the general population. This, too, was an unpopular theme and earned Ouologuem general indignation from supporters of the myth that in the Black/White encounter Black = good and oppressed, White = evil and oppressor, and there were no gray areas, which was exemplified in the novel by Jean Malonga's Coeur d'Aryenne.

After galloping through the centuries at this kaleidoscopic pace, Ouologuem finally settles down in the third part of his pseudo-history to the novel proper with identifiable characters and a story line of sorts. Titled "La nuit des géants", the third part is introduced with a Wagnerian image:

Crépuscule des dieux? Oui et non. Plus d'un rêve semblait en train de se faner; et il s'agissait, tout autant que de son tourment, de la convulsion d'une civilisation. Avant sa fin définitive? Avant une nouvelle naissance? Ou durant une sempiternelle agonie? Une larme pour la négraille, Seigneur--par pitié! . . . (p. 44)

The preceding panorama of cruelty, sadism and suffering boils down to a specific application in the twentieth century--the kingdom of Nakem-Ziuko, its ruler Saïf ben Isaac El Heït and the colonial period before independence. The events are chaotic, the atrocities never let up, and the sexual excesses which Ouologuem describes in loving detail have earned Le devoir the dubious distinction of being classified, in at least one instance,<sup>44</sup> as a pornographic novel. The author gets in his digs at everything and everyone. Murder, rape, intrigue, lurk in every corner, and nothing is sacred. Not even African anthropology emerges unscathed as Ouologuem satirizes Frobenius of blessed memory in his truculent portrait of "Shrobénius" the ethnologist, "marchand-confectionneur d'idéologie." Zombies and missionaries share the stage with colonial governors and African potentates in an extravaganza that bewilders while it alternately fascinates and revolts. The central drama concerns the saga of Kassoumi and Tambira, serfs at the court of the Saïf, and their son Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi. A pawn in the hands of Saïf, Raymond-Spartacus is sent to European schools in the colony and ultimately to Paris for advanced studies and a series of bizarre adventures. After World War II he returns to Nakem, a "nègre-blanc" with a white wife and, with Saïf still pulling the strings, is elected deputy to the French Assembly under the Constitution of 1946. Once a slave, always a slave:

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<sup>44</sup>Olney, Tell me, Africa,

Kassoumi, habile calculateur, avait mal calculé: fort de ses titres et de l'appui de la France, il s'était cru maître de l'ancien maître, alors même que seul le flambeau de Saïf, un instant assoupi pour mieux briller, plus rougeoyant que jamais, garantissait à l'esclave l'acquisition des suffrages. Yéré-té! aou yo yédè?

But Saïf is checkmated by the Bishop, Henry, who reveals Saïf's dubious methods to Raymond and then goes off to confront Saïf alone over a symbolic chess game in which the Bishop, the man of Love, tells the King, the man of Violence, that his game is up. "L'Aurore," the title of this brief fourth section leaves perhaps a glimmer of hope for the triumph of love in the world. The reconciliation of the collectivity and the true future of the African people depend on a renunciation of violence and a restructuring of the slave mentality which this violence has maintained on the Continent:

Souvent il est vrai, l'âme veut rêver l'écho sans passé du bonheur. Mais, jeté dans le monde, l'on ne peut s'empêcher de songer que Saïf, pleuré trois millions de fois, renaît sans cesse à l'Histoire, sous les cendres chaudes de plus de trente Républiques africaines . . .

. . . Ce soir, tandis qu'ils se cherchaient l'un l'autre jusqu'à ce que la terrasse fût salie des hauteurs noirâtres de l'aurore, une poussière chut d'en haut sur l'échiquier; mais à cette heure où le regard au Nakem vole autour des souvenirs, la brousse comme la côte était fertile et brûlante de pitié. Dans l'air, l'eau et le feu, aussi, la terre des hommes fit n'y avoir qu'un jeu . . . (pp. 207-208)

The pity so often invoked will perhaps at last shed its grace on the future of the "négraille."

With Yambo Ouologuem, the African novel of French expression has taken a bizarre turn. So far, as least, it has not been seminal to

new production, but rather like the whale, seems a dead-end in the evolutionary process, unique unto itself. Such a prodigal display of brutality and eroticism has not made a reappearance in the serious novel. The brilliance of Ouologuem's language, which sometimes provokes surreal or hallucinatory effects, has not been duplicated either. It may be, as O. R. Dathorne felt, that "too many superlatives spoil the telling; one ends up only with a shriek of despair."<sup>45</sup> The calculated use of legend and reality to shock and revolt creates a new myth, the thesis that there have always been strong and ruthless forces in Africa, that their means have always been violent, and that the eternal victim has always been the poor "négraille" who have neither the will nor the collective power to resist. Some African critics, chiefly Anglophones, it must be noted, felt Ouologuem played the neo-colonialist game with this thesis and encouraged the negativism of the post-colonial period which Kourouma's Les soleils des Indépendances documents. Positive social action is, however, the theme of the first novel by a young Cameroonian which appeared in 1969.

#### 4. Afrika Ba 'a

Rémy Gilbert Medou-Mvomo's novel has the tone of a pamphlet and a preachy message that out of darkness and despair will come hope

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<sup>45</sup>Dathorne, O. R., The Black Mind, p. 396.

and light. As a novel it is of minor literary value. As social commentary, however, it points up some of the very real problems facing Africa today. A representative of the new littérature engagée, it is often dull. It is not "commercial" in the sense that Ouologuem's novel is, nor does it have the mystic fervor of Dramouss or the esthetic interest of Kourouma's Malinké-in-French approach. It takes itself and its mission very seriously. The theme is do-it-yourself regeneration, a dawning of the pioneer spirit which recalls Sembène's O pays mon beau peuple!. As a novel of social comment, it is one long evangelistic polemic on the disintegration of village life and how to combat it:

Kambara, the hero, leaves his village, Afrika-Ba'a and his fiancée Ada to seek work in the city, ominously called Nécroville. All he finds there are chaos and corruption. Finally he returns to Afrika-Ba 'a fired with enthusiasm to resuscitate the village and bring new dignity to village life. His marriage to Ada crowns this achievement and Afrika-Ba 'a becomes a model of wonder for the whole nation.

Coming after Kourouma and Ouologuem, this sounds naive to the point of ingenuousness, but it is really an act of faith, an answer to the colonial mentality of Kourouma's Fama and the slave mentality of Ouologuem's Kassoumi. Kambara is closer in spirit to the hero of Dramouss, but he is no dreamer and visionary like Fatoman; rather he is a doer who will annul the crisis of the collectivity and shake

Africa loose from its lethargy. The moral is hard work, as preached by old Ekoto, the sage of the village:

---Tu vois, petit, expliquait-il, le travail réfléchi, c'est le seigneur le plus exigeant qui soit, mais aussi, le plus juste, peut-être. Il récompense toujours de quelque façon. Si ce n'est en argent, c'est en dignité d'homme. Un homme qui travaille, quel que soit ce travail, ne devrait jamais avoir honte d'être homme. Un homme qui travaille c'est comme une plante en terre fertile. Mais encore faut-il qu'il y mette toute sa conscience, qu'il sache travailler en homme responsable, juste et objectif. Le drame est que le noir ne sait pas travailler ainsi, nous avons tout ce qu'il faut, sauf la science du travail. (pp. 52-53)

A social worker turned journalist, Medou-Mvomo brings a reporter's eye for investigative detail to a reformer's zeal. The result, while lacking in the creative magic of an artist, is representative of the social realism (one might say socialist realism) which many African novelists feel it is their duty to portray. This is the major direction of the African novel written for Africans. Le devoir de violence is an aberration. Comparing it with Afrika Ba 'a is like comparing a Picasso or a Klée with the latest approved Chinese mural of the happy workers. One is for consumption by the "decadent" Western elite, the other for the edification of the masses. In diagnosing the problems of contemporary African life, Afrika Ba 'a touches upon a number of themes which echo and re-echo throughout the brief history of the African novel and which become a veritable litany as the novel develops into the 70's: general misery and the disintegration of village life, lassitude and despair of the young people, problems of



the construction of a nation, changing traditions of marriage and the family, the corruption of the city, the responsibilities of the new generation, rural development, the transformation of village mentality, and politico-economic action--a peaceful revolution in the service of Mankind and not an ideology.

The theme of the city especially takes on new meaning and new urgency because of the proliferation of urban problems as more and more people are attracted to metropolitan areas. A growing number of new sub-themes on this motif are finding their way into the novel. In Afrika-Ba'a we confront corrupt bureaucrats, cynical employees, wasted intellectuals, hordes of unemployed, solitary children--the street urchins of so many African cities, and of course the ever rapacious and pitiful prostitutes. And still the city beckons:

Rester au village était évidemment synonyme d'encroûtement: pas de loisir et rien à manger. Pas d'argent et une somme de travail grand comme des montagnes . . . Les vieux avec leur esprit obtus et leur paternalisme . . . la coutume rétrograde--voilà ce que signifierait rester au village. Aller en ville après tout, c'était sûrement affronter l'inconnu, le hasard, mais c'était aussi la liberté, la vie, quoi . . . la vie! (p. 44)

The people of Afrika Ba'a had been as disappointed as those in Togobala by the "soleils des Indépendances". They were expecting something to happen . . .

Mais, voilà que les blancs étaient partis et, non seulement rien n'avait changé, non seulement la manne n'était pas tombée du ciel, mais les choses semblaient s'être gâtées davantage . . . Oui, aux yeux d'Africa-Ba'a l'indépendance avait avorté. (p. 25)

This disillusion combined with a sense of fatalism and opposition to

any innovation has brought the collectivity to a critical stage of degeneration, but community action will save the day, and that is the thrust of Medou-Mvomo's message. Those with energy, intelligence and initiative must lead the others, not just with words, but with deeds . . .

Le colon avait fait miroiter trop longtemps devant nos intelligences la magie des mots, des joutes verbales et des abstractions. Maintenant, la vertu est dans l'action, sous peine de crever une seconde fois. (p. 146)

It would be easy to dismiss this novel as inconsequential if one did not know the situation in Africa today. The novelist's concerns are of prime importance, and in a society where people read less for pleasure than for instruction, the novelists' role can be of considerable consequence.

#### Manners and Customs -- The Sociological Novel

The two authors whose works we shall now consider are Cameroonians. The exciting literary development which Cameroon is experiencing today had its origins in the decade of the 60's. At a time when the frustrations of newly-won independence seemed to be inhibiting literary expression elsewhere, Cameroonian writers were carrying on the tradition of Beti and Oyono. There was one major and very significant difference: their intended audience was not European and Western-oriented, but educated Africans who were French-speaking. While some of their themes have been universal,

it can be noted that, in the novel at least, the trend is toward greater regionalism and the depiction of daily life and customs. The writers betray considerable sensitivity for their particular milieux. Their criticism of the people and their customs is written sometimes with amusement, more often with compassion, and certainly more in sorrow than in anger. The stories they tell are true to life, so that the Western reader may find them "charming" or "exotic," or even incomprehensible, but the African reader will recognize the situation at once. And this is what the novelist intends:

. . . ce roman social, je l'ai voulu simple à dessein. Je le destine au peuple, or le peuple a fort peu de goût pour tout ce qui est trop assaisonné. J'y ai jeté le meilleur de mon coeur, parce que la cause que je défends me tient à coeur. Puisse-t-il être lu, compris et médité par tous ceux qui l'auront entre les mains.

This is from the author's prologue to Sola, ma chérie by René Philombé, but it could have been written by any of half a dozen Cameroonian novelists to follow. Chapter 3 of Part Two will study the new Cameroonian literature in more detail. Let us now turn to the two novelists who are in a sense precursors of the later development.

### 1. René Philombé

Philippe-Louis Ombédé, whose pen-name is René Philombé, is a man of letters and the only professional writer of his country.<sup>46</sup> Poet, conteur and novelist, he was a founding member of the Association des poètes et écrivains camerounais in 1960, and has

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<sup>46</sup>Rial, Littérature camerounaise de langue française, p. 127.

since served as its general secretary. His first published work, Lettres de ma cambuse, a collection of short stories strongly influenced by Daudet, won the prix Mottart of the Académie Française in 1964. Sola, ma chérie, Philombé's first novel, was published in 1966.

A melodramatic rendering of the classical African triangle, Sola recounts the story of a young couple separated by the forced marriage of the woman to a man much older than she and the tragedy that ensues. The theme of the condition of women and the abuses of the tradition of the dot are Philombé's main concerns, but he touches also on the problems of unemployment in the city, alcoholism, and the conflict of generations.

In African society, the dot is a bride-price which the man must pay to the bride's parents to indemnify them for the loss of a daughter. It was the subject of ceremonial negotiations between the elders of the bride's clan and the clan of the aspiring husband and served a highly symbolic as well as material purpose. A frequent scene in the contemporary African novel is the palabre during which a dot is agreed upon. More and more young people are rejecting the dot and all it represents of control over their fate by the heads of families. The abuses of the traditional system have also become grist for the novelist's mill:

. . . jamais un père de famille ne regardait sa fille, son sang, comme un objet de commerce. Puis la dot avait un caractère essentiellement symbolique. Or, aujourd'hui, un homme sur deux voudrait s'enrichir sur la tête de sa fille. Ne s'agit-il pas là d'une véritable vente aux enchères à laquelle le chef de famille escroque sans vergogne plusieurs prétendants à la fois, pour attribuer sa fille au plus offrant! (p. 98)

In Philombé's novel, the drama is that of Sola who has been married in such a manner to Nkonda, a rich and miserly ex-combattant of "la guerre de De Gaulle." It is his treatment of Sola, who has had an education, like chattel that eventually provokes the rupture. Brutalized and terrified, she finally flees the village with Tsango, the young man whose suit had been rejected by her family in favor of the richer Nkonda. In a fury of rage and grief, Nkonda leaves the village in search of his young wife, and ends his days "tout maigre, tout maigre, tout déguenillé, presque méconnaissable, traînant sa désolation de quartier en quartier . . . à la recherche des beaux yeux de Sola" (p. 124).

For sophisticated tastes, this is an awkward novel. The style lacks polish and ease of expression. It is sometimes positively overdone, as in this emotional outburst of Tsango:

--Dieu seul sait, adorable Sola, toute l'ardeur de ma flamme. Mais, quelque indéfectible que puisse demeurer mon amour pour toi, douloureux serait mon ressentiment en te faisant entrer dans une maison d'arrêt. J'en crèverais de désolation et de remords! Aimer, c'est aspirer nuit et jour, au bien-être d'une personne! Voilà l'amour, le vrai! (p. 113)

It is hard to imagine even a graduate of the Lycée Le Clerc (Yaoundé's most prestigious) speaking in such Racinien tones. Nevertheless, in terms of human relations and social criticism, Sola, ma chérie is an accomplished work which opens new fields for the novelists' exploration.

Philombé's second novel, Un sorcier blanc à Zangali, appeared in 1969. It is a surer and more finished work than Sola, and treats a theme which recalls both Oyona and Beti. The influence of these two great Cameroonian novelists of the pre-independence period on Philombé's work is perceptible in the treatment of the theme as well. Irony and wit are managed with less dexterity, but Philombé brings a compassionate understanding to the equivocal situation which the novel documents: that of the simultaneous action of evangelization and colonization in Africa. Using fictitious events and characters to tell an historical story, Philombé revives the type of novel which Ikellé-Matiba's Cette Afrique-là began. In this case, he mixes history with sociology and produces a story that rings true on both counts. The "sorcier blanc" of the title is a missionary, the Reverend Father Marius, and the historical setting is the Beti region of Cameroon in 1915 at a time when the French were replacing the Germans in the colony. Neither are remembered with any particular fondness.

Au fait, rien n'était changé. Le même enfer brûlait toujours!  
Le même sang coulait toujours! Une seule différence: au lieu  
des Allemands avec le Mayor Dzomnigi, c'étaient désormais les  
Français avec le Lieutenant-Colonel Hutin, qui appliquaient le  
même commandement de sueur et de sang. (p. 15)

Marius accepts a mission to Zangali, a distant village renowned for its ferocious animism, where his predecessor Father Schrook had been dramatically disposed of. Accompanied by his adopted son, Azombo, baptized Etienne, he sets out on the hazardous route which carries him

through the village of Pala. There they pick up Andela, the lovely princess whom hospitality and tradition had insinuated into the bed of the horrified Marius. The chiefs are perplexed by his reaction since he had been posing as a commandant in order to allay suspicions of his missionary intent in the area. Traveling in a rattletrap old car they eventually arrive at Zangali . . .

une cité antique, gardienne d'une civilisation embryonnaire mais riche en sèves originales, avec ses cases disposées en flots dispersés, avec sa population forte de plus de dix mille âmes et régie par une tradition sévère, oeuvre inviolable des Sages et des Prêtres! . . . (p. 103)

Less than hospitable, the Chef-Mage of this 'baobab de paganisme' is nevertheless cautious with Marius whom he mistakes for a "guérisseur blanc." He allows the little band to establish themselves in an area shunned by all the villagers because it provokes "la maladie des fantômes." But they prosper there and even rescue a poor victim of the strange illness (which Father Marius recognizes as malaria) who had been evicted from the village. Father Marius's ardent desire to convert the people of Zangali almost results in his death, however, when he bursts in on a secret ceremony, the sacred purification rites of "tsogo" by which the priests of Zangali hope to exorcize the evil sickness which has become epidemic. He is saved from what seemed a certain fate by the man whose illness he has cured and by the intervention of Andela who reveals that she is a princess of Pala and therefore related to everybody in Zangali. These apparitions, which seem miraculous,

establish the confidence which Father Marius needed to begin his work of christianizing the heathen, and he is on the point of succeeding when an armed squadron sent to "rescue" him erupts on the scene. The tenuous contact is broken by the violence which ensues.

The attack on the "mission civilisatrice" which this novel incorporates differs fundamentally from the treatment of the same theme in the pre-independence novel. The protest is that of the historical novelist who knows that there is no retribution to be exacted. In the long discussion which Father Marius has with Commandant Doubi at the end of the novel, Philombé presents all aspects of an historical fait accompli. Marius represents the truly humanitarian missionary who thought he was embarked on a mission of love; Doubi is the military colonial who sees his work as a necessary one of pacification, because "les nègres sont de petits enfants à qui nous devons faire un peu de mal afin de leur apporter beaucoup de bien." (p. 181). The victims are the indigenous populations for whom "chambarder les coutumes les plus sacrées . . . constitue bel et bien un acte de provocation!" (p. 185).

Philombé's style has considerably matured since Sola, ma chérie. He uses French with more naturalness and assurance, and does not hesitate to mix traditional genres with the narration when appropriate. The palabre which has become de rigueur in the African novel has its place, but Un sorcier blanc à Zangali also includes one of the very rare instances of descriptive scene-painting in francophone African literature:



Sur tous les points de l'horizon, le soleil couchant n'était plus qu'un vague soupçon de lumière. Le pagné gris du crépuscule se déployait sur la nature et le plongeait progressivement dans la torpeur. Là-haut, d'interminables caravanes de chauves-souris planaient languissamment vers des bocages lointains. La savane bourdonnait de mille voix et courait frémissante, jusqu'au pied des grands arbres. Les oiseaux avaient perdu de leur vivacité laborieuse: ils n'animaient plus les herbages et, tassés dans le chaud duvet de leurs nids, ils écoutaient monter de buisson en buisson, la sérénade monotone des coucous. Une brise se levait par moments. D'une aile impuissante, elle taquinait tout sur son passage, en y laissant une froide caresse. Non loin de là, déchirant le calme de la nuit tombante, la gueule immense et rocheuse de la Sanaga charriait dans l'espace un lourd mugissement sans fin. (p. 125)

In African novels of the 1960's only Laye Camara's lyric description of the Guinea seacoast quoted earlier matches this sensitive evocation of one of Africa's greatest wealths, its unspoiled natural beauty. The upheavals of traditional life which the twentieth century brought seem even more harsh when played out against such a passive and lovely setting.

The cracking of the social structure constitutes the essential theme of a novel written by another Cameroonian in the last years of the 60's. With it, the sociological roman de mœurs evolves from the contemporary melodrama of Sola and the historical retrospective treatment of Un sorcier blanc to the creation of an authentic fable for the times in which a light-hearted atmosphere masks the author's concern for the bewildering changes which were operating within African society.

## 2. Francis Bebey

Another "homme à tout faire," Bebey pursues several careers: journalist and international civil servant with UNESCO, musician and musicologist, poet and writer. His first work of prose fiction, Le fils d'Agatha Moudio, was published in 1967, and in 1968 was awarded the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire.

In first person conversational style--the reader is addressed frequently as "vous"--Bebey tells a story of simple village life during the colonial period. The narrator, Mbenda, in an anecdotal and rambling way, relates the wry events of his polygamous marriages and subsequent paternities. The tone is lightly ironic with a touch of tongue in cheek. Bebey sees things with a humorist's eye even when the occurrence is potentially tragic, such as the deportation of all the village elders. Mbenda is a deep-sea fisherman, which permits the author late in the novel to launch into a lyrical passage on sea fishing, "Soleil splendide de l'été. . ."

. . .veillées autour du feu après la dure journée et la mer rude, contes, chants, devinettes, proverbes, danses, rêve souriant à la belle étoile, nattes de raphia à même le sol . . . fraternité, solidarité, le ciel, la mer, les hommes, des hommes perdus dans une nature écrasante, des hommes simples vivant au rythme de la mer, sous l'oeil vigilant de millions d'étoiles, des hommes pour Dieu et pour Satan, brassant leurs efforts pour la vie d'autres hommes, leurs semblables, leurs frères. . .  
(p. 202-203)

It is a Saint-Exupérian rhapsody which might be titled "Mer des hommes," But this is one of the few lyrical moments in the novel. Otherwise the language is direct, earthy and real. Dialogue is

plausible. An adroit storyteller, Bebey knows how to manipulate his characters so that conversations do not seem forced and unnatural. And he is obviously at home in his milieu, the coastal villages south of Douala on the great Wouri estuary. With no great pretensions of imparting a moral lesson, the novel nevertheless encompasses a number of African themes which are pertinent to the changing situation it depicts. It is the happy blend of entertainment plus regional charm plus the urbane good humor of the author which accounts for the success of Le fils d'Agatha Moudio, one of the very few works of the period to be translated into Dutch, German and Italian, as well as English. For the story is, as Jacques Nantet sums up, "fort instructif des moeurs du pays, . . . d'un style vif, net, efficace et élégant."<sup>47</sup>

Mbenda's troubles stem from the fatal attraction he feels for Agatha Moudio, "cette enfant terrible de la région" (p. 50), whose reputation was ruined by the time she was seventeen. Agatha has also set her sights for Mbenda, but they run into the implacable opposition of his mother, Maa Médi. Out of filial duty Mbenda finally agrees to marry Fanny, a child of thirteen, and so fulfill the dying wish of his father. Determined to wait until his wife is of a more suitable age before he consummates the marriage, Mbenda continues to run after Agatha. In time, however, Fanny bears a child,

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<sup>47</sup>Nantet, Panorma de la littérature noire, p. 127.

much to Mbenda's surprise and everyone else's delight because, as the wise old man of the village, le roi Salomon, tells Mbenda, "un enfant est un enfant. . ."

Un enfant, c'est avant tout ce qu'il sera demain. Je te le répète, tes yeux n'ont pas besoin de regarder derrière, puisque tu les as devant. Derrière, il y a l'adultère de ta femme, que tu n'as pas besoin de voir. Devant, il y a ce que deviendra 'ta' fille. C'est là que tu dois regarder . . . (p. 146)

Mbenda is only partially mollified by this reasonable attitude. To revenge himself, he decides to take Agatha as his second wife in spite of all objections. Eventually, however, the marriage is accepted by the village, and Mbenda even becomes a hero of sorts, the defender of the ancestral tradition of polygamy. Even his mother becomes reconciled when Agatha reveals she is pregnant. The long-awaited birth of a son occurs, but alas, the dire predictions of Maa Médi come only too true--"Mon fils, me répétait-elle, c'est moi qui te le dis, cette femme-là . . . elle t'en fera voir de toutes les couleurs," --for the child is completely white. Again, le roi Salomon intervenes: "tu sais, qu'il vienne du ciel ou de l'enfer, un enfant, c'est toujours un enfant," (p. 207) and Mbenda must resign himself to the fact that he is not the father of his first two children.

Bebey's gentle jeering is in no way offensive, nor does he treat Mbenda's situation as a slapstick gauloiserie. A true roman de moeurs, the novel depicts such traditional scenes as the woman's rivalry at the village pump, the palabre over the dot, marriage by

capture, a reunion of the elders, a village fight and other vignettes of typical behavior. The colonialist is present, and his presence is felt. It sometimes has bitter consequences. But it remains largely a part of the background against which the little tragi-comedy of African life is played. In one of the truly comic passages, Mbenda explains how his village profits from its muddy road in the rainy season. When it became evident that travelers would pay the villagers handsomely for help in extricating their mired-down vehicles, a group of volunteers was organized to dig the holes deeper every night and cover them over with earth: "Dans ces conditions, les voitures qui arrivaient s'enfonçaient automatiquement dans la boue, et le conducteur devait nécessairement payer, et payer cher, pour sortir de là " (p. 148). So the road "qui était venue d'elle-même s'installer chez nous" was made to serve a useful purpose in the village economy when the rainy season kept people from their normal occupations.

Social comment touching on the condition of women nudges the reader from time to time. But Bebey is not on a crusade, and Le fils d'Agatha Moudio succeeds by being exactly what it is, a slice of life, African style.

The African novel in French was undergoing a kind of mutation in the last half of the 60's. The trends were not yet clearly discernable, but the novel seemed to be heading in the direction of greater

realism and a clearer sense of autonomy of form and expression. The novel was reaching its own accommodation with Africanité because "il faut d'abord être soi avant de prétendre à une quelconque forme d'universalité."<sup>48</sup> This imposed a greater objectivity on the novelist and a tighter discipline which shunned the exotic in favor of a socio-cultural approach. It was a period of disenchantment and disillusion during which the novel was renewing and redefining itself in the light of the changed political, economic and social situation. The "aventure ambiguë" of the African novel caught between two cultures, African and European, had to be resolved.

In this chapter we have seen that the theme of disenchantment, disillusion and disorientation was reflected in the novel as it dealt with the crisis of the decade on two levels, that of the individual and that of the collectivity. The sense of deception which prevailed annihilated the fleeting euphoria of the early years of independence. Pessimism replaced optimism. The general mood was sour. An effort to avoid this negative outlook is characteristic of a new regional literature which was rising in Cameroon. The African world is portrayed from within, so that it becomes more appropriate to speak of the "Cameroonian" rather than the "African" novel of French expression. An increasing national identification will be the decisive characteristic of the novel of the 70's.

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<sup>48</sup>Kane, Présence africaine, p. 243.

The metamorphosis of the African novel in the 60's produced four of the strongest and most original works of the entire literary production of the decade: Laye Camara's Dramouss, Malick Fall's La plaie, Ahmadou Kourouma's Les soleils des Indépendances, and Yambo Ouologuem's Le devoir de violence. Unfortunately, it is impossible to talk about their authors as leaders of a renouveau du roman as so many critics would like to do.<sup>49</sup> Their novels are dead-ends, and not one of them has produced another work in the genre. Their favorable critical reception has been practically entirely European, and one may wonder, in fact, if the general African reading public has a taste for this kind of literature. Nor has their influence been felt particularly in later novels of other African authors. Still we may agree with Albert Gérard in his analysis of the importance of La plaie, Les soleils . . . and Le devoir . . ., that their promise for the future of the novel lies in their example--that the African novel can be freed

. . . de l'obsession du colonialisme européen aussi bien que du mythe de la négritude: l'Africain s'y trouve placé devant ses propres problèmes, dont il lui appartient de prendre la responsabilité. Et d'autre part [. . .] que la littérature francophone d'Afrique est en passe de gagner la bataille de son autonomie, se créant audacieusement son propre style, et forgeant des formes inédites capables d'exprimer l'expérience de l'homme noir dans son irréductible spécificité.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> crf. Gérard, "Littérature francophone d'Afrique: le temps de la relève," Irele, "A new mood in the African novel," Kane, "L'actualité de la littérature africaine d'expression française," etc.

<sup>50</sup> Gérard, La revue nouvelle, p. 204.

In Part Two we shall observe how the new novelists of the 70's have translated this need for specificity.



CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: The decade of the 60's in retrospect

The accession to national independence of states which had for so long been appendages to the métropole proved less disruptive, by and large, to African society than had the original appearance of the white colonizer on the African scene a half-century or more before. Traditional beliefs and a way of life had already been altered beyond repair by the installation of towns, improved means of communication, enforced education, evangelization, and a monetary economy which was gradually replacing a subsistence economy. New governments maintained and even reinforced most of the colonial heritage, including the systems of civil administration and justice. Traditional societies which had, however, managed to weather colonialism crumbled as the new urbanization lured young people from village to town in even greater numbers. The gulf between tradition and modernism widened. Changes in the socio-cultural structure impinged on the age-old concept of the enlarged family: what had been sociologically and economically workable in a rural setting became parasitism in an urban one as relatives converged on the family member whose position promised the most security. Progressive young Africans no longer had the same respect for the hierarchy of authority represented by their conservative elders. Education was changing the traditional role of women. Education was

also creating another problem. Imitative of the French system, it served to form an elite who aspired to white collar jobs in the burgeoning bureaucracy. The fortunate holder of a baccalauréat had earned the right not to work, and he expected to become a dirigeant with an in-box, an out-box and a rubber stamp. The rise of an African middle class for whom a villa and a Mercedes are the hallmarks of success, is one of the phenomena of the 1960's. Another is the rise of the military. Civil wars, rebellions and coups d'état seemed to confirm Ouologuem's conviction that Africa was committed to a "devoir de violence." After the Congo and Biafra he wrote:

Voilà soudain que l'on ne peut plus prétendre devoir cultiver les champs fleuris de l'Afrique gentille et heureuse, baptisée dans le bonheur idyllique avant l'arrivée de l'Homme blanc . . . voilà enfin qu'il est impossible de fermer les yeux devant l'image d'une Afrique par trop déformée par ses chantres et ses littérateurs . . .<sup>1</sup>

But was this, in fact, what the novelists of French-speaking Africa had been doing during the past ten years? Even before independence the novel had been pretty much concerned with reality and the social scene. That they painted nothing but pretty pictures and happy innocence is as much a myth as the concept of négritude which Ouologuem attacks. Sadji, Mongo Beti, Oyono, Sembène and Bhély-Quenum, to name a few, were among those who portrayed the bitter with the sweet

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<sup>1</sup>Yambo Ouologuem, "Lettre aux Philistins d'une négrophilie sans obligation ni sanction," in Lettres à la France nègre, p. 190.

and left an after-taste of pessimism. While not deliberately attacking African society, neither were they idealizing it. Literature had certain political ends to achieve during this period, and it is significant that most studies of the independence movement acknowledge its efficacy in this role.

The decline of the novel in the years immediately following independence is due, in part, to its external orientation. The novel was caught in a situation which Roland Colin defined as a "dualisme culturel . . . ":

. . . à côté d'un monde traditionnel qui s'effrite, se construit un monde moderniste qui se développe, à côté d'une littérature traditionnelle orale qui s'évanouit un peu plus à chaque mort de sage, s'édifie une littérature moderne d'expression étrangère . . . qui élargit le cercle de ses auditeurs à chaque classe d'âge qui prend le chemin de l'école.<sup>2</sup>

The novelist would be obliged to search henceforth for sources of inspiration and expression that would be meaningful to both African and non-African readers. This concern became acute in the 60's as the novel seemed to hesitate between two literary tendencies: "l'évocation épique du passé" and "l'étude réaliste ou satirique du monde moderne," two tendencies which "correspondent, plus ou moins, à des aspects fondamentaux de l'âme africaine."<sup>3</sup> Such cultural

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<sup>2</sup>Roland Colin, Littérature africaine d'hier et de demain, (Paris: Association pour le développement éducatif et culturel, 1965), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Mayer, "Le roman en Afrique noire francophone. Tendances et structures," Études françaises 3, 2 (1967): 170.

dualism produced what W. Umezina calls "l'esthétique du métis"<sup>4</sup> in the novel. Borrowing from both European and Negro-African esthetics, the novel becomes a combination of both. Creative writing in Africa, even when it is not concerned with "l'évocation épique du passé" per se, is still strongly influenced by the literary genres of the past, and by the traditional social role of the writer-as-artist. From European tradition the novel derived the genre itself, along with elements of structure and stylistic procedure.

Full of complexes and insecure in its orientation, the novel in the first half of the 60's nevertheless used its dual heritage to broadcast a message of hope and affirmation. The persistent image of the dawn and optimism at the start of the new day of independence were tied to the theme of liberation which was central to the novels of the period.

The novel moved out of its decline after 1965, but its renewal of vigor coincided also with a renewal of pessimism. The years which ended the 60's were fraught with despair and disillusion, as dreams of a happy, unified, liberated and independent Africa went a-glimmering. It may be that adversity, rather than necessity, is the mother of invention, for inspiration seemed to flow again as novelists concentrated on the crises which were afflicting both the individual and the collectivity.

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<sup>4</sup>Wilberforce A. Umezina, La religion dans la littérature camerounaise d'après les romans de Mongo Beti, Benjamin Matip et Ferdinand Oyono. (Ph. D. dissertation, Laval, 1971).

Pan-African unity was becoming a hopeless utopia. The artificial barriers which the French, English and Portuguese colonial empires erected remained as cultural and national barriers to divide the continent. As novelists became aware of their people's specificity, the first signs of regionalism replaced the Pan-African dream. Diversification by nationality will become the characteristic of the novel of the 70's.

In 1963 an observer of the African literary scene wrote:

The African novel will begin an authoritative existence the day its writers abandon a sterile imitation of Western forms of expression, and return to their native land to search for originality and a specifically African style. So far, the majority of African novelists are really writing for another audience, which they are trying too hard to please, and not for their own people.<sup>5</sup>

This process has been nearly accomplished during the transition years of the 60's. Originality, more specifically African style, and closer attention to the literary tastes of African rather than Western readers are trends in the evolution of the novel which began ten years ago. In 1970, another critic asked rhetorically, "What African writer will fictionally propose mechanisms by which the déracinés will re-establish their selfhood and grouphood? What African writer will free himself to the point where he will deal with present and future and the process that

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<sup>5</sup>Paulin Joachim, "African Literature: Part III French-speaking Africa," Africa Report 8, 3 (1963): 12.

links the two? "<sup>6</sup> This redefinition of the individual and the collectivity in the contemporary context is, as the second part will show, part of the on-going evolutionary process of the novel.

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<sup>6</sup> Albert H. Berrian, "Aspects of the West African Novel," College Language Association Journal XIV, 1 (1970): 41.

## PART TWO. New Directions, 1970-1975

After ten years of independence, the mood of African writing in French shifted subtly. Writers were obliged to accommodate themselves to the fact that the new society, with all its ills and ambiguities, was a present and probably lasting phenomenon. Novelists had to learn to live with their disillusionments and, if possible, create new illusions. A critical outlook was still necessary, but a more realistic approach to the portrayal of tensions in contemporary society was required if criticism was not to become sterile denunciation. Literature, as a result, became less aggressive and more personal. It began to look inward and to find "new themes in which the continent and its peculiar problems are presented in themselves and as arising out of an autonomous human situation."<sup>1</sup> The novel was nationalizing itself at the same time. Differentiations in national character and concerns operated within the novel as well as within the society it reflected. What was an autonomous human situation in Senegal could be a completely exotic and foreign behavior in Zaïre. So the novel began to take on a more specific national identification, at the risk of becoming hermetic. The

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<sup>1</sup>Abiola Irele, "A new mood in the African novel," West Africa 9/20/69, p. 1113.

confrontation with the West still echoes here and there in those novels which resuscitate the theme of a student's exile and alienation in Europe or which deal with the colonial period. But by and large, the theme of the European/African culture conflict, which was on its way out in the 60's, is practically extinct in the 70's. "Universal" themes, as in all national literatures, take on local coloration: love, death, honor, revenge, guilt, man's condition and relation to the universe, are treated in an African context. An aspect of great philosophical depth is lacking. Africa has not yet produced its Dostoevsky or Thomas Mann. Perhaps it never will but when one considers that the Western novel has two centuries of development behind it, it seems idle to demand any such feat of a young literature operating in a borrowed genre with a foreign medium of expression.

The concept of Negritude continues to excite attention, but not among the novelists. The emotional hue and cry over what Negritude is and what it isn't has largely died down, however. A colloque on Negritude was held in Dakar, its home-base, so to speak, from April 12-18, 1971. In its defense, Negritude was proclaimed a contemporary ideology and not just an outdated literary phenomenon by most of the speakers. In defining Negritude's new role, President Senghor said it had a mission "d'aider à bâtir une civilisation plus humaine parce que faite de différences nécessaires: des différences complémentaires des



ethnies et des nations."<sup>2</sup> This is the utopia that Senghor calls the "Civilisation de l'Universel." Africa will make its contribution through its own ideology, Negritude, which refuses to borrow from other ideologies, but creates its own devenir by obliging Africans to "penser et agir par nous-mêmes et pour nous-mêmes, en Nègres."<sup>3</sup> It seems that Edris Makward was right when, after examining the historical evolution of Negritude, he wrote in 1966: "Negritude is not static, it is changing: yesterday it was serenity, today [that is during the struggle for independence] it is aggressiveness and grievousness and tomorrow it will be something else."<sup>4</sup> What that something else is can best be determined by looking at the novels of the last five years. Consciously or unconsciously they are accurate reflections of facets of African reality, of what it means to "penser et agir en Nègre."

Because of the particular nature of the development of the novel, which seems to have nothing to do with common themes and interests, Part Two will take a geographical approach, country by country, to some of the most recently published works.

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<sup>2</sup>Léopold S. Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," opening address given at the Colloquium on Negritude, Actes du Colloque sur la Négritude (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Edris Makward, "Negritude and the New African Novel in French," Ibadan 22 (1966): 41.

## Chapter 1: The novel in former French West African Africa<sup>1</sup>

### A. Senegal

Senegal, the favored colony of the French dependencies, has produced a more sophisticated and varied literature in the metropolitan tongue than any other African state. From the first novels of the 20's and 30's to the poets and conteurs of Negritude to contemporary novelists, dramatics, historians and film makers, expression in French has flourished. The modern city of Dakar, on its peninsula edged by the sea, points a finger westward from the African continent. A seat of learning and administrative center for the whole of French West Africa in the colonial period, Dakar has grown since independence into a truly cosmopolitan capital. It is not

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<sup>1</sup>Covering a vast area of some 1,800,000 square miles, the eight territories of former French West Africa became today's modern nations of Dahomey (now called Benin), Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta. The novels studied in this chapter are Cheikh Ndao, Buur Tilleen (Présence Africaine, 1972), Ousmane Sembène, Xala (Présence Africaine, 1973), Aké Lobá, Les fils de Kouretcha (Eds. de la francité, 1970), Denis Oussou-Essui, La souche calcinée (Eds. CLE, 1973), Williams Sassine, Saint Monsieur Baly (Présence Africaine, 1973), Mohamed-Alioum Fantouré, Le cercle des tropiques (Présence Africaine, 1973) and Le récit du cirque... (Buchet/Chastel, 1975), Amadou Hampaté-Bâ, L'étrange destin de Wangrin (Union générale d'éditions, 1973), Boubou Hama, Kotia-Nima (Présence Africaine, 1968-69) and Le double d'hier rencontre demain (Union générale d'editions, 1973). Quotations are identified in the text by page number in parentheses.

surprising, therefore, to find novelists using the city theme as a mise-en-scène. They are beginning to capture the flavor of the city, no longer as the ville cruelle which alienates and destroys, but as the natural milieu in which life's little joys and tragedies are enacted. The social implications of this trend are significant. The city's role is recognized as a vital and dynamic force in the daily lives of its inhabitants. A new sense of identification and concept of community is being formed. Transition from an urban to a rural setting, and not the other way around, would now result in alienation. The Senegalese novel is almost unique in this treatment of the city. The disorientation theme predominates elsewhere still. But Dakar, like Paris, London or New York, has become a natural setting for the new urban novel.

A short first novel, Buur Tilleen, Roi de la Médina, was published in 1972 by Cheikh Aliou Ndao who was not, however, unknown on the literary scene. A poet and playwright, he had won prizes in 1962 for poetry and in 1969 for a play produced at the Pan African Festival of Algiers.

Buur Tilleen is a tightly written family tragedy, the style and structure of which reveal Ndao's talent as a dramatist and penchant for the theater. The opening scene could easily be staged. It shows Maram, the mother of the family, patient and submissive, lying in bed at night waiting for her husband to return. She tosses and turns, unable to sleep, tortured by the fleas and by a worry far more biting:

the predicament of her daughter Raki, and how she is going to tell her husband about it.' Almost immediately we are in the woman's mind, as she embarks on a long interior monologue:

"Quel est le meilleur moyen de dire la nouvelle à Gorgui? Le cajoler? Employer la résignation, la sagesse? L'aider à l'accepter en douceur? O ma douleur, mon amertume! Un mari comme Gorgui ne se rencontre pas facilement. Ah! . . . L'épreuve aurait dû nous épargner, nous ne l'avons pas encouragée . . ." (p. 10)

After several pages of this we are completely into the drama. We know the past history of Maram and her husband Gorgui, we know their characters, and we begin to suspect what Raki's problem must be. The essence of the monologue is in its short, descriptive sentences.

Then Gorgui comes home. We see him stumbling around in the dark and then getting grumpily into bed. Maram's anguish is palpable, and Gorgui senses it. The time has come to tell him:

. . . "Que Dieu me soutienne", pense Maram.  
 --Gorgui! Gorgui!  
 --Uuh?  
 --Raki traverse une épreuve.  
 -- Quel genre d'épreuve?  
 --Nul n'échappe à son destin.  
 Gorgui l'interrompt, avec impatience.  
 --Qu'y-a-t-il? est-ce grave?  
 --Raki est enceinte . . . (p. 23)

The realistic quality of these brief exchanges marks Ndao as a master of the dialogue. The natural rhythms of speech and the abrupt repartee reveal a genuine ear for the way people talk--in any language. The absence of windy language and high-flown rhetoric comes as a relief after the pretentious conversations of writers who are less sure

of their technique. Ndao's characters are believable, if only for the way they speak.

Precipitated out of the house by this news, Gorgui spends a doleful night wandering around reviewing his past glories, again through the technique of the interior monologue. The real problem, it seems, is not that Raki will have a baby--in all African societies this can only be a blessing--but that her young man is of a different caste, one that Gorgui (and tradition) considers inferior, even though Bougouma's father is Gorgui's most faithful friend, marriage between the two children is out of the question as far as both families are concerned. The main theme of the novel, then, is the new generation against tradition. It is a confrontation of love versus an outmoded notion of honor, and can only end in tragedy.

Ndao handles the tragedy gently, and so the dénouement is swift, almost unexpected, a procedure which again borrows from the theater for its final curtain effect. Gorgui chases his daughter from the house, and she is taken in by her aunt, Tante Astou, a spirited lady who runs a bar-bordello and knows a little bit about the ways of the world. Raki and Bougouma are happy in their love and plan to go off and settle away from the city as soon as the baby is born. But mother and infant die in the hospital, to the grief of all concerned, not the least of whom is Gorgui for his inflexible attitude.

As a roman social, Buur Tilleen deals with the generation

conflict that pits Raki, the emancipated young woman who is a student of nursing, and Bougouma, a college graduate and teacher, against the revolved world of their fathers:

. . . Que de rêves brisés, d'ambitions avortées pour avoir écouté les conseils d'un Afne. De justes dispositions servies par des qualités sûres se sont enlisées, parce que des parents ont mis sur les épaules de leurs rejetons leur propre destin.  
(p. 57)

Neither Raki nor Bougouma relish breaking with their parents, but they are willing to do so as a last resort in order to save their own future. Raki tells a friend, "Notre génération assiste à une lutte implacable entre un monde mité et l'aube de notre renaissance. Je suis satisfaite d'avoir osé " (p. 86).

As a roman à thèse, the novel attacks the caste system, "un handicap dans un pays moderne" (p. 68). The caste system, of which traces remain today, was a centuries-old tradition among some ethnic groups of the Sudan. Families of the nobility practiced strict endogamy. The serfs, no matter how closely attached to a noble family, would never be permitted to marry into it. A descendent of an ancient ruling aristocracy, Gorgui's mentality left him a stranger in this century. "Je comprends sa mentalité," says one of the young people talking about Raki's father, "la rapidité de l'évolution a pris cet homme au dépourvu; un prince ayant grandi dans la notion de l'hierarchie sociale se découvre soudain l'égal de tout un chacun" (p. 69). But Africa needs the courage to recognize whatever it is that

brakes its progress and eradicate it: "La liberté n'a pas de patrie, elle niche dans le coeur des humains. Tant que nous n'aurons pas le courage d'extirper nos tares, notre continent restera débile" (p. 71).

Finally, as a roman psychologique, Buur Tilleen offers incisive glimpses of the états d'âme of its principal characters through the use of interior monologue and conventional narrative technique.

Remembering her own youth, Tante Astou thinks of Raki:

Les deux caractères se ressemblent. Ils veulent se frayer leur voie vers le bonheur sans tenir compte de l'opinion. Tante Astou voit en Raki son image d'il y a quelques années. La même obstination, la même tolérance, la même détermination, la même volonté farouche de prendre la vie à bras le corps, de la secouer pour la rendre docile. (p. 95)

Solitude and isolation become sub-themes in the drama of Bougouma and Raki, created out of their psychological situation and because "ils préfèrent leur couple aux leçons reçues depuis l'enfance" (p. 103).

Bougouma et Raki mesurent leur isolement. Sans soutien. Sans avis. Seuls. Ils ne prennent plus part aux bruits de la grande ville, aux distractions. Leur horizon est obstrué, l'infortune les emprisonne comme dans un filet; ils butent contre l'incompréhension, la méchanceté. (p. 75-76)

Simply and affectingly told, with only a touch of the didactic tone so common in the African novel, Buur Tilleen marks a new step in the direction of objective realism. Naturalness of plot and dialogue are its most positive assets, the hallmark of an author who

is also a man of the theater. Descriptive passages are rare and spare. How and where the characters move and what they say are the elements that carry the action of the story, one of life's small tragedies of which the city encompasses hundreds daily and which are insignificant except to those whose lives they change.

Cheikh Ndao is now working on a new novel which will continue the city theme in an exploration of the contradictions in the life of a society lady of Dakar. The Dakarois, he feels, have always maintained their sense of separate identity and in spite of 300 years of colonization did not suffer the alienation that was common elsewhere. Thus they have been able to move and live in the city since independence without significant change in their outlook.<sup>2</sup> A negative view of this mentality is presented in the novel to be considered next.

Ousmane Sembène's Xala, published in 1973, tells another one of these "insignificant" stories of personal tragedy set against the background of the city. Or at least we would have had the wry and affecting drama of human frailty that Xala should have been if Sembène had been content to leave his ending alone. Instead, he sought to compensate for what he felt perhaps was the weakness of an insignificant story by adding a symbolic and moralistic final scene. When asked in an interview in 1963 what writing meant to him, Sembène replied,

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<sup>2</sup>From a personal interview with Cheikh Ndao in Dakar, 1/30/76.



"C'est une forme de participation à l'action sociale . . . à la construction de mon pays et à l'édification de la société humaine."<sup>3</sup> It was in this messianic spirit that he had produced his epic novels, O pays, mon beau peuple!, Les bouts de bois de Dieu and L'Harmattan. Turning from the novel in 1965, Sembène published two nouvelles, Vehi-Ciosane and Le mandat. The latter work is a small masterpiece which Sembène turned into a successful film. It tells the story of an old man who has received a money-order from a nephew in Paris and of his frustrations when he tries to cash it. Written without sentimentality and with great compassion, Le mandat was hailed as a milestone in the social revolution that was shaking the African masses. Xala carries on in somewhat the same tradition. It is a generally well-written novel about the ambitions and vanities of a rich bourgeois of Dakar and the troubles that ensue when he takes a young third wife. Sembène is a good story-teller and he knows how to catch the city scene exactly, but he also is a social critic with marxist leanings, so that Xala becomes a document of the ills which beset an urban, capitalist society. Disappointed at its lack of epic grandeur, a reviewer in the Dakar daily, Fraternité-Matin, wrote, ". . . cette mince histoire de mœurs à intention pesamment sarcastique et à conclusion lourdement symbolique ne satisfait guère l'admirateur que nous sommes de Sembène Ousmane--dont ici nous surprend le

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<sup>3</sup>"Entretien avec Sembène Ousmane, " Afrique 25 (June 1963): 47-49.

relâchement jusque dans le style et le vocabulaire."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the reviewer has missed the point. This is not epic but caricature, and it succeeds as such. The broadly painted major roles are types: the nouveau riche businessman, the traditional first wife, the modern and stylish second wife, the emancipated daughter, the wily go-between for the third marriage . . . Caricature is at its best when it is not too subtle. Sembène even manages to take a poke at Senghor's cherished "métis culturel":

El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye était, si on peut dire, la synthèse de deux cultures. Formation bourgeoise européenne, éducation féodale africaine. Il savait, comme ses pairs, se servir adroitement de ses deux pôles. La fusion n'était pas complète. (p. 11)

Sembène was probably thinking of the cinema when he wrote this novel, for Xala has already been translated into film and was featured at both the Cannes and New York Film Festivals in 1975. But Xala is more than just a screenplay. Sembène the novelist is too capable a writer for that, although we do sometimes have the sense of Sembène the director behind the camera hissing stage directions. And the various explanatory footnotes are obviously meant for the enlightenment of a non-Senegalese public as well as an occasion for Sembène to indulge in a form of social criticism:

Il est bon d'être informé sur ce genre de vie des polygames citadins, qu'on peut appeler polygamie-géographique, par opposition à la polygamie en zone rurale où toutes les épouses et les enfants vivent dans une même concession. En ville, les familles étant dispersées, les gosses ont peu de contacts avec leur père. Ce dernier, par son mode d'existence, navigue de

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<sup>4</sup>"Les Livres et Nous," Fraternité-Matin (Dakar), 12 février 1974, p. 5.

maison en maison, de villa en villa, n'est présent que le soir pour le lit. Il n'est donc qu'une source de financement quand il a du travail. Quant à l'éducation des enfants, la mère s'en charge. Les résultats scolaires sont très souvent médiocres. (footnote, p. 104)

Parenthetical explanations, which Sembène opens occasionally to clarify a point he must feel would otherwise remain obscure, are tiresome and sometimes redundant: "Selon la loi traditionnelle, la fille du frère est aussi fille de la soeur du père (en français: la fille de la tante)" (p. 14).

Descriptive writing, as is usual in the African novel, is rare.

Nature is catalogued rather than described and felt:

Les baobabs, courtauds sur troncs, aux branches épaisses et défeuillées; les roniers élancés, droits, fins, coiffés de leur larges palmes; les cades, arbres parasols étalant leur feuillage de la saison sèche, havres des animaux, des bergers, des cultivateurs, relais des oiseaux; l'herbe jaunie, séchée, cassée à la racine; des moignons de tiges de mil, de maïs, délimitant les anciens lougans; des arbres fantomatiques calcinés par d'incessants feux de brousse. Sous le poids torride du soleil de Coronn, la nature était recouverte d'une fine pellicule de poussière grisâtre. La langue rugueuse de l'alizé la râpait. Le paysages était marqué d'une austerité et d'une harmonie grandiose et tranquille. (pp. 105-106)

The cinéma vérité technique of this style, the nude simplicity of the language, devoid of any emotive connotations is characteristic of Sembène's later writing. Imagery and metaphor are almost wholly lacking. There are no "likes" or "as ifs"--a scene simply is:

La lumière terne sculptait grossièrement leurs faciès. La terre exhalait une senteur chaude. Dans les deux portes en vis-à-vis se découpait le ciel constellé d'étoiles. Des chuchotements parvenaient de l'autre côté de la tapate. On vint les

chercher pour les conduire auprès de Sérigne Mada. Ils franchirent trois séparations avant d'accéder à lui qui les attendait assis à même une natte. Une autre lampe à pétrole, placée derrière lui à distance, éclairait ses vêtements de dos. Sérigne Mada se confondait avec l'obscurité. (p. 111)

The calamity which has brought El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye and his faithful chauffeur to the marabout's case in the scene above is the title of the novel, xala, impotence. Stricken when he least expected it (or needed it), on the night of his wedding to the tempting young N'Goné, El Hadji is desperately seeking a way to "dénouer l'aiguillette" which fate has tied on him. The subject is one which could be treated in a completely burlesque manner. Sembène has chosen, however, to make El Hadji a caricature, but not a clown. He is the rich and enterprising bourgeois, respected for his business acumen, whose exploitation of the capitalist system Sembène sees as a direct continuation of French colonial policy. El Hadji's affectations--he speaks only French and drinks only Evian water--are elements of his corruption. He already has two wives, two villas, eleven children, a Mercedes, and a camionnette to transport his children to and from their various schools around town: "L'arrière du véhicule se divisait en deux. Chaque famille avait son banc. Cette ségrégation n'avait pas été l'oeuvre des mères, mais un comportement spontané des enfants " (p. 50). His third marriage to the 19-year old N'Goné is the pure vanity of an old man. The xala seems a fitting rebuke to his pretensions. The intervention of Sérigne Mada is successful and the xala is removed,

but not before El Hadji has ruined his business, his reputation, and his three households in his wild attempt to regain his virility. And all to no avail, for when his check in payment of services rendered is not honored, Sérigne Mada claps the xala right back on.

The little tragi-comedy would have been a better and more assured work if Sembène had left it there, a testimony to the foibles of human nature. The symbolic ending, a bruegelian scene of baroque dimensions, is a cinematic climax which seems out of place in the novel. Retrenched in the villa of his first wife, El Hadji is invaded one morning by a band of the most pitiful spectres of Dakar:

De front, occupant la largeur du talus, avançaient en procession éclopés, aveugles, lépreux, culs-de-jatte, unijambistes, hommes, femmes et enfants sous la conduite du mendiant. Un b ruissement d'insectes planait. La progression avait quelque chose d'horrible, laissant traîner la senteur fétide de leurs hardes variées. (p. 161)

It is the exploited poor en masse come to wreak their vengeance on El Hadji. Their leader is a beggar who explains that it was he who caused El Hadji's affliction to revenge an expropriation which had ruined his family years before. The beggar demands that El Hadji strip and be subjected to the humiliation of being spat upon by his horrible band. It is the social revolution in microcosm: "Je suis un ladre!" cries a hideous leper, "Je le suis pour moi. Moi, tout seul. Mais, toi, tu es une maladie infectieuse pour nous tous. Le germe de la lèpre collective " (p. 167). Slowly El Hadji begins to comply as the forces of law and order surround the villa . . .

The heavy message of the new social order and the massacre that is coming turns an effective satire into a piece of propaganda. The result is that El Hadji becomes an object of pity rather than scorn, and the satire loses its bite accordingly. When talented writers like Sembène learn to leave the point implied but not underscored in red, the social novel in Africa will have matured considerably.

Cheikh Aliou Ndao and Ousmane Sembène have forged a new genre of African novel in French. It is an objective kind of writing that shows the influence of their interests in the theater and the cinema. Dialogue and scenic techniques are more important than descriptive or philosophical style. The novels are very readable, the language is clear, unequivocal, as befits the theater where the lines, once spoken, cannot be recalled and reread. Such writing is more accessible to a newly literate African public, and points to a new direction for the African novel if it is to continue in French.

#### B. Ivory Coast

African literature of French expression in the Ivory Coast has its best-known exemplar in the works of Bernard B. Dadié whose Climbié, Un Nègre à Paris, and Patron de New York were mentioned in Part One of this study (Chapters 1 and 2). In 1968 Dadié brought out another reflection on his travels, La ville où ne meurt, souvenirs of a trip to Rome. His latest and most successful work has been in the

theater.

The novel, although partially eclipsed by other genres, still finds strong expression in the recent publications of two Ivorians, Aké Loba and Denis Oussou-Essui, who seem to have replaced Charles Nokan and Ahmadou Kourouma as exponents of the novel in the Ivory Coast.

Aké Loba first gained attention as a novelist in 1960 with the publication of Kocoumbo, l' étudiant noir. Following the independence he entered the diplomatic service of his country, and it was in Rome in 1966 that he wrote his second novel, Les fils de Kouretcha, published in 1970. A third novel, Les dépossédés, appeared in 1973. (This novel was not available to me at the time this study was written.)

The theme of Les fils de Kouretcha is tradition versus modernism. The treatment of the theme recalls Bhêly-Quénum's Le chant du lac; enlightenment and progress for the good of all will come when the old terrors and superstitions that subjugated a people are replaced by a newer, more humanistic interpretation of traditional values. Leaders in this socio-cultural revolution must come from the masses themselves, motivated by a collective will to change. Kouretcha of the title is both a great river and the god of that river, a jealous god whose sons are the tribe that inhabits the villages along the river's bank. Crisis arrives in the form of a government project to erect a hydro-electric dam on the river which will divert it from its

ancestral bed. The "fils de Kouretcha" will have nothing to do with the project and are terrified at the prospect of the god's angry reaction. Animism is very strong in the Ivory Coast, and is the religion of perhaps 50 % of the population.<sup>5</sup> A natural (as opposed to a revealed) religion, animism marks its believers with a strong sense of communication between Man and Nature:

L'animisme négro-africain pourrait se définir comme une vision du monde où l'on croit à l'existence, dans les êtres ou les forces de la nature, de dynamisme d'esprits et d'âmes capables d'intervenir dans la vie des humains. En d'autres termes cette religion repose sur le sentiment que le monde entier (êtres vivants et inanimés) est animé d'un souffle, d'une vie.<sup>6</sup>

Living in a sense of symbiosis with nature, the animist sees any attempt to disrupt the natural order of things as a direct invitation to disaster. The treatment of animism and animistic practices is becoming a more frequent sub-theme in the African novel. The approach is not folkloric, as it appeared to writers influenced by considerations of classical Negritude, but realistic, recognizing an

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<sup>5</sup>Jacques Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, p. 67: "Ce pays, d'une superficie à peu près égale à celle de la Guinée, compte une large majorité d'animistes (1,600,000), 600,000 musulmans et 300,000 chrétiens." Even those converted to the revealed religions frequently revert to animist practices in times of stress and trouble.

<sup>6</sup>Semi-Bi, "L'animisme et l'avenir des valeurs de la civilisation négro-africaine," Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, 26 (1972), p. 3.



everyday presence in the lives of millions of Africans which can influence a country's attitude towards its own development. Thus the inhibiting attitude of the villagers of Kouretcha is characteristic: "Même si certains veulent le barrage, ils ne peuvent désirer le construire eux-mêmes: travailler sur le Fleuve-Dieu est un suicide" (p. 112).

Another interesting development for the novel is the treatment of the European. Neither gods nor demons, the two white men in the novel are just human beings with jobs to do, one an archeologist, the other a "conseiller technique," and both are sympathetic. The counselor is an ex-colon who knows that "l'Afrique de papa' est en voie de disparition" (p. 47), and his sympathies for the new Africa have earned him the nickname of Francblanc. This casting aside of caricature and animosity indicates a new line of maturity, a concern with humanistic values by which the novel seeks to make a contribution to civilization tout court, as defined by Tougon, the progressive district administrator:

La civilisation est une et indivisible, elle appartiendra à tous les peuples; à quoi bon grandir une civilisation africaine en face d'une civilisation européenne qui elle-même suit une civilisation asiatique? Elle est une, la civilisation, puisqu'elle vise à amoindrir l'effort de l'homme, à soutenir la lutte biologique, à raffermir la volonté de puissance; c'est un phénomène scientifique, valable sous toutes les latitudes. Pourquoi parle-t-on des négritudes? Y a-t-il des blanchitudes, des jaunitudes? (p. 24)

Tradition is represented in the novel by two forces. Dam'no the ex-"commis expéditionnaire de première classe, le bras droit du commandant blanc" of the colonial period, is the inflexible defender of ancient custom who sees any attempt to tamper with the river as a profanation. Frustrated in his ambition to become chief of the tribe of the "fils de Kouretcha," he spends his time trying to counteract the conciliation which the chief is attempting to effect between the tribe and the dam builders . . . "tous les trois mois, le jour de la première lune, il prend un bain dans le Fleuve, lui sacrifie un poussin noir, et le lendemain un mouton vivant est offert au féticheur" (p. 23). The independence and development of his country mean nothing to Dam'no who has nostalgic memories of his own importance in the colonial era. The other face of tradition is "le Vieux," a direct descendent of the founders of the tribe and therefore, as the people believe, of the river itself. The mystique of antiquity is incarnate in his person:

Le Vieux, à y réfléchir encore un peu, signifiait ce que l'Afrique avait d'auguste dans le passé et le présent et imposait l'idée que la vertu de la tribu passerait toujours par lui pour se perpétuer. Lorsque les hommes prononçaient le Vieux, ils voulaient dire en somme la Patrie. (p. 92)

As opposed personally as Dam'no to the construction of the dam, he nevertheless realizes that the question is disuniting the tribe. In order to preserve the ancestral heritage, which is more important than the construction of a dam, he leads the population to an act of

submission signifying their acquiescence:

La division, la jalousie et la haine nous perdrons en effet.  
Si nous nous entretuons, les autres races nous aideront  
bientôt à le faire, mais notre terre ne disparaîtra pas avec  
nous; alors, elle sera le bien des inconnus. (p. 102)

Dam'no and le Vieux are symbolic of the negative and positive aspects of African traditionalism. The one is an impediment to the future, the other an accommodation in which those traditional values which really matter are preserved.

The construction of the dam is allowed to proceed, without, however, the assistance of any of the "fils de Kouretcha" save two, one of whom is appropriately struck by lightning when he spits at the name of le Vieux, and the other is caught stealing sacks of cement from the warehouse to take to his girlfriend's father (he thought he had rendered himself invisible by whispering an incantation to the river god). When a torrential rain brings out the frogs, an invasion of scorpions, and a disastrous flood crest, the villagers are sure it is the wrath of Kouretcha. Their fragile unity begins to crumble:

En fait, le barrage prend bel et bien le chemin d'une idéologie et cette nouvelle discipline inflige aux fils de Kouretcha des unions forcées sans rapport avec leur belle unité d'antan. La nervosité s'installe dans toute la région et jusque dans les foyers. (p. 148)

Order is eventually restored, but not before Aké Loba seizes two occasions at the end of his novel to display his talent as a writer of comedy. Satire and humor have made but rare appearances in the contemporary novel; comedy is almost entirely lacking. It is therefore

a pleasure to discover scenes in which an element of farce predominates even if it is a kind of slapstick comedy that shows a strong Hollywood influence. The first of these is a brawl, with the bodies flying in every direction, that began when the school teacher struck the village playboy who had made his star pupil pregnant. Soon everyone has joined in the fun thinking it was a fight between those for and against the dam construction. When misunderstanding follows misunderstanding, the army is finally dispatched to the village and what might have turned into a tragedy also becomes a comedy as the honor of the village is saved by the least expected source.

Aké Loba uses realism and good sense to construct a novel that has humor as well as pathos. Dam'no, the central character, is something of an anti-hero. In a great circular movement, the novel opens and closes on his frustrations and bitterness. We first meet him in a travesty of a World War I uniform on his way to a 14 juillet observance: "Celui qui passait dans ces hardes pharamineuses avait été pendant trente ans l'homme le plus en vue, le plus envié de tout un pays. Il avait été, était encore, membre de la tribu des Fils de Kouretcha " (p. 10-11). And it is Dam'no who brings the novel to its sudden close as he stumbles into the office where Tougon the préfet has been toasting the success of order over chaos with his two white friends:

Dam'no a défoncé la porte avec son fusil et, les yeux hagards,  
la voix halentante:

--Protège-moi, Monsieur le Préfet, dit-il, parce . . . ce . . .  
que je viens de tu . . . tuer Moussa . . . Domyia.

Et il s'affaissa aux pieds du Préfet. (p. 171-172)

Dam'no has killed the féticheur whose rites he had been following to  
confound the progress of the dam.

In La souche calcinée, published in 1973, Denis Oussou-Essui  
treats the familiar theme of the African student in Europe. In This  
Africa, a study of certain pre-independence novels as evidences of  
patterns of cultural consciousness, Judith Gleason says of this theme:

The loneliness of the exceptional person from the backward  
community who became the lonely tribesman in the regional  
school run according to European standards, who became the  
anxious ex-villager in the city or the guilty évolué far from  
home--this condition peculiar to so many African novels is  
obviously nowhere near as determinative as it once was.<sup>7</sup>

It is neither as determinative nor as frequent. Still it reappears  
from time to time, as in this sensitively written work by the  
Ivorian poet and journalist who has also produced one other novel,  
Vers de nouveaux horizons, which appeared in 1965.

La souche calcinée is the story of Kongo Lagou, a "broussard  
né un matin d'harmattan à Koliaklo" (p. 24), who with his school  
friends had been "secrètement pénétré d'envie d'enjamber les océans"  
in order to "aller s'abreuver aux sources d'instruction . . ." (p. 31).

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<sup>7</sup>Judith Gleason, This Africa, Novels by West Africans in  
English and French (Northwestern, 1965), p. 176.

The novel tells of his multiple sufferings to obtain an education in France after his happier days as a collégien in Africa.

It is the treatment of the theme, rather than the theme itself which holds our attention, for Oussou-Essui has mastered the technique of the flashback better than any novelist studied heretofore. The novel tells the story on two time planes, that of Paris where we first meet Lagou desperately looking for work, and that of his past life up until the time he arrived in Paris. Both parts of the structure unroll at an unequal pace until the retrograde scenes catch up with the "present." It takes a feeling of the dramatic necessity of a scene and the pertinence of the flashback it recalls to accomplish this feat without losing the reader. Oussou-Essui has managed just this, and managed also to hold the sympathy of the reader for his hero who seems an eminently human and likeable young man.

Although written in the third person, the narration radiates the flavor of an autobiographical account. The "il" of Oussou-Essui's hero could just as well be "je." By maintaining this discreet distance from his subject, however, the author has told a more interesting and less subjective story. The student milieu seen from without rather than from within takes on a dimension which only the technique of the omniscient but invisible author can achieve. The fault of the African novel with autobiographical tendencies is that it often tries to be both

personal mémoire and public réquisitoire, an uncomfortable feat when managed in the first person. Kongo Lagou gains our sympathy because of the straightforward manner in which his story is told and the absence of the "look-at-me-and-feel-sorry-for-me" motif. Lagou confronts life like the charred stump, the symbolic and recurring image of the title:

Le visage du Noir, luisant de sueur,  
 Ressemble à la souche calcinée des champs,  
 Quand la nuit absorbe les firmaments  
 Et, immense et noire, propage la peur  
 . . .  
 Quand viennent les saisons de la moisson  
 Dans leurs foulées éperdues pour atteindre le centre  
 Les moissonneurs pressés ont froissé l'herbe tendre;  
 De douleur elle se tord au pied de la souche calcinée des champs  
 Et la prochaine saison elle attend, pour reprendre son élan. (p. 203)

The tender young grass of a new regeneration draws its source of nourishment from the carbonized remains of the brush fire. After his long struggle, Lagou will return to Africa to participate in its rebirth.

Oussou-Essui has set his novel in the years leading up to and immediately following independence. His symbolism for the hopefulness of this period is a more practical one than the "new dawn" theme which novels contemporary with the independence era seemed to favor. It may be that the perspective of thirteen years has made a more homely and durable image necessary. As he has one of his African students say to Lagou, "C'est là notre défaut majeur à

nous Africains. Nous voulons aller trop loin sans prendre le temps de passer par toutes les étapes" (p. 156). This same criticism is voiced earlier in the novel through the intermediary of another friend of Lagou's:

Au lieu de se livrer à des politiques vasoillardes, tes Nègres là-bas feraient mieux d' être sérieux. Non, tu t'rends compte! Des troufions quittent leur caserne--baionnette aux poings-- vont faire un petit tour dans le cabinet présidentiel, en ressortent colonels, puis se proclament généraux du jour au lendemain... Et puis, avec leurs décorations toutes clinquantes, les voilà qui se mettent à balancer par-dessus leur tête le lourd destin de tout un peuple de la même manière qu'ils jetteraient par-dessus leurs épaules les plis de leur pagne. (p. 72)

The theme of political criticism is a sensitive and uncertain one for African novelists. They dare not be too outspoken, and censorship both at home and in France is severe. Examples of political writing are therefore rare, and the political novel is practically non-existent. One attempt, Vive le Président, la fête africaine, was published by Daniel Ewandé of Cameroon in 1968, and subsequently banned practically everywhere in Africa. In 1972, Mongo Beti brought out a non-fiction political document, Main basse sur le Cameroun which was immediately seized in both France and Cameroon.<sup>8</sup> The path of least resistance for the novelist is still satire or a non-specific attack as in the paragraph quoted above. Another consideration of the political theme will be considered in the section to follow on the novel from Guinea.

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<sup>8</sup>Rial, Littérature camerounaise, p. 21, footnote.



Nostalgia, solitude and exile, recurrent themes in all student-in-Europe novels have their place here but do not overwhelm the reader with their persistent melancholy. Fear and anxiety are more dominant, fear of failure, fear of being swallowed up by life, fear of the unknown:

Derrière Lagou c'était le vide de sa jungle natale; devant lui, l'éblouissement; blancheur éblouissante des neiges sur les côteaux; blancheur éblouissante des fleurs au printemps; blancheur éblouissante des soleils des étés; blancheur éblouissante des visages des hommes; blancheur éblouissante des pages des livres. Où était l'espoir? Devant ou derrière?  
(p. 140)

Hope is ahead, as Lagou eventually realizes. When he understands the alienation that ten years' absence have wrought in him and the frustrations that attend his every move as an exile, he decides that the time has come to return home and confront the future:

Il n'était plus un participant mais un spectateur passif. Il ne disait plus "nous", mais "ils" ni "notre", mais "leur". Au lieu de "nous construisons notre nation", c'était "ils" construisent "leur" nation. Au lieu de "nous avons une ambassade à Paris où nos dirigeants décident de l'avenir de notre pays", c'était "ils" ont "leur" ambassade à Paris où "ils" décident de l'avenir de "leur" pays. C'était comme s'il avait eu sa maison assiégée et qu'il devait attendre sur le palier, à moins qu'il ne fit des concessions aux assaillants avant d'y entrer.  
(p. 190-191)

Separation works two ways, however. Life is an eternal leavetaking. The open door means one has closed behind. For Lagou it is a nostalgic last trip through Paris, the Paris which has seemed to promise so much to the eager new arrival: "--Ah, palpitant Paris! Ah, vibrant Paris! Oh, trépidant Paris! Toi qui sais faire battre le

coeur des autres à l'unisson du tien, comme ce fut extraordinaire de partir! De courir vers toi! De s'élancer vers toi!" (p. 38). The image of Paris as a theme in the African novel of French expression is revelatory of the love/hate fascination which the métropole exercised on the African imagination. Recourse to this theme is diminishing. It may quite possibly disappear altogether since African pupils do not have the mystique of la belle et douce France instilled in them from their earliest schooldays as they had under the colonial system, nor are they obliged to expatriate themselves today in order to continue a higher education. Although still conspicuous by his color, the African in France today is no longer a self-conscious colonial. He is a citizen of his own country and his attitude toward Europe has changed subtly. This attitude, reflected in the novel, will shape the new treatment of the theme of the African in Europe, of which we can see an early indication in Rémy Medou-Mvomo's Mon Amour en noir et blanc in chapter 3.

Oussou-Essui is adept at catching colloquial style. The dialogues and exchanges are marked by a naturalness in which slang and familiar jargon are normal means of expression. The everyday speech patterns of people from a variety of milieux are captured by the novelist's sure ear. It is a feature of the African novel in French that description, exposition and characterization are handled less well than dialogue. The spoken word is the essence of the person who speaks, a trait which derives from the strong oral tradition and the importance

of the palabre in African society. The dramatic spoken quality of the novel has already been noted in the two Senegalese works studied in Section A. Denis Oussou-Essui, like Cheikh Ndao and Ousmane Sembène, uses dialogue rather than exposition to move a scene:

---Pas de blague. Bian! Il faut que je te trouve demain.  
 ---Promis, chef, j'y serai à l'heure dite. A moins d'un empêchement de force majeure . . .  
 ---Aurais-tu un autre projet?  
 ---Pas spécialement non. Mais si ça colle pour mon boulot, je risque de rentrer plus tard que d'ordinaire . . . Tu m'attendras puisque tu as l'air d'y tenir.  
 ---J'y tiens, Bian! Je t'attendrai.  
 ---Alors d'ac.  
 ---D'ac, Bian. Bonne nuit et bonne chance pour demain.  
 ---Merci.  
 ---Allez bye, Bian.  
 ---Oké, bye, bye, Bigger. (p. 47)

This technique has the immediacy of a staged production, but it does not give the reader much insight into the motivations of the characters. The narrative remains, therefore, very much a surface exposure.

A coming to terms with life and the future is the thrust of both Ivorian novels considered here. The optimism inherent in this attitude contrasts with the nihilism and bitterness revealed in the trio of novels to be considered next.

### C. Guinea

In the dedication of his 1966 novel, Dramouss, "aux jeunes d'Afrique," Laye Camara wrote:

. . . En témoignage de solidarité et d'amitié à tous, en formant

le voeu que ce récit, écrit d'une plume rapide, ne serve pas d'exemple, mais plutôt de base à des critiques objectives, profitables à la jeunesse, avenir du Pays. Que cet ouvrage contribue à galvaniser les énergies de cette jeunesse; et surtout celles des jeunes poètes et romanciers africains, qui se cherchent, ou qui, déjà se connaissent, pour faire mieux, beaucoup mieux, dans la voie de la restauration totale de notre pensée; de cette pensée qui, pour résister aux épreuves du temps, devra nécessairement puiser sa force dans les vérités historiques de nos civilisations particulières, et dans les réalités africaines . . . (p. 8)

Unable to compromise with the totalitarian regime which independence brought to Guinea, Camara left the country for Senegal. His most recent work has been as a researcher for I. F. A. N. (l' Institut Fondamental en Afrique Noire). The challenge he left the young novelists of Guinea has been picked up by two of his countrymen, each of whom has produced works in which biting realism and finished style combine to paint a bitter picture of the continuing struggle for liberation and development.

The first of these is Saint Monsieur Baly, published in 1973, by Williams Sassine. One of the more puzzling works of contemporary African fiction in French, the novel is the story of an old man's efforts to build a school for the poor. A teacher himself, Sassine clearly has a didactic and moralistic purpose in mind. In the struggles of the hero to construct a modest school and bring enlightenment to a small town lost on the fringes of the desert we may see an allegory of the construction of the New Africa. Monsieur Baly becomes in a very real sense a martyr to the "Dieu de la sainte Afrique," the Dramouss

of Camara's vision, to whom this prayer of supplication is addressed:

"Dieu de la sainte Afrique, délivre-moi du mal, de la maladie, de la mort, de l'indigence spirituelle, de la peur, de la singitude, de la pauvreté matérielle, en un mot de tout mal . . .  
Je crois en Toi, mon Père sur cette terre et dans les cieux."  
(p. 222)

Against the incomprehension and malicious mischief of almost the entire town are pitted one old retired teacher and his pitiful band of beggars and "éclopés"--François the leper, Mohamed the blindman (representing Christianity and Islam respectively) and the "petits mendiant," the children representing the African masses. Together they struggle to throw off the "dieux étrangers" and the dependencies instilled in them after years of colonial domination, and emerge self-reliant and strong in the ancient faith of their ancestors, Animism. Their school is the edifice they have constructed themselves out of their own devotion, courage and faith.

Monsieur Baly's dilemma was an existential agony. "Mon Dieu," he confides to his journal, "je ne sais pas encore qui je suis!" (p. 90). He is tormented by accusations that he is simply continuing a form of exploitation, and by thoughts that his actions are motivated by personal vanity rather than the will to serve. But his sense of mission is the source of his strength: "Malgré tout je ne suis qu'un simple dépositaire temporaire de connaissances que je dois communiquer tant qu'il y aura un homme qui ne sait lire ni A ni B"(p. 92), and he persists, in the manner of the heroes of Sartre and Camus, in

order to give a sense of meaning to his life. His commitment enables him to resolve his existential dilemma. Reconciled at last with the people he sought to serve, Baly hopefully believes that he will at last be able to "s'acquitter de la dette de la vie," find the reason for his existence. His philosophy is that of the "petit poussin" of the fable, an African Chicken Little, who instead of running around in a panic shouting that the sky is falling, tries to do something about it:

...un jour, le plus puissant roi de la terre, fuyant une terrible catastrophe, rencontra sur son chemin un tout petit poussin couché les pattes en l'air; il lui demanda: "Petit poussin, pourquoi te couches-tu les pattes en l'air, au lieu de fuir? Ne sais-tu pas que bientôt le ciel va tomber sur la terre?" "Je le sais, répondit le petit poussin; c'est pour cela que je me couche les pattes en l'air: je cherche à retenir le ciel; chacun fait ce qu'il peut; oui, chacun doit faire ce qu'il peut pour retenir le ciel . . . (p. 81)

Baly dies just when his dreams are beginning to be realized, when he begins to think that perhaps he has succeeded in holding up his part of the sky. In an epilogue we are told that his work was carried on by the faithful François and that Baly has become endowed with the holiness of a saint. His lesson of courage will serve as a model for the continent where "soufflera bientôt alors dans nos enfants l'esprit de Celui qui nous aide à repousser le désert, à rafraîchir le soleil et à éclairer les intelligences . . ." (p. 223).

In form and structure, Saint Monsieur Baly is, unlike most African novels, extremely complicated, consisting of a prologue, three parts and an epilogue. There is a constant flow back and forth in time to

create a reconstitution of Monsieur Baly's life, through his memory and a third-person exposition in the first part, and by his personal journal in part two. In part one, Baly receives his notice of retirement and as he looks ahead to what he may do with the rest of his life, he also looks back on what he has done and what he has been, especially in his relationship with Fati, his wife, and with Sidi, his friend. Face to face with himself, Baly conceives of his life's mission. In part two, two years have passed. Baly receives the diagnosis that he has contracted leprosy. The two years of struggle and sorrow in which the school was established and destroyed by the malice of teachers and administration are recounted in the journal he has kept and which he now rereads. He begs God to give him another two years. In part three, another two years have passed. The school has been reborn and his dream about to be realized, Baly dies, crying desperately, "Mon Dieu, ce n'est pas le moment" (p. 212). The two-part prologue presents the unbelievable miseries of the lives of François the leper and Mohamed the blindman, whom Baly later befriended and adopted. In the epilogue, we learn that François (now called Gnama, as he wished to have a traditional African name) is carrying on the work of the school, but that Mohamed has died, perhaps a suicide because he did not have the "vision" to carry on after the death of his protector. The novel ends on the note of hope for the future which is the prayer to the "Dieu de la sainte Afrique" quoted above.

Sassine's style and use of French have a sureness that is becoming rarer as fewer writers undergo the rigors of a French education. His language is vivid and evocative, and he knows how to make use of description to create an atmosphere:

Le soleil brûlait la petite ville aux rues sablonneuses; de part et d'autre de la route commerciale s'alignaient de vieilles boutiques avec leurs boutiquiers nonchalants et dégoulinants de sueur; à l'est, comme un symbole, s'élevait vers le ciel écorché la pointe implorante du minaret de la mosquée; au sud, la grande bâtisse cubique de la municipalité barrait l'horizon de sa lourde masse. La chaleur devenait écrasante, une chaleur sèche qui faisait vibrer l'air rouge de poussière; les murs des petites cases peintes à la chaux blanche pelaient dans la lumière crue . . . (p. 34)

The technique of the interior monologue is much used to get "inside" the characters and give them a psychological dimension that the flat technique of dialogue on which so many African novelists rely cannot achieve. There is strong use of symbolism and imagery. The most persistent image is that of rotteness and decay. François the leper is "l'homme-pourri" whose hideousness Baly cares for until at last he himself contracts the disease. Flies, the deadly intimates of putrefaction, hover symbolically over the collective filth and squalor which Baly is trying to eradicate . . . "Allah, du haut des cieux, regarde les fils de l'homme pour voir s'il y a quelqu'un d'intelligent qui le craint; c'est pourquoi il a créé les mouches qui couvrent d'autres hommes; chasse-les de leur corps et tu découvriras des frères. . . ." (p. 55). The images of the earth, the heavens and the



stars recur to develop the animist concept of the universe. Through a renewal of contact with the earth, Monsier Baly remembers what he had forgotten, "qu'il appartenait à cette terre qui, telle une mère, un jour l'embrasserait pour l'éternité" (p. 49). The stylistic approach of mixed genres, which gives a novel its "Africanness" according to many critics, has been well used by Sassine. He employs the narrative, first-person monologue, journal intime, poems and songs, the dream and the fable to create a whole which succeeds in a way other mixed-genre novels, Dramouss among them, have not.

As a psychological and philosophical novel, Saint Monsieur Baly is rather overrun with themes. They may, however, be divided into four somewhat broad categories. The first has to do with the individual's existential fate: suicide, solitude, hopelessness and discouragement, fatality, being and nothingness, the distance which separates men and the yearning for closeness. The second group of themes relates to the attitudes of the collectivity: suspicion, hostility, indifference, the cruelty of African for Africans, of man for fellow men. The third and fourth categories have to do with the transformation of these attitudes: the third encompasses scholarization, education, the mission of the school, methods of modern teaching, problems of language, alphabetization of the masses; the fourth carries the educating mission further into themes of African unity, traditional African values, and the search for authenticity. Twenty-nine years old when

his novel was published, Sassine is obviously both a dreamer and a doer. Saint Monsieur Baly is a cri de coeur for both faith and compassionate action, and it is unique in the African novel of the past fifteen years. On a continent which is so badly in need of models and modest heroes, Sassine's one inspired old man is a pathetic figure indeed.

Guinea--and Africa--need more than relevant education for the masses in order to survive in the modern world. A crisis of the post-independence years has been a lack of enlightened political leadership. Civilian rule has given way to military dictatorship in more than half the countries of French-speaking Africa, and where civilian rule has been maintained, there is a strict single party leadership which, with the exception of Senegal, brooks no opposition. The situation cries for a redress of grievances, but the novelists have hesitated in making too pointed a claim. The first frankly political novel to gain widespread recognition was brought out by Présence Africaine in 1972, and won the Grand Prix du Roman d'Afrique Noire in 1973. Entitled Le cercle des tropiques, its author is a Guinean writing under the pseudonym of Alioum Fantouré. It must be supposed that the author is living in exile, and it is not surprising that he wishes to guard his anonymity, for the novel is a deadly and only thinly veiled attack on the regime of Sékou Touré, president of his native country.

The novel is a bitter récit, with comic traces, of the adventures of a native peasant who always seems to be where the action is and who is swept along without understanding very much of what is going on. An appropriate subtitle might be the "The perils of Bohi-Di," as the hero's plaintive refrain, "Qu'est-ce que je fiche ici, mon Dieu?" echoes throughout the novel. At first sight, Bohi-Di seems a first cousin to Gil Blas but he has not the cunning of that rogue, and his story is one of far more brutality and despair. Still, there are certain features which relate him not only to Le Sage's hero but to Candide and the Huron as well. The "indestructible orphan," Bohi-Di is, like his 18th century predecessors, a survivor:

Orphelin, j'avais perdu ma mère le jour même de ma naissance, mauvais présage pour un nouveau-né que j'étais. A un an, il ne me restait plus que mon père comme seul parent, mes grands-parents, comme pressés de se reposer, étaient partis presque en même temps vers leur Père qui est aux Cieux. Pendant mon enfance, j'avais fait la collection de toutes les maladies. Au temps où mes camarades du même âge mouraient les uns après les autres, moi, je ressuscitais après chaque maladie. Comme par respect pour le Créateur, on m'avait surnommé "le protégé des dieux" . . . (pp. 19-20)

The novel is extremely episodic, with awkward jumps in time and an occasional flashback or change in locale and situation which leave the reader perplexed for a moment, obliged to supply a fill-in from his own intuition of what must have transpired. Through his own simplicity, Bohi-Di finds himself caught up in a whirl of social and political violence. He is the witness to and participant in events over

which he has no control and which he only partly understands. His troubles begin when, still a boy, he first tries to leave his rural milieu to seek his fortune in the city. He is attacked and robbed by his travelling companions in the taxi-brousse: "Mon crime était d'être propre, bien nourri et en bonne santé parmi des êtres qui trainaient avec eux le spectre de la misère. Ils ignoraient que j'étais aussi désespéré qu'eux. Ils ne devaient jamais le savoir" (p. 25). This was his first, but by no means last, encounter with social injustice. Alioum Fantouré is especially severe in his attack on unemployment and the exploitation of workers. From misadventure to misadventure, Bohi-Di finally manages to settle himself in the city. Not, however, before he has got himself inadvertently caught up in a clandestine anti-colonial movement with sinister overtones. It is the period immediately preceding independence when native factions are jockeying for position to see who will come out on top after the colonial power has withdrawn. The leader of the movement is called the "Messie-koi," a shadowy figure whose rise to power after independence is accompanied by all the tactics of a police state. Fantouré has named his fictitious country "Les Marigots du Sud" and its capital city "Porte Océane." It is not Guinea alone which is the target of his attack, but by extension all of the totalitarian regimes and petty dictatorships along the "cercle des tropiques" in whatever hemisphere,

north, south, east or west, they may be:

Sous le cercle des tropiques la roue du destin tourne si vite que nous finissons par n'avoir plus le temps de faire un bilan de notre existence. On se laisse mener par les jours qui se suivent, "pourvu que je me reveille demain, si Dieu le veut". Malheureusement, nombreux sont ceux dont les cheveux blanchissent prématurément ou dont le corps s'use si vite qu'ils n'ont souvent pas le temps de vieillir. Incertitudes, souffrances, espoirs jamais atteints peuvent être aussi les coordonnées immuables et prédestinées des Tropiques. (p. 154-155)

The theme of the resignation of the exploited and oppressed populations is emphasized by the eternal litany of fatality with which the "damnés de la terre," to use the expression of the Internationale hallowed by Fanon's use, seek to reassure themselves: "Dieu l'a voulu, " "C'est Dieu qui le veut." Novelists before Fantouré had tried to shake the people from this lethargy, but the social and political novel in Africa can make no great inroads on this mentality as long as the people are enslaved by illiteracy. This truth is put into the mouth of Fantouré's Dr. Malekê, a humanitarian who tries vainly to be apolitical:

--Vous perdez la tête, nous ne sommes tout de même plus des enfants pour jouer à la guerre civile ou à une révolution de pacotille. Vous voulez vous faire tuer. Sachez qu'on ne fait pas fondre une banquise avec quelques allumettes. Les vingt-six lettres de l'alphabet feront beaucoup plus de bien à nos compatriotes que toutes les déclarations des révolutionnaires réunis! (p. 152)

The novel is divided into two parts of approximately equal length. The first, "Porte Océane," covers a number of years leading up to the day of national independence in Les Marigots du Sud. The arrest, imprisonment and trial of the workers' leaders are

followed by a strike in which the solidarity of the workers recalls the theme of Sembène's Les bouts de bois de Dieu, and a vain attempt by the leaders of "Le Club des Travailleurs" to prevent the take-over of power by Baré Koulé the "Messie-koï" and his "Parti Social de l'Espoir." With the tacit approval of the European colonial administration, Baré Koulé has maneuvered himself into position through the most devious of means. The intellectuals can only watch in despair as the inevitable prepares itself. As Doctor Malekê tells the departing white police commissioner:

--Gouverner suppose un apprentissage. Vous nous donnez l'indépendance pour mieux pouvoir nous dominer par personnes interposées . . . La misère, l'exploitation, l'ignorance forment l'inhumaine trinité qui nous mène. Le désespoir, commissaire, ne secrète pas d'idées nobles. Même votre départ ne vous mettra pas à l'abri de nos violences, tôt ou tard vous serez concernés, quand bien même vous retireriez tous vos intérêts séculaires de notre sol et nous abandonneriez à nous-mêmes, vous ne serez plus jamais à l'abri de nos malheurs sur lesquels vous avez si longtemps fermé les yeux. (p. 116)

The crisis of the Third World has global dimensions.

The second part, "Le cercueil de zinc," borrows its title from a poem of Brecht's, quoted here in French translation:

Dans ce cercueil de zinc, il y a un homme mort ou ses jambes et sa tête, ou moins encore, ce qu'il fut ou rien, car il était un agitateur.

. . .  
 Cette chose-là dans le zinc vous a excités à de grands méfaits: à manger à votre faim et à habiter au sec et à nourrir vos enfants et à exiger votre dû; et à la solidarité avec tous les opprimés, vos semblables, et à penser . . . (p. 181-182)

The poem, circulated by a 16-year old lycéen who becomes a martyr for his deed, is a token of the protest that is taking form in the country against the dictatorial regime of Baré Koulé. At the time of his installation as president, "Baré Koulé était salué comme un nouveau dieu par ses compatriotes . . . C'était un sauveur, disait-on, son mythe avait pris forme . . . car nous, les enfants du soleil avons besoin d'être mystifiés par nos dieux pour oublier le temps qui passe" (pp. 126-127). But after the first delirium of joy, independence passed into legend. The people believed they were independent, they were fed with words telling them they were independent by the man who achieved his goals through political assassination, but their situation remained little changed. If anything, it grew worse. Even Bohi-Di could recognize that: "Moi qui attendais un changement, un miracle avec la venue de l'indépendance, j'avais découvert un gouffre d'incertitude, aussi angoissant que la pensée d'entrer soudain dans la tombe" (p. 130). The noble "Lion noir" which Fatoman of Camara's Dramouss saw in his vision as the savior of Africa has turned into Baré Koulé, the Messie-koï, a false messiah indeed.

The second part deals with the political situation of a country held in a reign of terror by a tyrant whose strong-arm militia are in full control. Alioum Fantouré attacks all features of a megalomaniacal dictatorship: the single party, intimidation of non-party members, torture and police brutality, midnight arrests and imprisonment,

corruption and self-interest of those in power, tax burdens, terrorism and deportation. The situation he describes is shocking and harshly factual. *Les Marigots du Sud* is every police state which has ever existed, within or without "le cercle des tropiques." Having declared himself "président à vie" through a rigged referendum, Baré Koulé continues to consolidate his position through force and intimidation until finally, as was inevitable, the army steps in and stages a coup d'état. Whatever hope for the future this may bring is left suspended by Fantouré. The novel's closing line is enigmatic, and not too reassuring:

Un sentiment depuis longtemps perdu en moi, celui-là même que j'avais appris à oublier, avait refait surface, pareille à l'étoile du matin sa lumière m'éclairait de l'intérieur. Ce sentiment si torturé, si lapidé depuis des années, osait soudain murmurer son nom, il murmurait: Espérance.

Et pourtant . . . (p. 252)

The characters who populate the novel, besides Bohi-Di, clearly draw their prototypes from the 20th century novel of political action, which in French-speaking Africa means a descendance traced back through Ousmane Sembène's Harmattan and Les bouts de bois de Dieu to the novels of Sartre, Camus and Malraux. It is especially the latter whose influence is felt in Le cercle des tropiques. While the first part contains elements that relate Bohi-Di's adventures to the picaresque tradition, the second part is a novel of revolt and resistance in which the chief characters are more akin to those of La



Condition humaine: the humanitarian Dr. Malekê; Mellé Han, the labor union leader; Salimatou, the courageous militant nurse, Colonel Fof who will depose the dictator . . . these and others play a definitely Malrusian role as they struggle for freedom and the affirmation of human worth and dignity. Alioum Fantouré proves with Le cercle des tropiques that the "roman engagé" is still very much alive and very much needed.

In Le récit du cirque . . . published late in 1975 (Buchet/Chastel), Fantouré carries his engagement into the realm of allegory with a novel that has the hallmarks of a modern morality play. The reader takes his place among the spectators who find themselves in a theater before a lowered curtain of indifference. The spectacle has begun and the author, Saibel-Ti, who functions also as a metteur-en-scène, is getting things ready following an entr'acte. What has gone before the reader cannot say because "Objectivement il ne nous est possible d'émouvoir un avis quelconque . . . nous n'étions pas dans la salle au début de cette soirée" (p. 11). Whatever it was, it has perturbed the audience which is beginning to get restless. A personnage appears, indistinct at first, and then progressively more identifiable. It is the "Rhinocéros-Tâcheté," personification of the culte du moi.

LE RHINOCÉROS-TACHETÉ, dieu maléfique  
 QUI REGNE DE NOS JOURS  
 SUR DES DIZAINES DE NATIONS  
 SOUS LE NOM DE DICTATURE . . . (p. 86)

It is not clear, however, at first that this is the "dieu maléfique" of the cult of the personality. His identity and origin as the offspring of a panther, representing cruelty and ruse, and a rhinoceros, representing stupidity and stubbornness, are revealed as the spectacle unfolds in a string of seven "chapelets." It is a multi-media show in which live actors and a cast of thousands mix with filmed sequences and sound and light presentations adroitly rendered by Fantouré's clever mixing of prose and poetry to catch the effect of a circus ". . . de la vallée des morts."

The time and setting of the récit are now and always, everywhere and nowhere: "Ce-jour," Ce-temps, "Ce-siècle," "Cette-époque," "Cette-ère," Ce-pays, "Ce-monde," The victims are "Ce-peuple," but the personnages who control their destinies play more identifiable roles. They are Afrikou, the Guide, the spirit of Africa who like Camara's Dramouss, conducts the spectators on their symbolic voyage; Mihi-Moho, "l'inconnu," conscience of the world who is killed by indifference; I-Mille and Vice-I-Mille the inquisitors who terrorize the population, carrying out the ruthless designs of the dictator; FAHATI, the dictator himself; and finally, Death, who will have the final say. Liberated at the end from the oppressive experience of witnessing the events these characters have generated, the spectators file out of the theater into the sunshine. As they go, each one is handed an envelope with a card on which is written RETOURNEZ A VOTRE INDIFFERENCE . . . (p. 151).

A reader looking for a story line will be disappointed in Le récit du cirque . . ., for Fantouré has deliberately tried to emulate the "total theater" effects of a visual spectacle involving live actors and filmed sequences, sound and image. It is a tricky stylistic feat, but succeeds in becoming something of a literary novel's theater of the absurd which the reader feels he has experienced along with the fictitious spectators. Along with them too, he may feel a little weary from the effort which this exercise in imagination demanded of him and long to return to his indifference.

But Fantouré's talent has certainly declared itself in these two novels, and with a third in preparation, he may well be the one to break the spell that has seemed to hold so many promising new novelists since the 1960's to one book.

#### D. Mali

The "Sage malien," Amadou Hampaté Bâ, has made it his life's work to preserve the history and oral tradition of his people. His texts are, for the most part, a reconstitution in French of the pastoral poetry and griot epics of the Peuhl and Mandé ethnic groups in the ancient Islamic state of Macina, the empire of Mali. Hampaté Bâ is a traditionalist for whom African national cultural originality has always been the source of inspiration. At a time when other writers were espousing the melting-pot concept of Negritude, Hampaté Bâ

was rejecting any ideological influences, save those which came from traditional African forms of expression. His goal was always that of an educator who combined a sense of esthetics with a sense of his intellectual responsibility as spokesman for his people.<sup>9</sup> His mission was to portray their uniqueness and to preserve it from the ravages of time, forgetfulness and modernism. It was a work involving intense research and literary creativity at the same time. The epics deal with heroes who are, like Niane's Soundjata, semi-legendary, semi-historical; the poetry is largely allegorical, penetrated with mysticism and antique philosophy.

It was not until 1973<sup>10</sup> that the venerable old historian<sup>11</sup> published the first work that we may recognize as a novel. L' étrange destin de Wangrin was written, so the author tells us, in order to fulfill "une promesse, faite à un homme que je connus en 1912" (p. 7). A long biography, the work bears as its subtitle, "ou Les Roueries d'un interprète africain." It is, in the most elementary fashion, the story of a life, but one of such complexity and detail that it becomes witness

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<sup>9</sup>See Kesteloot, La littérature négro-africaine de langue française, part 5, "Situation actuelle des écrivains noirs".

<sup>10</sup>Written in 1971, the novel bears the end date "17 Ramadan 1391" (8 November 1971).

<sup>11</sup>Hampaté Bâ was born either in 1899 (Gordeau, La littérature négro-africaine d'expression française, (Hatier, 1973), or in 1901 (cover of L' étrange destin de Wangrin, Union Générale d'Éditions). He has been living in exile in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, since the last coup d'état in Mali.

to an entire period and way of life as well. The form is episodic, recounting in 36 chapters the multi-colored events in the life of a slyly clever, astonishingly resourceful, and wickedly intelligent Bambara from his birth and childhood to his death and burial. The treatment is panoramic, a pageant which unfolds its sumptuous or drole or dramatic scenes au fur et à mesure. Hampaté Bâ assures us that it is all true, gathered from the accounts of eyewitnesses, including that of the hero, Wangrin, himself: "Chaque nuit, après le dîner, de 20 à 23 heures, parfois jusqu'à 24 heures, Wangrin me racontait sa vie. La conversation se déroulait aux sons d'une guitare, dont jouait excellemment et infatigablement Dieli Maadi, son griot. Il en fut ainsi durant trois mois" (p. 8). The result is a non-fiction biographical novel in which the marvelous and the occult, legend, anecdote and proverb, are inextricably part of a real life in a real time. There is no didactic intent, there is no moral lesson to be drawn: "Qu'on ne cherche donc pas," warns the author, "dans les pages qui vont suivre, la moindre thèse, de quelque ordre que ce soit--politique, religieuse ou autre. Il s'agit simplement ici, du récit de la vie d'un homme" (p. 9).

But what a life, and what a man! The period is that of the French colonial empire from the end of the 19th century through approximately the first third of the 20th. The locale is the central Sudan, and the characters are the populations of the towns and

villages of this area, the colonial administrators, and their indigenous aides, the most esteemed of which was the native interpreter. Wangrin's destiny takes him from "l'école des otages," the colonial school where the sons of chiefs and notables were sent to keep their fathers in line, to the pinnacle of success as an interpreter who could speak French like a "blanc-blanc né d'une mère blanche de France." The novel is full of gems of information on the characteristics of an era. Unfortunately, Hampaté Bâ rather overwhelms us with notes, a total of 248 gathered at the back of the book. Many of them are of course, indispensable to a full understanding of the text, but the effect is rather like that of reading an anthropological treatise or a case study than a novel.

The tenuous thread of plot which links the episodes is the rivalry which exists between Wangrin and Romo Sibedi, another interpreter. Each is out to ruin the other if possible, but it is always Wangrin who gets the upper hand, from the moment, when after having enjoyed Romo's hospitality at his post in Yagouwahi, he brazenly announces that he will do all in his power to replace Romo in his sinecure. He succeeds, too, in this and other nefarious projects which assure his fortune and his prestige throughout the colony. His trail is strewed with powerful enemies, but as long as his sun is ascending he manages to outwit them all and consolidate his position. As a young man, Wangrin had put himself under the protection of Gongoloma-Sooké, the

bizarre god,

. . . dieu fabuleux que l'eau ne pouvait mouiller ni le soleil dessécher. Le sel ne pouvait le saler, le savon ne pouvait le rendre propre. Mou comme un mollusque, pourtant aucun métal tranchant ne pouvait le couper.

Les éléments n'avaient aucune prise sur lui. Il n'avait jamais ni chaud ni froid. Il ne dormait que d'un oeil. Pour cette raison, la nuit avait peur de lui, et le jour s'en méfiait . . .  
(p. 21)

With this protection he remains invulnerable until the series of evil omens foretold by his geomancer signify that the alliance has been broken.

Wangrin is the eternal opportunist. He plays his tricks on African and European alike, and bends events always to his advantage. He is at the same time imbued with a traditional code of honor that guides his relations with the world and imposes a sense of duty towards those who depend on him:

Wangrin était filou, certes, mais son âme n'était pas insensible. Son coeur était habité par une intense volonté de gagner de l'argent par tous les moyens afin de satisfaire une convoitise innée, mais il n'était point dépourvu de bonté, de générosité et même de grandeur. Les pauvres et tous ceux auxquels il était venu en aide dans le secret en savaient quelque chose. Son comportement cynique envers les puissants et les favorisés de la fortune, ne manquait cependant jamais d'une certaine élégance. (p. 197)

This complex personality is the central figure in a novel peopled by an enormous cast of characters. Hampaté Bâ seems to have considerable fun with the names of his colonial administrators, some of which, he even assures us, are authentic. Thus he introduces such splendid representatives of French glory in Africa as Jean-Jacques, Comte de Villermoz:

De Villermoz, qui se comportait en grand seigneur, portait un monocle. Son boy laissait entendre que c'était un chausse-oeil réservé aux seuls fils uniques des familles princières de France et de Navarre et qu'il suffisait à de Villermoz de présenter cet insigne à n'importe quelle trésorerie ou caisse de commerce française pour se faire délivrer autant d'argent qu'il voulait. (p. 74)

If de Villermoz becomes Wangrin's bitter enemy, it is not because he is a racist or a colonialist, but because Wangrin has played him a "sale tour," resulting in an unforgiveable humiliation. Colonialism is not under attack in this novel. It plays an important role only in that it was the situation of life at that time, the essential background against which everyone's behavior must be adjusted. But L'étrange destin de Wangrin is not a protest novel or an anti-European polemic. It is committed to no idea but that of capturing the reality of an epoch. Himself profoundly anchored in ancestral traditions, Hampaté Bâ is more concerned with relating the folkways and traditions which surround the strange life of his hero than in criticizing colonial practices. He does allow himself, however, from time to time, an amused and almost benevolent aside on the peculiar notions these practices engendered:

A l'époque, le degré de moralité d'un individu se mesurait d'une part à l'importance des services qu'il avait rendus à la pénétration française et, d'autre part, à la situation géographique de son pays d'origine. C'est ainsi que les plus moraux des hommes étaient les Européens blancs. Après eux venaient progressivement les Martiniquais et Guadeloupéens, puis les Sénégalais autochtones des quatre communes--Saint Louis, Gorée, Rufisque et Dakar--les anciens militaires indigènes et enfin, en dernier lieu, le restant de la population. (p. 57)



The genre of the biographical novel has not been exploited in African writing in French. While the autobiographical account has flourished, true biography is in default. The lives of other such singular individuals as Wangrin would make fascinating reading. It is time to draw the line between legend and reality. The Soundjata's Douguicimi's reflect only one part of the oral tradition. The equally fabulous lives of real and contemporary personalities deserve the same rich and very African treatment that Hampaté Bâ has given to Wangrin. In telling the true story of a key figure of a period in recent history he has preserved yet another aspect of Africa's heritage, and added another dimension to the African novel of French expression. Amadou Hampaté Bâ won the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire in 1974 in recognition of this achievement.

#### E. Niger

An only slightly younger contemporary of Hampaté Bâ, the Nigerien,<sup>12</sup> Boubou Hama, is at once a philosopher, writer, social historian, and political figure who has served as president of his country's national assembly. Like his Malian counterpart, Boubou Hama has devoted years to collecting and transcribing the histories and traditions of the lost kingdoms and the animist societies of Niger. Chroniqueur and ethnologist, he belongs to the group of specialists in

<sup>12</sup>Nigerien = of the country of Niger; Nigerian = of the country of Nigeria.

the oral tradition of whom Lilyan Kesteloot wrote, "Ils s'ingénient à creuser, à comprendre et à exprimer tout ce que leurs sociétés ont d'original et qu'aucun blanc ne pourrait expliquer comme eux, dans cet esprit et cet langage."<sup>13</sup>

Among his most recent publications have been works which it is convenient to classify as novels,<sup>14</sup> but which in reality have very little to attach them to that genre. It is true that the esthetic heritage of an African novelist differs usually from that of a modern Western writer, being based on oral rather than literary tradition, and that the difference may be reflected in both forme and fond. Nevertheless, in electing to use a borrowed genre, the African novelist generally accepts its esthetic restrictions. The innovations he brings to it are culturally determined and serve to enrich rather than diminish both the genre and the individual work. Boubou Hama is a writer of skill and great sensitivity. His output is prodigious, thoughtful and insightful. He can be considered a novelist however, only by the wildest stretch of a bibliographer's imagination. His three-volume Kotia-Nima, published in 1968 and 1969, won the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1970. It is an autobiographical reflection, but not an autobiographical

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<sup>13</sup>Kesteloot, Littérature camerounaise, p. 306.

<sup>14</sup>See J. R., Duclos, "Bibliographie du roman négro-africain d'expression française" (Présence Francophone, 10, 1975).

novel. It is true that it starts out as an autobiography, a common enough one at that, of the African child whose life changes as his contacts with the West are progressively strengthened. But what begins as a first-person narrative: "A sept ou huit ans . . . j'étais un enfant noir, pareil à tous les autres. De ce continent massif, j'ignorais jusqu'à l'existence . . ." (V. 1, p. 11), "Que pouvait-on penser à huit ans? Je subissais L'Afrique" (V. 1, p. 20), changes to a third-person overview of Africa's dialogue with the West. Little by little, as he moves from village to town, from bush school to collège, the child loses his subjective concept of the world: "Sur le chemin de l'école je perdis les illusions que je nourrissais quant à la conception du monde, les notions que j'avais de l'espace et du temps" (V. 1, p. 46). The subjective, emotional "je" becomes an objective, rational "il" torn by the opposing forces of his heritage and his education which have conditioned him to "expliquer les phénomènes de la vie, plutôt que de les laisser se dérouler naturellement" (V. 1, p. 52). The rest of the three-volume work is a concentrated effort to reconcile Cartesian logic with African spirituality, to find "la voie conciliante, nécessaire, qu'il faut instaurer par une synthèse, entre l'Europe et l'Afrique" (V. 1, p. 73). Kotia feels himself "à mi-chemin, entre deux sources possibles de vie . . ." (V. 1, p. 98), but for Boubou Hama this results not in an "ambiguous adventure" but an opportunity for "l'esprit africain" to complement the spiritual retardation of the

West.<sup>15</sup>

The first volume moves from 1906 and 1935, and is more autobiography than anything else, but Kotia Nima begins to express the ideas on existence and reality which Boubou Hama will develop as volumes two and three. Volume two, after a lyric interlude,

Au rythme du tam-tam chante l'Afrique. Au son des balafons  
dansent les jeunes filles noires le soir, sous le clair de lune,  
Dans leur corps qui vibre, passe le rythme du vent, se diffusent  
les mille nuances des sons, tous les coloris de la nature. Dans  
le grand rythme du monde, dans la lumière qui irise ses yeux,  
l'homme d'Afrique vit et meurt, au rythme de l'univers . . .  
(p. 32),

becomes a history of the colony, the nation, and a people. Boubou Hama undertakes to discuss the organization and development of a modern African nation as a philosopher and historian, but not as a novelist. In his native tongue, he tells us, "Kotia signifie enfant et Nima entends-tu?" (V. 2, p. 41). He is not just a child, the student, the Nigerien, but the African, bringer of peace, master of the invisible world of the spirit: "Car je suis 'Kotia-Nima', je suis l'Afrique aux latentes possibilités immenses, la mère qui garde en réserve la

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<sup>15</sup>In another work, Le retard de l'Afrique (Présence Africaine, 1972), Boubou Hama enlarges on the idea that Africa's technical lag and spiritual advance are a necessary complement to the West's technical advance and spiritual lag. Master of the visible world, Western man nevertheless needs African spirituality to initiate him into the realm of the invisible, just as African man needs the technology of the West to survive and prosper in the modern world.

'dernière poire de l'espérance', " (V.2, p. 46). The third volume is strictly philosophical and polemical, the destiny of Africa face to face with the two Occidents: capitalist and communist, both materialist. "Je suis, mon ami qui m'interroge, l'Afrique à la croisée des chemins où passera, obligatoirement, l'homme à la recherche de son 'origine' et de son avenir . . ." (V. 3, p. 53). Africa thus has a message to our "common humanity," and it is her turn now to be heard; "C'est le tour, le tour de l'Afrique, d'apporter sa part, enfin, à la civilisation de la cité" (V. 3, p. 277).

There is something rather quaint in this utter faith in the spirituality of Africa as the remedy for the ills of the West coming at a time when the African continent was erupting in violence, the long tradition of which serious novelists were beginning to acknowledge and deplore. Kotia-Nima is a relic of Negritude.

Another non-novel is Boubou Hama's mystical treatise on animism, entitled Le double d'hier rencontre demain, which appeared in 1973. It is a roman d'initiation only in the broadest interpretation of the term, and a philosophical novel only if we may admit L'Histoire des Oracles to the same category. Boubou Hama is seeking to undo, or at least to counterbalance, all that Fontenelle, Bayle and the later 18th century rationalists did for philosophic and scientific thought. The gift of "la sagesse africaine" will be to restore mystery to nature and the universe, to place man in relation to the forces cosmiques et

tellurgiques which move in all things, animate and inanimate. The marvelous exists; it is only that we are not sufficiently spiritualized to experience it. But the African lives in daily mystical communion with the elements around him. Every act has ritual significance, every phenomenon is part of the great whole in which there can be no separation of spirit and matter:

Il comprit . . . que rien ne se perd et que chacun de nos gestes, chacune de nos pensées, une fois émises, continuent, éternellement, à travers l'espace et le temps, à gravir le cosmos en direction de leur destin final, sans doute, vers le créateur, la seule existence dont existe l'univers. (p. 59)

In search of this eternal truth, the Grand Master Bi, "l'Afrique, son retard sublime," leads two postulants, Bi Bio, "le 'double d'hier', l'ombre du passé" and Souba, "'demain', l'avenir," through a series of initiations. The way to wisdom passes through the various levels of the realm of the spirit to the "quatrième ciel," the realm of pure spirit where Good triumphs over Evil. The ascension is a difficult one and recalls in many ways Tamino's struggles to reach the Temple of Wisdom in Mozart's The Magic Flute. The same trial of the will places the same necessity of choice before man:

L'homme est un carrefour à égale distance du Bien ou du Mal. C'est par sa volonté de Bien qu'il se détermine dans le sens du bien, et c'est par son abandon aux forces du mal, qu'il s'identifie à celui-ci, qu'il devient le Mal. (p. 144)

After their initiation through the cieux of the spirit, Bi Bio and Souba must pass a seven-year novitiate on earth among men. In this

second part Boubou Hama presents the various animist practices and customs of the Africa of his heritage. Traditional wisdom and mysticism are the antidote to rampant materialism, Africa's lag is a blessing in disguise for the salvation of our common humanity: "Au moment où l'homme est remis en question le paradoxe d'un retard vient s'offrir comme une espérance pour tempérer la fougue intempestive de la dynamique matérialiste de la science moderne" (Introduction, p. 11). An evolution towards that which transcends both spirit and matter should be the aspiration of mankind, "au fond, un éternel 'Présent' qui est le 'Passé', qui est le 'Présent' dont se fait le 'Présent', tous les présents enfoncés dans l'univers matériel et spirituel, du 'mouvement' duquel, change et varie tout ce qui EST, hormis DIEU vers lequel il évolue et va sans retour" (p. 406).

Boubou Hama's philosophy leads him always in the same direction: toward a reconciliation with the West and an affirmation of the brotherhood of mankind. His contribution is to universal culture and to a reinterpretation of the meaning of life through African values.

This concludes our look at the novel, or what passes for such, in the literary production of former French West Africa in recent years. The most promising developments have come from Senegal where a new "city" novel is taking shape, and from the Guineans, whose political and sociological novels have great force. Chapter two will move into the new nations of equatorial Africa where the novel in French is

developing to a considerably lesser degree.



## Chapter 2: The novel in former French Equatorial Africa<sup>1</sup>

### A. Central African Republic.

The heart of the continent beats to a rhythm different from that of the West African states. Traditional ways have been slower to change. Here more than anywhere, Bantu culture has escaped the "colonization" that Janheinz Jahn was talking about during one of the last interviews of his life when he said,

The problems for the African masses are not those of decolonization, because, let's face it, they have never been colonized. Their spirit has not been colonized, never even been touched! If you believe that a majority of the African peoples in the countryside have been colonized, then you are wrong. Decolonization is necessary for those Africans educated overseas and by missionaries. Those who have not been educated in this sense, and who have remained faithful to their traditions, need no decolonization simply because, in keeping with their own value system, they have consistently considered all European ways of doing things wrong.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude has doubtless also been a factor in the rejection by Central African writers of the novel as a form of expression. Stories from the oral tradition and poetry have been the favored genres forming

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<sup>1</sup>Somewhat more than half the size of French West Africa, at 970,000 square miles, the four territories of French Equatorial Africa became the countries of the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon.

<sup>2</sup>"An interview with Janheinz Jahn, " UFAHAMU (IV, 1, 1973) p. 36.

the bond between the cultural heritage of the past and contemporary literature. An exception is one of the most original novels to come out of Africa in recent years, Princesse Mandapu by Pierre Bamboté. Published in 1972 by Présence Africaine, the novel has as its protagonist a brutal fonctionnaire, Batila, called "Monsieur Boy," the new breed of African civil servant who has replaced the colonial administrator in the brousse. The story deals mainly, and in an only half-revealed way, with the hostilities and treacheries of "Monsieur Boy" and his antagonist, Mokta, a commerçant, as they try to get the best of each other.

The dark tale of revenge and death develops in the desolate little town of Uandja, several hundred kilometers remote from the capital, Bangui. The scene is variously the main square, the prison, Boy's concession where live his three wives, Mandapu, Ya and Za. Mandapu is also the name of the child who will be born to Ya, the little girl whose death is the tragic dénouement of the novel. It is a dénouement in form only, an end which resolves nothing, only adding to rather than clarifying the murky climate of oppression which the novel creates. Inconclusiveness determines the tone of the whole work: dark deeds half-suspected, avowals half-made, events half-specified, memories half-recalled. The novel guards its secret terrors like the central square of the town, "un vrai bedon nu sans nom qui a tout mangé . . ." (p. 7).

There are no readily identifiable themes other than vengeance and hatred which motivate the action, and innocence which is their victim. In an atmosphere heavy with menace, the images are those of heat, dryness, emptiness:

Ce dimanche . . . Sous le soleil auquel ne s'est jamais habitué Monsieur Boy, c'est-à-dire ce soleil pleuvant à cette heure de la journée sur la place lisse, qui n'offre nul obstacle aux rayons si ce n'est les rayons des grains de sable, c'est le vide. Le vide, Monsieur Boy n'aime pas le vide . . . (p. 47)

There is little plot or story line. Incidents seem simply to happen of themselves, in dream-like or nightmarish fashion, which is heightened by Bamboté's rapid, uneven and syncopated prose style. The confrontation between Monsieur Boy and Mokta becomes a duel of malice and cruelty, with lunges and feints first from one, then from the other. It is an inexplicably necessary relationship for both. Batila, Monsieur Boy, is a descendent of the god-king Bangasu:

. . . un descendant des rois. Ou de soldats. Ou bien enfin d'hommes qui ont fait leurs "preuves", créé des empires, des preuves quelconques de bâtisseurs de ruines ou de civilisation . . .

Les ancêtres de Batila surnommé "Monsieur Boy" par un colonisateur avaient été les uns et les autres. (p. 86)

The affair which pits him against Mokta stems from a case of lèse-majesté, the effrontery which Mokta has had in giving his own name to a son born to Boy's third wife, Za.<sup>3</sup> As administrator of the

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<sup>3</sup>Mokta was present at the birth which occurred not in Uandja but in Bangasu, Boy's "pays," while Boy remained at his post in town. Mokta assumed the role of "père adoptif" and gave the baby a name the instant it was born. By tradition, this name cannot be removed.

region, Boy can procure for Mokta a certain needed commercial authorization. He does not. Mokta bribes, threatens, physically attacks Boy. Boy puts Mokta in prison and himself inflicts a sordid and brutal punishment. Mokta is suspected of paying the midwife to damage at birth the infant of Boy's second wife, Ya. This is the little Mandapu, "Princess Mandapu" of the title. The baby is not, however, permanently disfigured, and grows into a charming child, the idol of her 'maman Mandapu,' Boy's first wife:

. . . Elle la soulève de terre, embrasse ses deux oreilles, y insufflant de l'air chaud.

Le souffle de la vie.

Elle embrasse ses yeux, sa bouche, son ventre, son bas-ventre.

Elle est nue et lisse comme une gazelle, une fillette qui ne veut rien entendre.

Sur les fesses, la tache ronde de poussière. Mais Mandapu pourrait dire:

"C'est moi qui l'ai faite belle. Attendez et vous verrez la belle petite que ce sera."

Les trous dans les lobes des oreilles.

Avec de minuscules perles bleues.

Devinez ses reins solides, pleins de la nervosité de la vie. Et pour qu'elle ne soit pas tout à fait nue, Mandapu, une fine ceinture de perles blanches et bleues, lui ceinture les reins. (p. 145)

Mokta provokes the ruin of Boy, who loses his administrative post and goes to Bangui with his family. There little Mandapu is accidentally killed when a kettle of boiling water upsets on her. This abrupt ending seems in no way related to the feud between Boy and Mokta. And yet it has been, we realize in the final analysis, the end of a long chain of events which fate started to link even before Mandapu was born.

In the African concept of life fatality plays a prime role. No death is merely "accidental." It results from the withdrawal of protective life forces either through the intervention of magic by some other party, or because "Dieu l'a voulu." Thus, although Bamboté does not specifically say so, Mandapu's death is a kind of sacrifice necessary to nullify the vindictive pride which had opposed her father and her "uncle" in a long and fruitless battle.

Characterization is a technique which few African writers of French expression employ. It is not necessarily lack of perception or talent, as we have noted earlier, which is the cause, but rather a different concept of the personnage which derives from the traditional story and legend. The character must be a representative, a type, a pattern, but not an individual personality. There is no in-depth psychological character analysis in Princess Mandapu which allows us to penetrate the role each figure is assigned. A swift sketch, however, leads the reader to intuit a feeling of distaste, antipathy, or affection for various characters, through nothing more than descriptive technique. Thus Ya, the second wife:

Ya a une belle maternité. Elle est enorme, elle dort beaucoup. Elle est lente mais puissante. Il ne convient donc pas de se fier à la lenteur de Ya. Elle prend seulement son temps parce qu'elle ne pourrait admettre que quelqu'un, derrière elle, la presse. Ya a une belle maternité.

...  
Ya dort bouche entr'ouverte. Elle a une bouche aux lèvres finement ourlées, Ya. Une grande bouche qui ne le paraît pas. Avec Ya tout est grand. Se tenir, regarder loin de Ya si l'on se restreint aux petites choses. Car Ya s'étonne alors et méprise les petites choses, les amateurs

de petites choses. Elle ne les méprise même pas, elle tourne le dos. (p. 76)

Bamboté uses language like the poet that he is. The most astonishing thing about this novel is the versatility of its style. Not since the "esthétique malinké" of Kourouma's Les soleils des Indépendances has there been such a truly original manipulation of word and phrase. The prose is infused with poetry, a poetic treatment of French that would delight the ear, should be read aloud to appreciate the brilliant use of alliteration and assonance:

Les herbes de la saison sèche craquent, "craquillent",  
craquètent en une vague infinie. La lumière elle-même  
craquille, brille comme des milliards d'insectes invisibles.  
Un seul oiseau, celui que l'on ne voit jamais. (p. 51)

Prose is treated rhythmically as well so that entire pages seem to pulsate, ebbing and flowing in rhythmic phrases in which repetition is the key device. This combination of rhythm, repetition, imagery and sound creates a style which is unique in the novel, authentically African, and firmly derived from the oral tradition:

Le piétinement s'allège, s'oriente vers une  
levée provisoire ou définitive.

Et puisque le commerce fait partie des activités  
humaines jusqu'à la prochaine occasion. Un "dimanche"  
prochain.

Le piétinement des dimanches. Les dimanches pro-  
chains. Toujours.

Le piétinement qui empoussière.

Le piétinement lourd s'oriente vers la levée du  
marché.

Le piétinement qui empoussière les chevilles.

Ah! les chevilles ont des points brillants, la  
sueur colle, absorbée par la poussière rouge et ne  
s'évaporant pas.

La rosée de sueur immobilisée par la poussière.  
 Les chevilles dures comme des os, les chevilles  
 souples.  
 Les chevilles. Les pieds.  
 Les pieds.  
 Ils sont nus ou portent des chaussures, leur sont  
 attachés les pieds.  
 Les chaussures bleues cette année-là. . . (pp. 132-133)

This rather lengthy quotation is necessary in order not only to illustrate the use of image and repetition, but to show the disposition on the page of the lines of prose and the recall phrases which link them in the way the village weaver links the warp and woof of his fabric, manipulating the shuttle and the frame at the same time with his nimble fingers and toes, or the way the griot and story-teller evoke the timeless patterns of a familiar legend with their repeated invocations. The originality of Princess Mandapu lies in the sensitive blend of modern novel and traditional technique. Robert Green, discussing criticism of African literature in 1967, noted that the traditional narrative technique includes especially repetition and inconclusiveness. "Thus," he concluded, "if an African artist wishes to write in this European tradition [the novel] he must be prepared to jettison the ancient narrative technique of his own tribe and abandon a form that may be quite deeply embedded in him."<sup>4</sup> Bamboté has proved to the contrary that such a conclusion is false, and that an

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Green, "Under the Mango Tree--Criticism of African Literature", Journal of the New African Literature 3 (1967): 27.

African novelist firmly anchored in his own tradition, with a poet's intuition of style, language and form, may innovate the Western type of novel by introducing just these techniques from his oral heritage. The result is an African "nouveau roman," which rejects the nineteenth-century realism to which practically all other contemporary African novelists have yoked themselves.

#### B. Congo-Brazzaville

Recovering the past, assuming the burden of its bequest for both good and evil, and taking stock of the present situation lucidly in order to assure the future--these are the obligations which a commitment to literature imposes on the African writer, according to Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou.<sup>5</sup> Following his own advice, Makouta-Mboukou has become the conscience of the Congo, a prolific writer of short stories, poems, novels and plays, as well as a professor of literature and popular lecturer. It is his contention that Africa is too far behind to make any contribution to the world through technology, and that it is in its literature that Africa's uniqueness can be found: ". . . notre pensée, notre culture, notre esprit, ils nous sont particuliers et spécifiques."<sup>6</sup> The writer has the obligation to reveal

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<sup>5</sup>Introduction à la littérature noire (Yaoundé, 1970).

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou, "La condition de l'écrivain négro--africain", (lecture given at the University of Ouagadougou, March 14, 1975), Annales du Collège Littéraire Universitaire, p. 14.



this specificity not only to the outside world, but also at home where a new public must be created among the elite. The writer's role is that of a prophet . . . "Or le sort du prophète, vous le connaissez: il n'est jamais bien reçu chez lui," he concludes.<sup>7</sup>

This morose observation was made after Makouta-Mboukou had published several novels, and perhaps reflects a personal experience. The first of his three novels, En quête de la liberté ou une vie d'espoir appeared in 1970.<sup>8</sup> It is a continuation of the autobiographical mode, a first-person narrative of the effect of evil and injustice on a sensitive nature. It is a "récit" bathed in tears from beginning to end; one frequently becomes impatient with its pious sentimentality. The narrative seems to divide naturally into two parts, two eye-witness accounts. The first part consists of a continuous succession of miseries and inhumanities suffered under colonization in the Congo of Gide's Voyage. It follows the usual route of the "témoignage" in presenting various aspects of colonial abuse: administrative power, torture, taxes, racism, the Church-- ". . . personne ne pouvait dire, à cette époque noire du vrai colonialisme: 'Mon Commandant,

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 15

<sup>8</sup>Editions CLE. The other two, Le Contestant (1973) and Les Exilés de la forêt vierge ou Le grand complot (1974) were not available to me at the time this study was written.

je ne peux pas parce que . . .' Seuls les cadavres pouvaient peut-être dire non" (p. 46). This was the period of protest from which the combat literature of the 50's took its inspiration. Toma, the narrator who is "en quête de la liberté," is, like the heroes of Beti and Oyono, seething with revolt: "Dans les églises et les temples les prêtres et les pasteurs prêchaient le ciel et l'égalité de tous. 'Mensonge! mensonge! mensonge!' disions-nous révoltés, et c'était vrai" (p. 50).

The second part is a consideration of the even worse excesses of the newly independent African state. It continues the "témoignage" on the abuses of power, tribalism, injustice, inequality, which make the period of colonization seem like the "bon vieux temps" to the Africans: "C'était donc cela l'indépendance? Des fêtes et de la bonne chère pour les uns et pour les autres un parc austère et sans vie, où la lèpre et la cécité rongent ce qui leur reste de cellules vivantes!" (pp. 125-126).

A European interlude separates these two parts. It is the obligatory student sojourn in France which has become de rigueur in the African autobiographical novel. The narrator's experience there provides an atmosphere of relief between the two poles of man's inhumanity represented by colonialism and independent nationalism. The compassion and understanding of Edith, his friend and confidante, contrast with the cruelties of the colonial administrator, Monsieur de Butafoco, and the African leader who becomes president of his country, "Chef Ce n'est pas moi." Reluctantly Toma leaves Edith and France

and returns after fifteen years to Africa where the technical assistant has replaced the colonialist, the president has replaced the territorial governor, and the prefect has replaced the district administrator, and where ". . . si les petits commis de bureau ont été métamorphosés en administrateurs, nos moniteurs vont bientôt remplacer les professeurs de lycées, tandis que nos instituteurs occuperont les chaires de facultés dans nos universités naissantes . . ." (p. 127).

En quête de la liberté is a weaker political novel than Fantouré's Le cercle des tropiques, but it attacks the same problems. Makouta-Mboukou is himself fulfilling that aspect of the mission of the writer which he said was to attack the evils of contemporary Africa, to reveal the true image of Africa and to show that "l'enfer, ce ne sont pas toujours les autres, c'est aussi nous, le plus souvent, et c'est nous de plus en plus."<sup>9</sup> This is the kind of novel which African writers were being encouraged to write in the 60's, the new "roman engagé" which would not stop at condemnation of colonialism, but would go on to look openly and honestly at the current scene and not flinch when it came to pointing an accusing finger at an African face. The charge of treason and betrayal is leveled at the African leader whose declarations of liberty only mask the fact that he has exchanged one type of servitude for another: "Il n'a pas achevé ses déclarations fracassantes qu'a`

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<sup>9</sup>Makouta-Mboukou, "La condition de l'écrivain négro-africain," (Ouagadougou: Annales du College Litteraire Universitaire 1): 15.

peine dégagé du soleil couchant, il s'est mis de son gré sous la protection du soleil levant, porteur du choléra et de la peste, fléaux qui tuent indistinctement, mais surtout qui ont la spécialité de niveler les couches sociales" (p. 134). It is the first indication of a new theme in the novel, that of the "redoutable Orient" which it seems may be waiting in the wings to take up where the Occident has left off.

Characters in the novel are flat and uninteresting, except as stereotypes: the inhuman colonial commandant, the innocent, naive African child, the callous missionary, the compassionate and beautiful young Frenchwoman, the sensitive student, the disillusioned African intellectual, the unscrupulous political leader. The absence of psychological depth makes these people seem like puppets performing an established routine. We are unable to feel any real motivation. The absence of characterization is a feature which, we have noted and will continue to note, is typical of the African novel of French expression. It is perhaps a Western bias to continue to look for it as we trace the development of the novel into the 1970's. A certain degree of personality development would eliminate the mythic quality which invests so many of the novels. On the other hand, myth and reality are two faces of a single coin in the African concept of life; each one backs the other and they are inseparable. To destroy this mythic quality would divest the novel of its role as educator and continuator

of the oral tradition for an increasingly literate African public. Any trend to increased characterization will indicate a change in both the concept of the novel and the taste of its readers.

The search for liberty received a somewhat more allegorical treatment at the hands of Makouta-Mboukou in a "nouvelle," Les Initiés, published in the same year as En quête de la liberté. The story is melodramatic and moralistic, and does not concern us for the study of the novel. There is an interesting parallel with the theme of liberty in the novel, however, which may be drawn from the dying plea of its hero, a young African (Malagasy) student in France, addressed to his mother:

Maman, si j'ai succombé, c'est en partie ta faute. Tu m'as trop tenu prisonnier dans ta maison. Loin de toi, je me suis senti comme libéré des chaînes dont j'étais lié. Alors j'ai fait des bêtises: cette liberté dans laquelle je venais d'entrer, j'en ai mal usé. Car l'usage de toute chose doit être appris. On apprend à se servir de la cuiller, du stylo, du couteau comme de la liberté. Et moi, je n'ai jamais eu de liberté dans ta maison. Que Zirouatra [his little brother] trouve grâce auprès de toi, et bénéficie de ma malheureuse expérience. (p. 84)

If "maman" = oppressive African regimes and "Zirouatra" = the young generation of African writers, the story takes on a symbolic meaning which makes it much more interesting. It shows Makouta-Mboukou's insistence on more liberty for the writer, and his concern for responsible commitment on the part of the writer. It is the responsibility of the modern "écrivain engagé" to fall back on his former role

of accuser and to attack injustice and inequality wherever he meets them. It is the quest for liberty which makes life "une vie d'espoir."

En quête de la liberté has done nothing to advance the genre of the Bildungsroman. As an autobiographical novel it is simply another example among many of what psychology calls the "archetype of transfer"--the transformation of an individual. The combination of this mode with the politico-philosophical mode, however, lends a degree of originality to the work and confirms the author's status as a committed writer in the enigmatic world of Africa today.

In comparison with the development of the novel in West Africa, literary production in Equatorial Africa has been slight. Only Bamboté and Makouta-Mboukou have made significant contributions to the evolution of the genre as a means of expression. Makouta-Mboukou is the 1970's continuator of the line of Congolese novelists which had its representative in Jean Malonga in the 1950's and in Guy Menga in the 1960's. His themes, like those of Coeur d'Aryenne and La palabre stérile, are anchored in his country's present-day problems. He is committed to creating a new public and to writing a new literature with that public foremost in mind. The esthetic innovations of Bamboté's work are the most interesting development in the novel in recent years. A poetic prose style which marries the oral tradition to the narrative and expository conventions

of the novel is an exciting indication of a new direction. It points to the possibility that a synthesis may indeed be effected between African and Western literary genres to create a new mode. It holds promise for the future of a literature which will find its public both in Africa and in the West.

### Chapter 3: The new generation of Cameroonians - the rise of the popular novel: Les éditions CLE

The most fruitful and promising development of the novel in French-speaking Africa has occurred in Cameroon. First colonized by the German, subsequently divided into French and British zones of "protection," and united following independence, today's United Republic of Cameroon has a long history of exposure to the West and to a mix of cultures which has allowed a distinctly Cameroonian literature to emerge. The unique flourishing of literary ideas and genres which one finds in Cameroon is characteristic of no other francophone African country. The advance of Cameroon over other countries is greatly facilitated by the presence in Yaoundé, the capital city, of an energetic and enterprising publishing house the "Editions CLE." Founded in 1963, CLE is an acronym for the Centre de Littérature Evangélique. Created and subsidized by the protestant churches in francophone Africa, Germany and the Netherlands, CLE is not, however, as its name might suggest, limited to religious publications. While these figure in its catalogue, the majority of works come from other genres: poetry, theater, novels, essays and practical studies. In 1971 and 1972, CLE published 35 titles each year; the 1975-76 catalogue lists a total of 115 publications



with another 25 now out of print. Of the current titles 22 are listed under the heading "Romans, Récits, Nouvelles," and the majority of these are by Cameroonian authors. Altogether, 40 out of 50 authors represented are African. The editors received more than 700 manuscripts, largely unsolicited, from all over Africa in 1973. Even as publishing costs are mounting, sales are increasing slowly in proportion with the rise in literacy, to the point where the editors hope one day to be able to survive on the income from sales alone. When the 10th anniversary of the founding of CLE was marked in November 1973, due recognition was given the crucial importance of publishing in the strategy of development. Purveyor of a new literature written by Africans for Africans, "Les Editions CLE" have put their efforts to the service of the development of both the individual and the country, for, ask the editors, "le livre n'est-il pas la clé du savoir?"<sup>1</sup>

Since 1971, CLE has published eight novels by Cameroonian writers, some of whom are appearing in print for the first time. While the literary quality may occasionally be uneven, all show the promise of a new direction which cannot but be beneficial for the

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<sup>1</sup>La presse du Cameroun, 12 novembre 1973, For other details of the activities of "Les Editions CLE" I am indebted to Mr. J. R. Dihang, Associate Editor, for a personal interview accorded me on September 10, 1973 and for another brief meeting in July, 1975.

African novel: the predominance of national themes and national interests. It is useless for African writers to struggle for universal themes until they have built up an informed and enlightened readership at home. In treating the preoccupations of a public with which he is familiar, the new generation of novelist who may never, in fact, have experienced the cultural ambiguities and conflict with the West of his predecessors, is on surer ground. He will enlarge the scope of "la francophonie," all the while remaining firmly attached to his people, their traditions and their customs. A new trend to a literature of French expression with all the charm--and limitations --of regionalism is characteristic of the contemporary novel in Cameroon. A closer look at these novels will show both their strength and their weaknesses. In order of publication they are: Mon amour en noir et blanc, Rémy Medou-Mvomo (1971); Ramitou, mon étrangère, Joseph Jules Mokto (1971); La nasse, Patrice Ndedi-Penda (1971); Le journal de Faliou, Rémy Medou-Mvomo (1972); La poupée ashanti, Francis Bebey (1973); Les fiancés du grand fleuve, Samuel Mvolo (1973); L'homme-dieu de Bisso, Etienne Yanou, (1974); and Le fruit défendu, Honoré-Godefroy Ahanda Essomba (1975).

Rémy Medou-Mvomo's two most recent novels, Mon amour en noir et blanc and Le journal de Faliou are as different from each other as they are from his first published work, Afrika Ba'a, which

was studied in Chapter 3 of Part One. The exalted tone and the glorification of collective action have given way to two very different treatments of an individual crisis, both within the most African of contexts and situations, even though the first, Mon amour en noir et blanc, is set entirely in Europe. As the title suggests, the novel is a story of interracial love. It is a first-person narrative, relatively simply and directly told, and very unlike any other African novel in the tight unity of time and place. All action occurs in the space of two weeks, an Easter school vacation period, and takes place entirely in Europe, in a small village of the Auvergne. Ambroise Eva'a, a Cameroonian, who has been in France as a student for nine years, falls in love with Geneviève of the silky blond hair, and she with him. They become engaged, announce the news by telegram to their respective families, and confront the ultimata they receive in return which show both families' hostility to the match. We are led to believe, however, that their union will occur in spite of any obstacles, and that colorblind true love will triumph.

The major themes are the déracinement and condition of the African student in Europe, subtle racism--the ignorance and condescension of the European toward the African, mixed with a general distrust of things black, solitude, and love between Black and White with all the problems and obstacles it encounters. The treatment of these themes is marked by an absence of bitterness and by a certain

savoir vivre on the part of the African narrator which makes him less of a victim than his prototypes in the student novels of an earlier generation. His separation from Africa is painful, but not definitive. It seems likely that a compromise will be found. Not, however, before he has suffered the anxiety of a "dédoublement de la personnalité" caused by the necessity to dissimulate a complex of inferiority vis-à-vis his European comrades: "Tout Noir qui a séjourné tant soit peu en Europe a certainement à un moment ou à un autre joué spontanément ce rôle de 'démenteur' doublé de celui de 'démonstrateur'. Ce sont là des rôles difficiles à tenir surtout lorsqu'on n'a pas les moyens de les jouer réellement. Dans ce cas-ci on bluffe d'abord extérieurement, c'est alors que nous devenons des êtres dédoublés" (p. 11).

The concept of love in the Western sense, that is, the romantic involvement of two individuals, is a growing theme in the African novel. This notion of romantic love has been uncommon in Africa outside of Europanized circles. The myth of passion, if we are to believe Denis de Rougemont's thesis in L'Amour et l'Occident, is a psychological inheritance of the Middle Ages, and has so penetrated modern life in the West as to form an almost inescapable preoccupation. Love has traditionally not occupied such a predominant place in African culture, nor has passion been the necessary ingredient in marriage. The interests of the individual, in the Western sense, do not count

in an alliance; it is rather the interests of the group which are being promoted. Sex outside marriage is condoned as long as it does not prejudice family commitments and the future of the collectivity. This does not, of course, preclude affection, sentiment and love within marriage and other human relationships. Erotic love, however, the passion of one individual for another, is on its way to becoming a theme almost as pervasive in Africa as in the West. If its proliferation in films, novels and romans-photo were not proof enough, the courrier du coeur of popular papers and magazines would give added evidence of its ubiquitous presence, especially among the young. While passion is generally treated with discretion in the serious novel, it is nevertheless a relatively new characteristic which will bear watching as the African novel for an African audience develops. Medou Mvomo makes it clear that Geneviève and Ambroise are not acting out of a spirit of defiance towards their respective societies, but out of a dream of love in which they are only trying to safeguard their own happiness. The treatment of the love theme shows a certain uncomfortableness with the language, a dependency on the rather theatrical love scenes of the cinema or the penny-dreadful. The scenes are few and brief, however, and there is something touching in their innocence:

Finalement, levant vers moi son visage brûlant, elle m'offrit ses lèvres et nous unîmes nos bouches tremblantes. Chacun semblant vouloir imprimer dans les lèvres de l'autre quelque chose qui tenait de nous seuls et de l'univers à la fois. Peu

après, les sanglots de Geneviève fendirent le crépuscule et se répandirent dans l'air, ricochant sur toute chose, pour venir finalement sombrer dans mon coeur. (p. 108)

Another innovation is the use of nature as a backdrop to the emotional upheavals of the young narrator. Nature is not a theme which is widely developed in the African novel, and the conceit of the romantic fallacy is rare indeed. The theme is handled skillfully and subtly, however, and does not seem an interpolation of a purely Western convention. The novel begins with an unseasonal snow, the image of an intrusion: "'Une intruse, pensai-je, voilà ce qu'elle est cette neige!' -- Pourquoi venait-elle jeter le trouble là où tout commençait à être harmonisé?" (p. 5). The image is symbolic of the even more disruptive intrusion in his life soon of another white presence. Subsequent descriptions of nature are those of a harsh, chaotic scenery, the mountains, rocks, pines and rushing streams of the Massif central, which are a contrast to the lush tropics of Ambroise's origins. Nature, too, is in league against him, to make him feel a being apart.

While Ambroise's destiny seems headed on a positive course --  
 "Mais, j'étais sûr d'elle et elle pouvait compter sur moi: je tenais la barre ferme et, si l'on n'arrêtait pas le vent, celui-ci soufflait en poupe, le bateau était bon et la mer et le ciel se mariaient à l'horizon" (p. 109) --that of Faliou, the keeper of the journal of Medou Mvomo's next novel, seems to show its negative side at every

turn. The story is that of the progressive downfall of an individual in the modern African society of dog eat dog and the devil take the hindmost. The drama of Faliou's life is told in the form of a "journal intime," a highly schematicized structure which allows the action to proceed in direct, chronological fashion as the hero sets down in his diary his sufferings, thoughts and impressions between July 1967 and December 1968. While the form may be linear, the events themselves are made to progress in a circular or, rather, spiral manner. Faliou moves from failure to failure, from calamity to calamity, from vexation to vexation. The novel is full of new beginnings which revolve right around to failure and disaster each time. There is a constant sense of movement without getting anywhere, as the hero displaces himself from Yaoundé to Douala to Kribi to Douala to Ngongsamba to Fort Lamy to his village to Kribi and Douala again, to Edéa, Douala, and finally, perhaps, back to Yaoundé. It has the hallucinating effect of a ride on a carousel: when it is over one has traveled far and gone nowhere. This circular motion and the analogy with travel are reinforced by the opening and closing scenes. When we first meet Faliou, he is at the train station in Yaoundé: "J'attends l'autorail de 13 h 15 qui me traînera jusqu'à Douala" (p. 5). The closing sentence of the novel indicates his intention to take the train back: "Ce soir, sans faute, je serai dans le train" (p. 178). Nothing has been resolved in his life, he is right back where he started

from, if not worse off than at the beginning when there was at least some hope.

Medou Mvomo is attacking a number of contemporary problems in detailing the peripatetic existence of Faliou. The young man is the holder of the first certificate of the license, but having failed a final examination, is obliged to look for work. His adventures lead him into the seamier sides of the city as a nightclub entertainer and to the provinces as a teacher. Everywhere he goes he meets nothing but spite and meanness. In fact, it seems that fate has elected him victim of all the possible "sales tours" human beings can play on one another. He is convinced that everyone is bent upon his personal ruin. His adventures seem to confirm this impression, but the weakest part of the novel is precisely this persecution complex and the lack of anything which would explain just why his antagonists behave the way they do. There are no strong secondary characters, only a mass of others against whom Faliou is constantly pitted. It is hard to feel too much sympathy for him, as his own strength of character is not explored in depth. We have only a surface impression of perseverance which does not sufficiently explain motivation or give the reader a dimension essential to create concern for or interest in the fate of this unfortunate young man.

It is as a social, rather than as a psychological, novel that Le journal de Faliou makes its mark among the contemporary novels.



Medou Mvomo has made some important comments on a number of social injustices which demand action. He is a journalist by profession, and his quotation from H. L. Mencken at the beginning of the novel is apt. Like Mencken he is a walker in the city, an observer and a critic, who attacks complacency and the evils of society in whatever guise they are presented: unemployment, conditions of misery and poverty, stagnation of development and urban planning, tribalism and the attitudes of Blacks for other Blacks, bribery and nepotism. This is an important development in the novel in Cameroon in that it recognizes the novelist's responsibility to attack current social ills. While it may not be great literature, it indicates that the novel is at a stage of social awareness similar to that of American writing in the early twentieth century represented by Mencken, Upton Sinclair, and other reformists. It also indicates that a new public which is receptive to these ideas is growing. The reformist trend should continue to manifest itself as long as a literature of French-expression serves a necessary unifying purpose in multi-lingual African countries. It will help to combat the fear which Medou Mvomo sees as the great scourge preventing true unity and independence:

C'est étrange de constater combien les gens ici vivent paralysés par la peur. Tout le monde a peur de tout le monde. C'est pour dire! Or la peur résulte de l'ignorance, pourquoi les gens d'un même pays refusent-ils de resserrer leurs liens au point qu'ils en viennent à se connaître et à bannir la méfiance entre eux?  
(p. 150)

Fear wears a mask, the collective madness of life in a large city. The urban jungle is far more cruel than the brousse. It is the paradox of misery in the midst of plenty and of that deceptive freedom in which an individual may succumb to ruin far more easily than he may accede to success. Douala is the New York of Cameroon, and is invested with the same magic attraction that shows the city theme to be an element that will characterize Cameroonian novels which deal with contemporary life:

Douala vit intensément la nuit. Ce qui frappe au premier contact celui qui vient de l'intérieur du pays, c'est la luminosité. Sans conteste possible, Douala c'est la ville lumière du Cameroun. Les rues sont larges, trop peut-être . . . Une foule abondante grouille sur les trottoirs spacieux et sur la chaussée. Elle se mêle aux solex, vespas, voitures. A Yaoundé, on 'plastronne' dans un conformisme béat. A Douala on est décontracté, débraillé, non-conformiste. Cette atmosphère de liberté vous conquiert avant même que vous ayez fait la connaissance de la ville et de ses gens. (p. 12)

The novel is concerned with the problem of solitude and the fugitive nature of happiness, as well as with social problems, and it is impossible not to wonder how much of Faliou's trouble is due to his own nature, rather than to the maliciousness of society.

The problem of tribalism is at once both social and personal. This theme in the novel is replacing that of racism as an aberration which intelligent people must combat: ". . . la tribalisme a parfois des façons surprenantes de se manifester. Absolument pas drôle pour celui qui en est la victime! Certaines gens peuvent ainsi pousser la jalousie tribale jusqu'à travailler purement et simplement contre

leurs propres intérêts, c'est aberrant" (p. 92). This aberrant nature of tribalism is the main theme of Ramitou, mon étrangère, by Joseph-Jules Mokto.

Ramitou is a pleasant little story of love and marriage in which the villain is the tribal prejudices that oppose the young couple's union. The drama is an "histoire vécue" written with young readers in mind who may be struggling against the same intransigence and whose appreciation of the problem will contribute to future changes in tribal mentality. It is again the spirit of reform which motivates the novel. It is time to put our own house in order before we attack the problems of others, warns the author.

Problèmes africains! Problèmes complexes! Faut-il parler des racistes américains et sud-africains quand nous ne pouvons pas nous entendre comme les fils d'un même pays? Même avec l'évolution indubitable de nos peuples, certaines tribus s'arrogent encore le droit d'appartenir à la 'race' dite supérieure, et de ce fait, toute relation avec une autre 'race' dite inférieure est compromettante . . . (p. 6)

Jules is a Bamileké from Bafoussam, Ramitou is a Bamoun from Foumban. They meet and fall in love as students in Douala. When her family opposes their marriage, Ramitou forces the issue by becoming pregnant. Jules himself had been promised by his family to a village girl, but when presented with a fait accompli, the family decides in council to accept Ramitou, the "étrangère." Eventually, after other contretemps and troublesome incidents, the young couple secure their happiness and reconcile their families. They are

thus able to triumph over the conflict which Jules had feared would cause a rupture with his people: "Si mes parents ou ceux de Ramitou se montraient hostiles à nos projets, nous passerions outre et je devrais vivre éternellement en contradiction avec ma théorie bamiléké de la famille, laquelle était pour moi la meilleure chose que mes ancêtres avaient pu apporter à l'édification d'une humanité plus humaine" (p. 57). The crisis is that of tradition confronting modernism on yet another level. For African families, the educated member is a source of great pride, a bastion against the future in the interests of the collectivity. When that individual who has benefitted from an education and exposure to the world of ideas asserts the freedom which this education has taught him to appreciate, however, it is a clash of interests which has repercussions far more serious than the simple conflict of generations in Western society. Freedom of choice in marriage is but one manifestation of the theme that is still a major preoccupation of contemporary novelists. Mokto is speaking on behalf of the young, as one who knows: "Que leur fils épouse celle qu'ils ont choisie uniquement pour leur plaisir et ne s'entende pas avec cette dernière, et en souffre, qu'importe aux parents! tant que la fille leur convient et leur obéit! Et c'est là le drame! Drame surtout pour l'Africain émancipé et pénétré de liberté" (p. 32). In traditional society where polygamy was practiced, it perhaps did not matter so much, at least to the man, if one wife was

not congenial, He could always take another. Today, the ideas of love and marriage have changed, and the unit is more and more the couple rather than the extended family. The theme of the despair of young love is treated in a more melodramatic fashion in Patrice Ndedi-Penda's La nasse.

In a situation reminiscent of the popular "romans-photo," Charles, called "Papi," and Colette, called "Coco," fall in love. They are from two different clans of the same tribe. Both are educated (Colette as far as the brevet which is quite advanced still for girls in Africa). The "sous-préfet" Ekandè, who is from another tribe, literally "buys" Colette as his second (polygamous) wife. Since Ekandè is all-powerful in the eyes of her family, Charles' family, and all the villagers, Colette is eventually forced to acquiesce. The bulk of the plot concerns all the devices and machinations of the two young people to thwart the marriage and of everyone else to promote it. The story is a modern tragedy which has the ring of truth to it, for Ndedi-Penda belongs to the new generation of African writers whose chief concern is the imperfections and contradictions of an evolving society. He chooses his themes from among those which most concern the young: marriage, traditional polygamy, the condition of the wife, the dot tribal customs, the man/woman relationship, and the revolt of the young generation. These are the relatively non-controversial themes which Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou says will

guarantee an African writer a long career: "Tant qu'un écrivain reste dans les limites de l'éternel débat du mariage forcé, de la dot, des traditions, sans référence ni de loin ni de près aux événements du jour, il obtient un brevet de longue carrière d'écrivain chez les négro-africains."<sup>2</sup> But Ndedi-Penda does not avoid the controversial as well, and the novel attacks the abuses of administration and bureaucracy which are only too common. A prison beating which recalls that which Oyono described in Une vie de boy shows that sadism and brutality have simply changed color, but that the methods remain the same. It is a brave indictment of the excesses which independence has done nothing to eradicate.

The novel follows a simple structure in which events occur consecutively as the two young people try to gain time in order to forestall the marriage which will separate them forever. Ndedi-Penda is also a dramatist, and like other African novelists who are also men of the theater, he makes considerable use of dialogue to advance the situation. The dialogue often contains no indication of who is speaking, so that the reader is obliged to keep track of the logical course of exchange between two speakers. In this and in its frequently melodramatic tone, the novel has the somewhat exaggerated style of the roman-photo:

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<sup>2</sup>Makouta-Mboukou, "Conditions de l'écrivain négro-africain," (Ouagadougou: Annales du Collège Littéraire Universitaire 1), p. 10.

--Vous êtes abject et vénal! vous êtes avide de ma jeunesse, de ma beauté. Et quand je ne les aurai plus, vous me laisserez pour chercher une jeune fille plus fraîche . . . vous me faites pitié, Ekandè et je . . .

--Et tu me hais!

--Non, je vous plains simplement.

--Très aimable de ta part.

--Je ne pourrai jamais vous aimer, c'est sans espoir. (p. 35)

The technique of the palabre is important in the scene where the dot is decided on, and Ndedi-Penda makes use of it to portray the greed and cupidity which motivate the elders of the clan as they bargain away their "daughter."

The use of the present tense for descriptive passages is another device from the theater which creates a sense of artificial reality. The effect is that of a stage setting, in direct style and short sentences. Thus, the opening lines of the novel introduce immediately the time, place, and atmosphere of what is to follow: "C'est le mois d'août. La pluie n'a pas cessé de tomber depuis trois jours sur Banya, un village de quatre mille habitants environ, situé sur la rive du fleuve Nkam . . . Il est dix-sept heures et un brouillard épais flotte. La terre boueuse exhale une odeur de pourriture; tout est humide et sale . . ." (p. 5).

Characterization is again without significant psychological depth. Physical description is more adequate, and even evocative, but only rarely do we get an insight into the human conflict raging in a personnage. Strangely enough, it is Olga (Ekandè's first wife) and Ekandè, really secondary characters, whom we find more "true to life" than Coco

and Charles. In spite of their drama, these tortured youngsters often seem frivolous and shallow.

The image of "la nasse"--the fish weir--becomes symbolic for Charles as he resolves, after having lost Colette to Ekandè, to devote his life to helping others escape the snares which seek to pull them under: "Dans son esprit, la nasse prend des proportions grandioses. Elle représente tous les Ekandè du monde entier qui, au lieu de mettre leurs situations sociales, leur puissance, leur intelligence au service des plus faibles, se servent d'elles pour mieux les écraser" (p. 153). The writer is committed to a similar mission, to pull the people from the "nasse" of ignorance, for, as Ndedi-Penda said in speaking of the role of the African novelist, "on ne peut être qu'engagé dans la société et défendre des idées."<sup>3</sup>

A writer who is above all engaged in the actualities of current life is Francis Bebey. His second novel, La poupée ashanti, is set not in Cameroon, but in Ghana, and gives a vivid picture of life in a certain milieu in the city of Accra. It evokes scenes of town life, the busy streets, the market and the market "mammies," the bureaucracies, offices and political parties of a seat of government, the houses and homes of town people, the bars and "dancings" of a frenetic night life. This is a local color novel with all the flavor of African life as it is

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<sup>3</sup>M. B. Cisse, interview with Patrice Ndedi-Penda in Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, 25, p. 13.



lived by Africans: "Ainsi bouge l'Afrique, avec ce désir fou de faire de n'importe quel moment de la vie un instant pour vivre, une fête souvent recommencée" (p. 92).

With some complications, the story is essentially that of Edna and her fiancé Spio--can she marry him and still stay a true market woman, succeeding her grandmother, Mam, as "reine du marché"? Edna is illiterate, but full of quick native intelligence. Furthermore, "Edna était belle, avec sa poitrine bourrée de significations. La femme noire du poète . . ." (p. 33). Spio is a young civil servant whom Edna meets one day at her market stall. The intrigue includes a manifestation, a strike and protest march of the market woman led by Edna; the conflict of Spio who uses his government position to intervene in favor of the market woman and is punished by being exiled for a while to a post in the provinces; the friendship and jealousies of Edna and her two girlfriends, Gin and Angela (Gin ends up in jail for disfiguring Angela by setting fire to her!); and the eventual dénouement in which all ends happily for the lovers.

The main theme is "la femme de l'Afrique nouvelle" with its auxiliary treatment of life in the city. It is a natural milieu for the people who live and work there, and marked by the same absence of alienation which characterizes the new city novels set in Dakar. Accra is its inhabitants, and vice versa. Every character has a strong sense of personal identity. They are very African, and suffer no

confusion, make no apologies, experience no need for justification to the "other." A white or European presence is missing altogether, as the characters move naturally among themselves to a distinctly African rhythm. The theme of revolt is mildly political and generally optimistic.

Francis Bebey is a regional colorist of talent. He has managed to capture a certain picturesqueness of the African scene without becoming quaint or precious. His prose style is lively, nuanced with humor which is lightly handled and never sarcastic or vituperative. Vignettes typical of the milieux in which his characters function occur simply and unostentatiously: the market scene, the animation and music of the bars, the public scribe, the "taxi-brousse":

C'était un de ces autocars vieillots au seuil du brinque-balant, torturé par les crevasses et les saisons, et bourré d'optimisme malgré sa couleur bleu marine. Comme tous les cars du pays, celui-ci avait un nom que l'on pouvait traduire par "Bonne route, Vieux!". L'insistance du point d'exclamation était flagrante: il avait été dessiné en jaune, et renforcé de rouge sur tout son contour. (p. 176)

Secondary characters have strong personalities of their own, which makes them more than just accessories to the narrative. Mam, Edna's grandmother, and Tante Princess, her aunt have individual characteristics and play believable roles. Although it is in many respects a social and psychological novel, it is as a novel of manners that La poupée ashanti is most effective. A benign realism contributes an atmosphere which gives this novel the strength of genuineness. Since this is the weakest point of so many other recent African novels of

French expression which tend to remain flat and unconvincing, Bebey's achievement is all the more significant. Dialogue is handled with assurance, and sounds realistic enough, except for some of the longer "speeches" of certain figures which seem out of character. If the dialogue does not always ring "true," it may be the fault of overwriting, for this is, in effect, a rather overwritten novel. One has the feeling that some of the anecdotes and incidents are included to fill it up, as they seem to have nothing to do with getting on with the story. This is an esthetic consideration which again has a Western bias. The old African love of palaver--the "grande palabre"--in which everyone has his say, and at length, has probably influenced the author both consciously and unconsciously. The great repetitiveness, which is wearisome to a Western reader, is an accurate reflection of African use of language in the vernacular, and it also characterizes the use of both French and English as second languages in Africa.

Beginning with a glorification of the city and ending with a glorification of the emerging African woman, La poupée ashanti marks a new maturity in the new African novel of French expression. It is a novel without sentimental excess, with a moral lesson gently given, and with a good deal to interest the mass of new readers. It stands out like the new African woman of Spio's final paean "qui scrute l'horizon lointain et aide son homme à s'en rapprocher" (p. 216).

The theme of the ideal woman subtends the plot of Samuel

Mvolo's novel, Les fiancés du grand fleuve. This is a rather delightful work which combines the picturesqueness of a romantic fairy story, with an historical novel, with a boy-scout adventure. A lot happens to Sondo, the narrator, who introduces himself and his wife Tonia in the prologue, and then proceeds to tell how this princess, daughter of a chief, came to be his wife. We begin with a 14th of July celebration in a small Cameroonian town in 1930. The colonial commandant, the "chef coutumier," the "ladies and gentlemen" of the small white community, the men, women and children of the African community, come together for a fête which is fondly recalled in detail (as are most of his adventures) by the narrator. The colonial presence is recalled as in some distant memory, a feature which is becoming more and more common in the Cameroonian novel as a new generation replaces the old. It is something of a novelty to be spared stories of unalleviated atrocities and bitterness and to be presented a pleasant scene which must in fact have been repeated many times in many places around the colonies. We have come a long way from the tragi-comic humiliation portrayed in Oyono's Le vieux Nègre et la médaille, to which Mvolo makes passing reference: "Nul n'ignore que, plusieurs années après les événements que je suis en train de relater ici, un fils de ce pays écrira une oeuvre à succès, à propos d'une médaille . . ." (p. 17). From the celebration, which ends in what seems to be a tragedy, the supposed drowning of the child, Tonia, we are sent back in time

through the intervention of an old servant of the Chief's, to learn a little bit about the latter's private life some six years earlier and the drama of Tonia's origins. Then we accompany our hero on a journey which leads him from ten years as a student back to his native Anakolingo and off into the forest on an expedition to gather latex for the French war effort (it is now 1940). The historical novel now gives way to the "boy's life adventure" as Sondo, separated from his companions by accident, must pit his own resourcefulness against the overwhelming tropical forest. How he overcomes these épreuves and the idyll that he finds at the end turn him from intrepid boy scout to Prince Charming, and there is indeed a Princess awaiting to be awakened and returned to life.

Mvolo has written the first piece of contemporary African fiction in French which might be qualified as a fantasy that is at the same time historically factual and realistic in its accessory events and physical setting. From the blend develops a light novel which is both informative and entertaining. It is a special genre which could help to modify the reading habits of the general public and to open its receptiveness to "pure" literature. It has been the case until now, as the editors of CLE maintain, "que toujours en Afrique les gens ne lisent pas pour le plaisir--pour s'instruireoui, pour s'amuser non."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>J. R. Dihang, Associate Editor, "Les Editions CLE, in a personal interview, Sept. 10, 1973.

A new "escapist" literature is beginning to show some signs of life and is a possible trend for the future.

Mvolo's style is simple, fluid and direct. He remains always accessible, like the traditional storyteller. The first-person narration is, in fact, told by Sondo as if he were before a circle of listeners, and could accompany his story with appropriate gestures: (relating the 14th of July celebration) ". . . A un nouveau commandement du chef des gardes . . . les hommes à la chéchia rouge levèrent leurs fusils et gardèrent le coude gauche pointé en avant; comme ceci . . ." (p. 15). This narration is occasionally interrupted by other stories proffered by secondary characters, and by anecdotes, references to legends, traditions and superstitions. A characteristic of this novel is its effort to be objective and accurate in dealing with the colonial period, especially that time of the indigénat when forced labor was common. But colonialism is not a major theme. As the plot unfolds, it becomes evident that there are, in fact, no major themes; the leading motif is survival, and the almost miraculous way in which the principal characters have managed to survive. Nature is not invested with the exotic coloration that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre described for his readers. Even in their idyll, Sondo and Tonia are more related to Tarzan and Jane than to Paul and Virginie. The jungle is something to be mastered, not admired.

Almost every character is sympathetic; Sondo himself is real

and believable, especially in his boyish enthusiasms. Les fiancés du grand fleuve stopped just short of becoming a modern fable which saved it from failing as an allegorical romance, the fate of Etienne Yanou's L'homme-dieu de Bisso. Here what starts out as a rather charming story quickly becomes flat and diffuse. The theme of animism versus modernism is mixed with fantasy and a light touch, which unfortunately is not light enough or facile enough to be Giraudoux African-style.

The novel is structured in three episodes, each chapter of which is in effect a story apart. The first episode, "Un Noël perdu" presents the village curate and his struggle with animism. When nobody shows up for his Christmas eve services, Abbé Voulana starts to make inquiries and discovers that a leopard-man is rumored to be lurking about, a sign that a new "homme-dieu" is about to appear. Since the village's "arbre fétiche" was cut down, things had gone from bad to worse, and only the designation of an "homme-dieu" can set things right"

En effet, les ancêtres, qui veillent sur notre survie, se sont émus des maux qui nous frappent. Aussi ont-ils imploré le grand dieu Movou, afin qu'il dépêche auprès de vous un homme-dieu pour remettre de l'ordre dans le pays. Leurs vœux ont été exaucés et Men'Si, que vous connaissez bien pour l'avoir vu naître et grandir, a été fait dieu pour servir la tribu. (p. 45)

The second episode, "L'Oeuvre d'un homme-dieu," presents the transformation of the village. Everybody confesses his evil ways,

the sorcerers are exorcised, the village becomes a place of pilgrimage and flourishes. In the third episode, "La fièvre et le baptême," the god becomes a man again. Men'Si has attacks of malaria and believes it is because his "arbre créateur" was uprooted by the bulldozers of the government's forestry project. Cured by Silla, a more practical young woman, he recognizes that he is in love with her. So the god hands in his resignation. Silla and Men'Si hide out at Abbé Voulana's until all calms down, then emerge triumphant the day after their marriage and Men'Si's baptism as a Catholic.

Through the character of Men'Si, Etienne Yanou presents a serious problem of present-day Africa: voluntary submission to a world of custom and tradition which has been eroded by time. When Men'Si at last refuses to remain subjected to his animist entourage, he becomes a symbol of the old seeking a rapprochement with the new. His conversion to Catholicism seems an unnecessary compromise, however, and must be interpreted as having been guided by the author's own personal religious convictions. Excessive modernism has its negative side too, as the villagers of Bisso discover when the news of the miracles of the "homme-dieu" brings the world flocking and money replaces simple honesty and good will as a means of exchange: "Comme par un coup de baguette magique de l'homme-dieu, l'argent entrainait à foison pour la première fois, dans toutes les poches. On était comme en ville" (p. 107).



A number of stylistic devices in the novel link it to various traditions of oral literature. The direct narrative form and the absence of character development, as well as the profusion of secondary roles derive from the popular folktale. Action is episodic, and within the divisions of each part, it remains simple and unified, concentrating on one aspect or phenomenon of the argument of the whole at a time. The presence of the story-teller controlling his artistic creation as it evolves is felt. The miraculous or the unusual are accepted as ordinary occurrences. The fabulous exists, and is not, in traditional Africa, a product of the imagination. Thus fantasy is unknown in African literature, but the fantastic is a common ingredient. All of these elements mark L'homme-dieu de Bisso as a novel which captures the complex patterns of the world of the brousse.

Creeping modernism manifests itself in a gang of "hippies" who invade the village and proclaim themselves devotees of the god, and in the Delange family, the French forester, his wife and son, who live nearby. In the treatment of the latter may be seen the most recent development in the theme of the white man in Africa. The Delanges are portrayed sympathetically, almost incidentally. Although Emile, the father, retains some of the old colon about him, Julie, the mother, is simple and earnest, and completely different from any other "Madame Blanche" of the African novel. And Louis, the son, is just another

young man in revolt against his parents. His friendship with Men'Si is simply a detail in the "homme-dieu's" story.

A review in Afrique Contemporaine called L'Homme-Dieu de Bisso "un bon roman de l'évolution sociale camerounaise."<sup>5</sup> It is that, but it is more: it is another step in the popularization of the novel using themes, plots, structures, style which make it more accessible to its public and which make the Cameroon novel the fastest growing literature of French expression in Africa.

The conflict caused by tribal traditions is the theme of yet another novel, Le fruit défendu, by Honoré-Godefroy Ahanda Essomba. What passes for incestuous love creates the drama in this story of the confrontation of the personal desire of a rich and spoiled young man with the established and sacrosanct traditions of his tribe that concern the "liens de parenté."

Alima Guillaume, rich and pampered only son of a "gros bourgeois" falls in love with his "cousin," Mengue Rose, who has come to town from her village to finish her studies and live in the protection of her "uncle's" house. Ailma and Mengue are "cousins" in the sixth generation only, descended from brothers who centuries earlier were the "aieux" of the tribe. But this relationship makes them "brother and sister" in the eyes of a tribe which practices the strictest exogamy; any other relationship between them would be incestuous. Because

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<sup>5</sup> Afrique Contemporaine, 77 (jan-fév. 1975): 47.

he cannot have her any other way, Alima rapes Mengue, thus unleashing a whole series of misfortunes and catastrophes in the life of his victim which cannot be explained as long as Mengue refuses to name her violator. This she steadfastly refuses to do because of the dishonor and scandal, until at last the truth comes out in a family tribunal and respect for traditions is reaffirmed in a purification ceremony.

As drame bougeois, this story has all the melodramatic effect of an histoire de roman-photo. The style and tone are appropriately extravagant, and all characters tend to be flat stereotypes who often talk in clichés which also penetrate the narration: "Mais Alima avait à peine vingt ans et il imaginait des conquêtes plus exaltantes que les femmes. Il voulait, comme la plupart des fils à papa, brûler la chandelle par les deux bouts avant de se mettre la corde au cou" (p. 31). The image of the forbidden fruit is called forth regularly: "Plus la barrière parentale se renforçait, plus il se sentait attiré vers cette fille avec toute la force diabolique du fruit défendu" (p. 54). We have learned earlier (p. 37), that Alima was fascinated by Julien Sorel and had read Le rouge et le noir many times. While not motivated by the same spirit of arrivisme as Stendhal's hero, Alima is as piqued by Mengue's preferring death to dishonor as Julien is by the haughty demeanor of Mathilde de la Mole. The combat between pride and passion ends in a defeat for Alima as it does for Julien, and his punishment ensues when he defies the "Tribunal des Sages" convened

to consider the case. It is considerably less dramatic than Julien's execution, however. The parallels with Le rouge et le noir are tenuous, and in the person of the hero only, rather than in any resemblance of situation. Alima's revolt has something of the social significance in an African context that Julien's had in the French society of 1830. Alima and Mengue, who might possibly have loved her cousin under other circumstances, are victims of tribal fears and traditions which impose as strict a social order as the society of privilege and rank of the early 19th century. The absurdity of life where one's aspirations are constantly thwarted by an unjust order causes Alima's despair as it did Julien's:

N'avoir pas pu mener la vie qu'on aurait voulu vivre, mourir au printemps de la vie, être désespéré à vingt ans, révolté contre les dieux et les hommes, et condamner un être innocent à subir peut-être le même sort. La procréation ne peut se concevoir que dans la mesure où l'on est d'accord avec le système du monde et la loi des hommes. Mais on vivait dans un monde cruel où l'homme est obligé de renoncer à ses plus chères aspirations sous peine d'être considéré comme un gibier de potence. (pp. 141-142)

Disobedience of tribal laws calls forth a punishment from the gods rather than from man, however. A lengthy legend recounted near the beginning of the novel, of the disobedient son who, ignoring the fortunes around him, ventured into the forbidden forest, only to bring back a basket of evil, is made clear at the end as symbolic of Alima's life. The moral lesson is made somewhat obscure by Ahanda Essomba's equivocal stand on the question of tradition versus change. He has one

character say, "Qu'appelles-tu vivre avec son temps? Vivre avec son temps, ce n'est pas renoncer à ses valeurs, aux fondements culturels de sa personnalité. Vous voulez détruire tout ce qui fait de nous des hommes authentiques, créateurs d'une civilisation originale" (p. 138). And yet we feel that his sympathies are with Alima who braved the anger of the gods and suffered for it.

The setting of the novel is contemporary Cameroon--Yaoundé and the village of Ebogo, and Paris. But the time element is confusing. Mbida, Alima's father, is presented as a rich "commerçant," but it is hard to understand how he could have existed as such, with villas and luxurious automobiles, at the time of Alima's birth when the novel begins, which must have been during the period of colonization, of which no mention is made. Alima is 23 by the time the novel ends with a puzzling last paragraph which leads us to somewhere in the future when even more time must have elapsed and Alima is a considerably older father of a family. This is an unusual liberty taken with time, and may be seen as a deliberate falsification of the historical time element in order to tell a story in a Cameroonian setting without bringing in the era of colonization. Like other modern authors, Ahanda Essomba is writing for a generation with only vague recollections of the colonial era, and a completely African plot and milieu seem far more natural. This is another trend which the popular novelists of Cameroon have been among the first to grasp.

The most important themes have to do with authenticity and ancestral tradition: the idea of "parenté," unity of the tribe, traditional rites and ceremonies. The question of incest and the actual account of a rape are extremely daring for the African novel, however delicately handled. The willingness to attack such controversial subjects indicates a new awareness of the mass of human passions and problems which the novel may yet explore. Other themes include the African nouveaux riches, the opportunism and duplicity of servants, and the dependent situation of women with its concomitant emphasis on virginity. The principal character may be not an individual at all, but the collectivity, the "Tribu Endongo" itself and the unusual hold which the "liens de parenté" continue to exercise on many young Africans. It is the mentality which holds back the progress of unification and sees in the city a danger not only of modernism, but of a threatening heterogeneity: "La ville, constatée-t-on encore, avec son amalgame de tribus et de races, avec sa diversité de croyances et de mentalités, est le plus grand ennemi des valeurs vitales de notre civilisation" (p. 126). The intolerance that this attitude implies is one of the reasons it is so difficult to build a modern, unified nation in Africa today. Ahanda Essomba's social novel has avoided taking a stand on the question, and has therein abdicated a large part of its responsibility.

It is undeniably in Cameroon that the greatest literary movement in French-speaking Africa is taking place. A novel-reading public is being created by the efforts of native novelists. The quality of the literature is uneven, but it attacks themes which engage both novelist and reader in real and immediate problems and ideas.

"L'important réside," as Jacques Rial pointed out, "dans le fait qu'au Cameroun il y ait des hommes qui cherchent, avec maladresse parfois, toujours avec passion, les voies d'une littérature et d'une pensée critique originale, 'consommables' par leur public naturel."<sup>6</sup>

The result is a strong, young literature that will continue to grow as future conditions become even more favorable.

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<sup>6</sup>Rial, Littérature camerounaise de langue française, p. 82.

#### Chapter 4: The novel in Zaïre - the search for "authenticité"

In the former Belgian Congo, now Zaïre, nationalist sentiment has followed a particular development in search of the "être-dans-le monde (Zaïre) du Zaïrois" which has resulted in the elaboration of a national ideology known as "authenticité." As early as 1966, the writer and essayist, Thomas Kanza, expressed it this way: "Il s'agit d'un d'âme, d'un sentiment affectif profond et naturel, d'un amour souvent idéalisé et magnifié de la patrie. 'Congo' en particulier, 'Afrique' en général, avec tout ce que le sentiment amour peut entraîner comme conséquence, surtout quand il est idéalisé, magnifié et qu'il est brimé ou frustré d'une façon ou d'une autre."<sup>1</sup>

In present-day Zaïre, "authenticité" has political as well as ideological repercussions as it has become synonymous with Mobutuism and the Zaïrian cultural revolution led by President Mobutu Sese Seko which seeks to "faire la synthèse entre ces valeurs qui nous viennent de nos ancêtres et les valeurs nouvelles que la technologie met à notre disposition."<sup>2</sup> The "sentiment affectif" which Kanza was among the

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Kanza, "Eloge de la révolution," quoted in Nantet, Panorama de la littérature noire d'expression française, pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup>Mobutu Sese Seko, interviewed in Jeune Afrique, 30 mars 1971.



first to identify has changed into a "doctrine pour combattre ce fléau qui n'a épargné aucun pays d'Afrique: l'absence de conscience nationale."<sup>3</sup> Authenticity rejects other African ideologies which obscure the search for total independence (according to the theory of "authenticité"), such as African socialism, Pan-Africanism, and above all, Negritude, "une grandiose mystification . . . , un mythe . . . , une idéologie négativiste."<sup>4</sup> It is through the ideology of authenticity alone "que se trouve indiqué 'ce qui est bien et ce qui est mal, ce qui est beau et ce qui est laid, ce qui est vrai et ce qui est faux, ce qui est sublime et ce qui est vil'. Elle dit ce qui vaut mieux, ce qui est préférable, ce qu'il faut estimer, admirer, déster, mépriser. Elle dit ce qu'on doit sacrifier et à quoi. L'idéologie de l'authenticité établit dès lors une échelle de valeurs."<sup>5</sup> On this scale of values are to be found distinctions between the frozen, closed up world of "traditionnalisme" (bad) and the creative spirit of "ancestralité" (good); between "occidentalité," the Euro-American world (bad) and "modernité", authentic development (good). Vigilance is required at all times to keep the bad from creeping into the good. Cultural relativism and métissage are abominations which must be extirpated in order to achieve complete

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<sup>3</sup>Kangafu-Kutumbagana, Discours sur l'authenticité (Kinshasa, 1973), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 51 and 52.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

independence, cultural as well as economic, "de penser Zaïrois, de réagir Zaïrois . . ." <sup>6</sup>

This African puritanism is perhaps a necessity in a country like Zaïre, which is rich in tribal, ethnic and linguistic distinctions, in order to mold a modern, unified nation. But it imposes certain hardships and limitations on novelists and writers of the present generation whose early education had mostly been through the Belgian system or in the hands of American missionaries, whose formation was heavily impregnated with Western values, and whose chosen means of expression was a foreign genre and a European idiom. Much poetry has been composed in Zaïre in recent years, but the novel is, as Jeannick Odier calls it, a "genre littéraire en mutation." <sup>7</sup> Two novels appearing, one in 1970 and one in 1973, indicate that a reconciliation has been found which will permit the novelist to portray the problems of a society in transformation and the agonies of conscience which this may entail for the intellectual . . . "Ce sont donc essentiellement des problèmes socio-psychologiques que traitent ces deux romanciers, lesquels laissent comprendre que la recherche d'une authenticité humaine reste toujours possible malgré les difficultés." <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>7</sup>Jeannick Odier, "Bilan de la littérature zaïroise depuis l'indépendance", Afrique Littéraire et Artistique 35 (1975): pp. 30-34

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

Deux vies, un temps nouveau by Ngombo Mbala first appeared in 1970 as Engo et Miese ou l'aube du renouveau (Kinshasa, Editions Okapi). The author, who was then known as Emile Ngombo, was awarded first prize for literature in the literary competition sponsored by the chief of state, President Mobutu. Of the novel's 'authenticity' there can, therefore, be very little doubt. The novel recounts the progressive changes which occur in two lives, that of Engo, the father, a Congolese peasant, and Miese, his son, a bridge between the old and the new. The "temps nouveau" is represented by Miese's children, a somewhat ambiguous new time that leaves us wondering about the future, and hoping that their promise will be realized.

The story is told simply, in direct chronological fashion, beginning with Engo the child, happy in his village and the familiar surroundings of ancestral tradition. As he grows, progressive changes bring an awareness of his physical, social and cultural identity. The earthen pot is replaced by an enamel kettle, the open cook-fire becomes a kerosene stove, the sound of the tam-tam has died before the squeaking of the phonograph. Life's wisdom can no longer be got from the grandmother's tales, but must be sought in the village school and beyond. Engo suffers the impact of these changes brought by colonization and dreams of a time which his children will help to create when they can live "pleins de ces universels qui nous aideront à vivre / notre vie à nous, à faire comprendre notre vie à nous / et à exprimer notre

pensée à nous . . . " (p. 43). After the traditional upbringing and little schooling of his father, Miese, Engo's son, sets out to obtain an education in Africa and Europe. He succeeds, but finds that his major in philosophy is of little practical value in the development of his country. It is his turn to dream of a new time for his children, "l'aube des jours nouveaux: une vie familiale, sociale et économique qui leur permettra de vivre et de suivre à la fois la civilisation du progrès technique et la transformation des bonnes traditions héritées de leurs ancêtres" (p. 125). Miese's children will have more to offer both the storehouse of universal civilization and the heritage of a national identity. The ironic tone of the last chapters on the accomplishments of these children indicates that it will take some settling down before the nature of their contribution can be appreciated, and that the world must tolerate some foolishness and excesses until then. All of them recognize, however, that their mission is to express Africa's originality: "Enfants des tropiques, quand même vous parcourrez le monde, sachez que votre devoir est celui combien honorable d'ouvrir spontanément et sans animosité votre monde au Monde, de faire connaître partout la terre de vos ancêtres et d'en vivre . . ." (pp. 187-188).

The elevated tone of much of the novel puts us before a moral lesson to be learned and applied. In fictional form, this is a social and political indoctrination into the ideology of "authenticité" and like

the earlier literature of Negritude, it employs a number of themes which serve to state its position and clarify its values. It is interesting to note that the majority of these themes are quite similar to those used by the Negritude poets and novelists to awaken Negro-Africans to their cultural uniqueness and to point the way to a separation from Europe and the colonial mentality. Ngomba Mbala analyses the progressive changes which cause the conflict of generations and the crisis of African identity. The theme of the city and the fascination it exercises on the imagination of the broussard are a theme in the formation of the young Engo: "Et puis vient la hantise de la ville . . . L'attrait vers la vie supposée facile [. . .] A l'insu des siens, il a hâte de boire aux sources de jouissance qu'une imagination paresseuse [avait] pareés de mille couleurs" (pp. 36-37). The urban phenomenon created a complementary problem, the theme of the village in crisis "Privé de sa jeunesse, le village se meurt. Des enfants et des vieillards, --jeunes pousses et feuilles fanées sur un vieux tronc qui s'étiolé. Aucun jeune homme, aucun adulte. Clair de lune ou pleine obscurité, même vie morne et languissante" (pp. 37-38). In Miese's education, we get the themes of the African cultural heritage and the "retour aux sources" as Miese studies his past and ponders what it means to live authentically:

Vivre authentiquement . . . c'est vivre face à soi et face à autrui avec cette simplicité d'être soi sans un masque d'emprunt et cet intense désir de se trouver soi-même à chaque instant

et de trouver son propre idéal; c'est éviter de se prendre pour ce qu'on n'est pas ou faire croire le mensonge de ce qu'on n'a pas; reconnaître ses vraies limites et ses vraies capacités physiques, intellectuelles et morales. (p. 55)

It would be vain to seek an analogy with Sartrean philosophy in the concept of authenticity, and yet it is tempting because of the similarity of terminology. Zairian authenticity has, however, nothing to do with the obligation of a choice of action imposed by a situation for which one becomes, thereafter, responsible. The problem of life as a perpetual "devenir," the meaning of which is determined only insofar as one commits oneself in daily action is not relevant to the interpretation of "la vie authentique" which Miese is describing. "Vivre authentiquement" has here the rather more vague meaning of searching out the realities behind the appearances and not trying to pretend to be something one isn't. For a Zairian it means, as Miese explained to Engo: "Vivre pleinement notre vie, père. Etre tout à fait moi, chez moi et partout; devenir ce que nous sommes pour comprendre ce que sont les autres réellement; peut-être sera-ce le commencement d'une vie authentique, ayant son cachet personnel au milieu et en harmonie avec d'autres vies" (pp. 98-99).

The theme of Europe plays a large role in the development towards authenticity and a "temps nouveau." The myth of Europe as seen from Africa and the Europeanization of the African are presented as anomalies which block the establishment of Zairian dignity. "Vivre

en Européen" is natural for a European; it should be as natural for an African to live "africainement," or as Kangafu-Kutumbagana put it in the Discours sur l'authenticité: "Le Zaïrois n'a pas à choisir entre une vie à l'africaine et vivre à l'européenne. Vivre à l'européenne doit cesser d'avoir pour lui le sens de 'vivre en évolué; la civilisation européenne d'être synonyme de civilisation tout court. Il doit vivre africainement."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, various aspects of the theme of modern life are considered: education, its aim and its perversion as a cause of alienation and disorientation in the African student; marriage, motherhood and the condition of women; problems of modern government--the formalities of administration, corruption, bureaucratic vanity. Once it has conquered itself--learned to live authentically, Africa can set about conquering, benignly, the rest of the world. The first missionaries of this conquest are represented by Miese's sons: John, the minister of government, Miese, the painter, and Rossignol, the poet-musician. They learn that what is important is what they bring to Europe as spokesmen for their culture, not what they take from it in terms of approval and applause for themselves. The sons of Miese will work the proud and free exchange when the two worlds will cooperate and share their treasures for the common good. Old Engo's sincerest

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<sup>9</sup>Kangafu, Discours su l'authenticité, p. 29.

wish will then be realized:

Mon voeu lu plus profond:  
 Apporter du Nord à l'Equateur  
 Interpréter l'Equateur au Septentrion  
 Interpréter, non point altérer  
 Corriger, non point supprimer:  
 Conserver de tout peuple ce que son patrimoine  
 a de riche et d'original, de valable et d'universel . . . (p. 42)

Deux vies, un temps nouveau, in spite of its moralizing tone, has a simple and clear style which befits the sincere social, cultural and political témoignage that it is. Its purpose is very strongly didactic, of course, and it lends itself admirably to the campaign for authenticity which the government of Zaïre is waging. It is more than a polemic or a political tract, however, and shows the role imaginative literature may play in a coordinated effort to awaken national awareness. There is no great depth of thought, no particular philosophical insights into the profounder causes of the national dilemma, no controversial ideas. Everything is admirably addressed to the level of an educated, but not intellectual, African public. Ngombo Mbala, taking his own lesson on authenticity to heart, makes much use of the technique of mixed genres, blending in songs, poems, stories and traditional legends. In one evocative scene, we are reminded of Laye Camara (and how many others!): it is the image of the lonely African student, far from home in a cold and snowy Paris, who seeks to delude his loneliness and nostalgia by writing memories of his happy African childhood. He is in this way affirming his



authenticity in an alien world.

Deux vies, un temps nouveau never rises above its moralizing to take a closer look at the complex psychological drama which Engo and Miese must be experiencing. The story remains on the surface of things as an allegory of Africa in transition. Engo is the old ways which were shaken by the arrival of the colonists, Miese is the period of assimilation and acculturation, Miese's children are the future prise de conscience from which the ideology of authenticity will spring "comme interrogation dernière sur les illusions africaines . . . comme l'unité d'une triple détermination: ancestralité, colonisation, acculturation."<sup>10</sup> Entre les eaux, by V. Y. Mudimbe, published in 1973 by Présence Africaine, is a far more significant look at the crisis of an individual caught in this transition. Subtitled "Dieu, un prêtre, la révolution," it is a philosophical and psychological novel of the interior drama of a black priest, formed in the West and imbued with Renaissance humanism, and his search for meaning, "authenticity" and Faith in his ancestral Africa, a search which is ultimately a failure, leading to resignation and withdrawal.

Hoping to find in the rebels of the maquis the real purity of his faith which the Church's hypocrisy and exploitation of Africa have defiled, Pierre, the narrator, joins a band of revolutionaries without the permission of his superior. In spite of a certain idealism which he

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 55 and 56.

finds there in the person of the "chef, " he is impelled from this treason (to the Church) to another (to the maquis) to another (to the customs of his ancestors). He wants to live his faith and to find salvation in a purity which the elements of this world will not allow. Overwhelmed at the end, he withdraws to a Cistercian monastery, spending his days in the empty repetitiveness of rites and symbols without faith.

In its themes and in its treatment of them Entre les eaux enters the illusive precincts of the "universal" which have escaped so many other African novelists. The metaphysical anguish which Pierre experiences is that of every man in whom doubt and faith are in conflict. His agonized soul-searching relates him to all seekers of a resolution to the existential problem. Dissatisfied with his role in the Church---". . . la compromission de la Foi avec le pouvoir ne pouvait en aucune façon aider la justice. J'ai vite toléré les situations de fait même si occasionnellement je sentais, malgré moi, mais à cause de ma Foi, je serais toujours du côté de l'injustice institutionnalisée" (pp. 20-21) --Pierre chooses a course of action which will engage him in what he believes to be a purer struggle. In allying himself with the maquis, he is performing what is now, in the strict Sartrean sense, an "acte authentique": "Puisque mon désir est que, grâce à nous, une situation sociale plus pure puisse naître; que le Sacrifice de la Croix ne soit plus un mensonge" (p. 21). But Pierre is

unable to assume the full responsibility of his choice. A participant in the violence of the maquis' political action, he nevertheless remains detached from it. Intellectually he is able to justify the efficacy of their methods, but spiritually and emotionally he is unable to confine himself to the mechanical role he is expected to play in carrying them out:

Bidoule avait fait mettre les soldats en trois colonnes. Horizontalement. Combien étaient-ils? Trois cents? Cinq cents? Deux mitraillettes s'étaient mises au travail. A peine trois secondes. Du travail propre. Très propre. Un peu écoeurant. Mais parfaitement dans l'ordre. Gêné, j'avais essayé de faire taire le Magnificat qui montait dans mon coeur. 'Il ne faut pas', me disais-je. Pourquoi? (p. 39)

Because of the equivocal nature of Pierre's commitment he is never fully accepted by his comrades. Nor can he accept their theology of violence which has replaced the love of God and Man he so ardently wishes to bring to Africa. He confesses his disappointment to the chief, who responds,

--Déçu? Pourquoi donc? . . . Ah bon! la simplicité de nos méthodes? Mais voyons, c'est cela la pureté. Dans l'acte comme dans l'intention. Et puis, nous ne sommes pas des intellectuels, nous autres . . . Une lutte de libération se condamne dès qu'elle accepte des nuances entre le bon et le mauvais, dès qu'elle remet en cause, ne fût-ce qu'une fois, le bien-fondé de ses objectifs . . . (p. 53).

Thus the chief is a purer priest and visionary than Pierre himself, and Pierre realizes that his presence in the camp is a pretension, that he has been moved more by a spirit of rejection of his own assimilation by the West than by a spirit of sacrifice of self as a necessary commitment to the future. The chief is a man of faith

who most closely resembles the revolutionaries in Camus' Les Justes; like them he has understood that it is not enough to denounce injustice; one must be prepared to give one's life to fight it: "Cet homme s'offrait comme un simple instrument préparant un temps futur qu'il ne connaîtrait pas. Un prêtre ou un poète" (p. 55).

Pierre throws himself into the wholesale violence in an effort to prove his total commitment, but the Marxist-Maoist atheism of the movement drives him at last to an act of betrayal. It is an ambiguous act in which he betrays in order not to betray, in order to remain true to his ideals. But this, too, ends in failure; he is unable to escape the "spiritualité de la haine" which is the atmosphere in which his every act succumbs: "Aliéné, oui, aliéné à une vision fondue en moi. Tôt ou tard, je serais devenue un traître. Ne le suis-je pas devenu dès mon entrée au grand séminaire? La phrase de mon oncle me poursuivra toujours: 'Tu as refusé la vie aux tiens.'" (p. 156). In a final act of refusal, he rejects life even for himself, and as Brother Mathieu-Marie de l'Incarnation, humiliates himself with empty symbols "dans l'attente d'un Messie qui ne reviendra peut-être jamais plus" (p. 184).

In structure and form, the novel makes use of the first-person narrative and the interior monologue. The psychological drama is reinforced by this technique which enables Mudimbe to delve into the intimate thoughts of his character and to explore the philosophical

conflict which is raging within him. Through the technique of rapportage and témoignage, persons and events which exert exterior force on his drama are presented and move in and out of range as their lives, thoughts and actions interact with Pierre's. In Pierre's memories of a happier times in Italy (Rome, Venice), during his studies at the Angelicum, the author creates a constant va-et-vient with time, present to past, but it is a past never specifically detailed chronologically. Pierre's philosophical debates with his friend Fabrizio are lost in a past time that also includes evocations of his childhood and early alienation from tribal customs. The interior drama--the search for authenticity--unrolls on both the conscious and the subconscious levels as Pierre's present action, intimate thoughts, and deep personal memories push the lone central character into a final total abnegation of self, where he drifts, "entre les eaux."

The themes of the novel can be divided into three large categories: Personal, the Church, and Africa. In the category of the personal, are the sub-themes of solitude, melancholy, a feeling for nature, the ambiguous situation of the assimilé, hatred, treason, martyrdom, poverty. All of these ideas are related to Pierre's own concept of himself. The theme of the Church is presented in the form of a conflict: The Church and colonization, Catholicism and animism, Faith and Modernity, Marxism and Christianity, mysticism and

spirituality. Rifled with hypocrisy, lacking true Christian love, the Church continues to exist through a "théologie de contingences." In the theme of Africa is the ideal, or the search for it: authenticity, ancestral faith and traditional ceremonies, the "retour aux sources," the mystification of Negritude, and the myth of the "âme noire." The real Africa is in the revolt of the maquisards and in the psychological crisis of a society caught between acculturation and authenticity.

There is a very clear and pertinent use of imagery and symbolism throughout Entre les eaux. The image of water is a pervasive one which accords with the ideas both of thirst and of drowning as well as with the idea of the equivocal nature of Pierre's situation: "Je vogue entre les eaux. Douces? Les sons des tam-tams effleurent à peine la surface. La fange est loin. Le chant grégorien va monter, fleuve de vertu, soutenu par la voix humaine. La voix" ( p. 183). The fragility and mechanical nature of words is another image, and man's slavery to them as he seeks to explain and name in order to push back the terror of the unknown: "C'est cela, l'intelligence du monde au quel j'appartiens. Tout a été prévu. Les vertus comme les vices. On les a nommés une fois pour toutes. Ils ne peuvent se vivre que sous des mots donnés et des formes déterminées. Que devenait Dieu dans tous ces mots?" (p. 168). Symbols are vivid and relate to both aspects of Pierre's ambiguous situation as a priest of God and a priest of the Revolution. They are the symbols of the "sel sacré," chastity, fire,

the priesthood, and most significantly, those of blood and wine--the Eucharist of the Revolution and of the Catholic Mass.

Mudimbe's style is most striking in its use of short sentences, sometimes only a word or two long, which gives a beating rhythm, like that of a tam-tam or a heart, to a passage:

C'était un homme. Nu. Il vivait encore. Un souffle tenu lui soulevait légèrement la poitrine. Du visage, il ne restait pas grand-chose. Les lèvres avaient été coupées. Le nez, enlevé. A la lame de rasoir, sans doute. A la place de l'oeil gauche, il n'y avait plus qu'un trou. Le front était tailladé et couvert de filets de sang encore frais. (p. 51)

The horror of the description of this atrocity is accentuated by the broken and jerky rhythm and its abrupt phrases as it is by the bare vocabulary and skeletal form of the paragraph. Mudimbe uses this technique to create a mood or describe an action or give a description. True descriptive passages are rare, and even then there is a similar use of brief phrases and halting rhythm. The device of the autodiologue is employed at the end of the novel in order to dramatize Pierre's "dédoublement" as Brother Mathieu. By another device we are also prepared for the psychological double which characterizes Pierre's personality: along with the recurring theme of the grandmother to represent traditions recalled through her memory, there is constant reference to and identification with the glories of Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting (Titian, Carvaggio, Boticelli, Bernini, Michelangelo) and Baroque music (Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi).

Pierre is possessed by two worlds--ancestrality and the West. He has not found his own authenticity, and his humiliation is to remain empty, but receptive to another presence which may yet save him. Mudimbe has written a novel of an individual passion which transcends a banal analogy with the crisis in present-day Zaïre. It is more than just a socio-political novel designed to assist in the construction of a new order in line with modern reality or current ideology. Entre les eaux is the first genuinely philosophical novel to have made its appearance in the francophone literature of Africa.

Entre les Eaux and Deux vies, un temps nouveau hardly constitute by themselves a trend which can be considered encouraging for the development of the novel in Zaïre. They indicate nevertheless that the theme of authenticity can provide matter for the novelist's creativity without compromising its goals in an alien genre.



Chapter 5: A Case Apart--Mongo Beti, Perpétue

When Mongo Beti at last broke his long, self-imposed silence as a writer, it was with a political indictment, Main basse sur le Cameroun, in 1972. He followed this in 1974 with Remember Ruben<sup>1</sup> which evokes the memory of Ruben Um Nyobé, a martyred nationalist and pre-independence political leader who founded the Union des Populations des Camerouns that fought for an amalgamation of the British and French sections of the country, and had the support of the Communist Party in France. In the same year he brought out a novel, Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur (Buchet/Chastel, 1974), which is unlike any other he has written. Perpétue is the work of a mature and bitter man, and has none of the lighthearted verve which characterized Mongo Beti's novels of the 1950's. Although the author has lived in France for many years, Perpétue captures present-day

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<sup>1</sup>Union générale d'éditions, 1974. This is a ponderous, over-written, neo-marxist fictionalization of pre-independence in-fighting to see who will gain control in a fictitious African country that is also the setting of Perpétue. The prose is heavy and the moralizing tone curiously flat. The narrative is jerky and jumps from anecdote to anecdote with no transitions. The characters, unlike those of Beti's earlier works, have no solidity or credibility. The most believable is an opportunist, the scoundrelly Jean-Louis, who recalls Kris and Medza. The style is awkward, although there are some instances of good use of dialogue. In all, this is a disappointing book which we will not examine further.

African realities exactly. And its assessment for the future is pessimistic. As long as the police state, served by mediocre and corrupt officials, maintains its oppression over a people whose miseries have only increased since independence, Africa, like Perpétue, will have to resign itself to the "habitude du malheur."

In the novel *Essola*, a former Rubenist militant, returns to his native village after six years as a political prisoner "dans le nord," and begins a quest, the attempt to reconstitute the life of his little sister, Perpétue, and the events leading up to her death about six months earlier. Chapters are unnumbered and there are no specified major divisions to the novel. However, it is possible to see that Beti was working with a three-part structure, and that the novel is tightly organized around and within those three parts. The construction of the whole is made more solid and more unified by this craftsmanship, the work of an accomplished novelist. The first part consists of the stages in Essola's search for witnesses who can shed some light into the circumstances surrounding Perpétue's death. In this undertaking, finding that he will not get the truth out of his own family, he successively visits first the mission at Ngwa-Ekeleu where Perpétue was a schoolgirl, and talks with her girlhood friend, Crescentia; then the village of Teuteuleu to find the "guérisseur," Nkomedzo; next he goes to the town of Oyolo and the Zombotown section where Perpétue lived the last years of her life; and finally to

Fort-Nègre, the capital, to find their older sister, Antonia. He returns obsessed by the information he has uncovered: "...Essola se sentait surtout en proie à l'épouvante du chaos funeste, à la fois subi et entretenu autant dans son hameau natal, qu'à Ngwa-Ekeleu, à Teuteuleu, à Oyolo, à Fort-Nègre, partout où il venait d'aller" (p. 91).

The second part is a reconstitution of Perpétue's tragedy, and takes us through the stages of her life up to her death: her studies, her hopes and dreams, her forced marriage, her life in town, her miseries, her pregnancies, and her final martyrdom as she dies in childbirth at barely 20 years of age: "Ainsi s'en alla Perpétue à vingt ans, abandonnant le prétendu banquet de la vie à l'âge où, ailleurs d'autres sont seulement autorisées à y paraître dans l'aura de leur jeunesse scintillant comme la traîne flambante d'une mariée exquise" (p. 264-265).

The third part is Essola's vengeance, the particularly hideous death into which he lures his own brother, Martin, one of the chief instigators of Perpétue's tragedy.

The characters in the drama which surrounds Perpétue are for the most part particularly loathsome: Maria, her tyrannical vampire mother, Martin, her drunken, worthless older brother, Edouard, the weak, self-serving husband to whom she is literally sold, and M'Barg Onana, the brutal police commissioner whose mistress she is obliged to become. Contrasted with this not very admirable bunch

are the couple, Jean-Dupont and Anna-Maria, who befriend her and try to protect her.

Using the narrative form of the témoignage, Beti reveals the drama little by little. The image of the journey or quest is confirmed at once, as the novel opens and the reader is at the very beginning plunged into Essola's trip home without knowing where he is coming from or where he is going. A feeling of desolation is evoked immediately, and from thereon, the reader must feel his way gropingly, along with Essola as he painfully reconstructs the tragedy. Since we already know that it is too late to save Perpétue, the quest takes on a depressing sense of futility and hopelessness. There will be, can be, no final resolution, only the grim satisfaction of finding out the truth. Beti has used all his skill as a novelist to sustain the oppressive atmosphere of degradation, pain, fear, sorrow and resignation that characterizes Perpétue's fate, and is the reality of daily existence, so Beti would have it, in the African police state.

As reconstructed by Essola, Perpétue's calvary began when she was withdrawn from school, where she had dreams of becoming a medical assistant, and delivered against her wishes to Edouard's family to become his wife. The drama of arranged marriages and the institution of the dot are the targets of Beti's criticism. Not even consulted about her fate, Perpétue "dut assister, impuissante, au bâclage de sa propre vie" (p. 112). In Zombotown where the young

couple went to live, Essola discovered that in order to make ends meet, Perpétue had opened a little sewing shop, that she had incurred the admiration of their circle of friends, but the enmity of her husband when she proved that she was quicker and more intelligent than he, that while Perpétue was home in her village giving birth to their first child, Edouard had taken a second wife. Her solitude and her misfortunes had begun to weigh on Perpétue and she accepted them as strokes of an inescapable fatality: "On devinait à nouveau chez elle cette fermeté raide de somnambule qui faisait parfois douter que son âme irrigât la mécanique de son corps; à Anna-Maria aujourd'hui, comme jadis à Crescentia, elle paraissait un fantôme mal graissé dont les grincements seraient silencieux et les saccades imperceptibles" (p. 189). The degradation of Perpétue had been accomplished when her husband, failing in his affairs, pushed her into a liaison with the police chief in order to protect his interests. From then on Edouard's star was on the rise, but Perpétue's grasp on life declined until she died giving birth to her third child by yet another man to whom she had turned seeking a semblance of affection.

The thread of another story, political rather than personal runs through Perpétue. In discovering his sister's life Essola also discovers the political organization mounted by the single party of the president, "Baba Toura," and maintained by a reign of terror that precluded any opposition. Beti's politics are clear and unequivocal.

He is denouncing the prostitution of Africa following independence to the interests of néo-colonialism. The assassination of Essola's country has been carried out with the same ruthlessness which marked the treatment of Perpétue. Through Essola and the auxiliary character of Jean-Dupont, municipal counselor for Zombotown, Beti expresses his mood of negation and resistance which the years of independence have only served to strengthen. The attack is specific. It is to his own country he is referring when he speaks of "la colossale machine de despotisme sanguinaire agencée à la hâte dès la veille de l'indépendance par les apprentis sorciers blancs du faux prophète d'Allah imposé par la force et le crime à notre peuple..." (p. 269). But it could also be any one of a dozen countries in which tyranny and intimidation are the political order of the day.

Three large groups of themes serve to expand Beti's ideas on the malheurs which have become Africa's habit. They are the political themes, the social themes, and the cultural themes. In the category of political themes he considers Africanization, the reversals brought after independence, fear and political intimidation, torture and concentration camps, dictatorship and the single party system, exile, responsible resistance, neo-colonialism and foreign aid, the U. N. and the O. A. U. Under social themes we may group the questions of marriage, the dot, polygamy, the place of women and children in contemporary life. Cultural themes include superstition, customs, "le

forçage culturel, "religion, the language problem, the gullibility of Africans, and the conservative and backward spirit of the peasants.

There is a particularly significant treatment of the condition of women which earns this novel the distinction of being the first truly feminist work to come out of recent African literature in French. Feminist tendencies have been noted in a number of works written since 1960, notably Sembène's L'Harmattan, Philombé's Sola, ma chérie, and Bebey's La poupée ashanti. Many others have included the theme of the condition of women in their treatment of the institutions of marriage, the dot, the family, and in their portrayal of the vicissitudes of young love. But not, perhaps, since Sadji's Nini and Maïmouna, has there been such an in-depth study of the psychology of women, or rather, of the African woman of a particular milieu caught in a particular situation. Beti has sensitively understood the moods and strategies of a woman who, like a tracked beast, must move to defend herself in the world of men. The wariness of a victim characterizes Perpétue's behavior as she receives the unwelcome advances of the police commissioner, M'Barg Onana:

Perpétue se taisait, avec un entêtement à désespérer tous les commissaires centraux du monde, dissimulée dans la pénombre ainsi que Katri lui avait appris à le faire pour mieux observer les hommes, ces animaux étranges. Le policier voulut lire sur le visage de la jeune femme les sentiments qu'elle refusait de lui dire; il leva la lampe-tempête au-dessus de la table, la brandit en vain de gauche à droite, et de droite à gauche; il eut alors l'idée de la poser sur le sol de terre battue et aperçut enfin la jeune femme, assise, détournée, sur une vieille

caisse d'emballage, à l'entrée du cagibi qui lui servait de cuisine, la moitié droite du dos appuyée au mur, les yeux levés vers une contemplation mystérieuse; elle semblait bêtonnée dans un refus rigide. (p. 2-7-208)

The women in Beti's novel seem far more real than the men who merely serve as foils to the feminine drama, which their assumption of privileges as men has created. Women's lives are circumscribed by those of their men. While the men may radiate outward in new directions, the women are condemned to a circular, closed-in existence at the hub of the man's world. Beti's awareness of this condition is of early date. In Le roi miraculé, he had Kris's aunt, one of the repudiated wives of the Chief, say to Kris:

--Tu as bien de la chance d'être un homme!

--Oh, je sais! répondit sincèrement Kris.

--Non, pas tout à fait, dit la femme. Si tu avais des enfants un jour--ce que je te souhaite de tout mon coeur--tâche que ce soient des garçons, Kris. Tel que je te connais, si tu avais une fille, tu ne manquerais pas d'assassiner un homme, parce qu'il aurait fait souffrir ta fille; car, étant un homme, tu ignores à quel point une femme est faite pour être malheureuse. Cela faisait combien? Quinze ans, peut-être plus, que j'étais là--dans ce village que je croyais mien, dans cette maison que je croyais m'appartenir, servant cet homme que je croyais mon époux. Mais ne voilà-t-il pas qu'il entre tout à coup pour me dire lui-même: 'Va-t-en! Je ne veux plus de toi, tu ne m'es rien, tu es une étrangère'... (p. 157).

Beti is posing the problem of the social and cultural development and emancipation of women so that they may play a significant and independent role in the evolution of society in Africa today. In the secondary female characters, Beti rounds out the portrait of the African woman he is tracing. Maria, Perpétue's mother, is an illiterate traditionalist,



suspicious of anything new, of any changes in what she perceives to be the natural order of things. A woman's lot is marriage; education is a waste of time. In her eyes, "pour une femme, l'école n'est qu'un jeu auquel la mode et les moeurs modernes contraignent les petites filles, et non l'assise sur laquelle bâtir une vie" (p. 97). Maria has engineered Perpétue's marriage in order to get money to buy a wife for her idle older son, Martin, whom she favors. Katri, a village cousin, is the typical peasant woman, hard-working, realistic, and luckily, happily married. She tries to console Perpétue who begs her family for just a few more months in school in order to complete her certificate: "Trop tard, ma petite mère. Personne ne te consultera, n'y compte surtout pas. Ta mère t'a piégée. Nous sommes toujours piégées, et par les nôtres encore" (p. 110). In Crescentia, Perpétue's schoolfriend, Beti attacks the problem of a spirited young évoluée, forced to flee a jealous husband and fend for herself and her children. She is, according to another character, "Un peu légère, peut-être, mais très belle femme, et très dégourdie, ce qui ne gâte rien par le temps qui courent" (p. 303). Anna-Maria, Perpétue's benevolent protector in Zombotown, is the town woman, shrewd and full of good sense, "dont la philosophie variait avec les circonstances et ses interlocuteurs" (p. 169). She is practical, warm-hearted, and strong, willing to confront men on equal terms if she can, and if not, to invent the little strategies that she knows will manage them. Even Antonia,

the briefly introduced sister, has distinct character which the few pages devoted to her reveal. She tells Essola, "A peine étais-tu né, cher, que tu comptais déjà cent fois, que dis-je, mille fois plus que moi, ton aînée de dix ans. Tu sais bien, dans nos moeurs, une pauvre femme, cela compte à peine pour deux sous" (p. 90).

Thus in these female characters are resumed all of the many aspects of the condition of women in Africa. Beti has shown himself a sympathetic and alert observer of the situation, as well as a perspicacious critic who realizes that it is the society as a whole which suffers when the dignity and worth of one-half of its members are compromised.

Perpétue is a tightly written novel, in which the use of anecdote, sketch, and play-like dialogue vary the tone of the narration. The lengthy run-on sentence is a characteristic of Beti's mature style of which he gave already some evidence in his pre-independence novels. But the verve and elasticity of these earlier works are lacking. It is a tired and disillusioned prose which needs to explain everything. The following sentence is an example:

Aussi, dès 1962, trompétait-on sans doute sous l'inspiration des psychologues français de Baba Toura et afin de couper les bras aux populations demeurées en dépit des persécutions intimement attachées au souvenir de Ruben, que la bienfaisante terreur du régime avait ramené ici un état d'esprit paisible rappelant le début des années cinquante à ceux qui avaient connu cette époque bénie: revenus enfin à l'exercice exclusif de leurs activités traditionnelles les gens ne se gardaient pas seulement de la politique comme d'une malédiction, leur

sagesse si typiquement bantou allait jusqu'à la bannir de la conversation même, ce qui laissait augurer très favorablement du retour de l'antique prospérité. (p. 12)

The most striking thing about Perpétue is the lack of the irony and satire which marked Beti's early works and which caused him to be hailed as a major comic writer and, with Oyono, one of the "two most ribald commentators on society in colonial Africa."<sup>2</sup> Perpétue is a tragedy. The theme is such that Mongo Beti has been unable, or unwilling, to create the kind of African novel which would do for contemporary social injustice on the Black Continent what his pre-independence novels did for colonialism, that is, construct a climate of harsh ridicule that can purge and cleanse. Colonial society was a wide-open field for Beti to exploit with his humor and wit, and the Western world accepted this criticism complacently, even helped promote it. But now it is time for a change of tactic, and things are serious. The situation now requires, as Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou emphasized, that the writer retrench himself in his role of accuser: "Jusque-là, en effet, l'écrivain nègre tapait sur la tête de l'Occident qui, paternellement, encaissait les coups sans crier. Maintenant il va falloir taper sur les Nègres au pouvoir."<sup>3</sup> And the writer can no longer anticipate an attitude of paternalism when he does so.

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<sup>2</sup>Brench, Writing in French from Senegal to Cameroon, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Makouta-Mboukou, "La condition de l'écrivain négro-africain," Annales du Collège Littéraire Universitaire (Ouagadougou) 1 (1975): p. 9.

Perpétue was not free to dispose of her own fate, and so she succumbed to the tyranny of others, thus wasting all her bright promise. This, so Beti's message seems to be, is also the fate of Africa. In spite of its themes and setting, and its preoccupation with current African realities, Perpétue does not fit into the current stream of "African" fiction. Perhaps the author has been too long in exile. The moral lesson is lacking. The didactic approach is dissolved in a bitter kind of criticism which is marked by pessimism, and even cynicism, in regard to the contradictions of Africa. In his final conversation with Norbert, the brigadier, Essola says of the African desire to produce children:

C'est une sorte de mécanique; cela n'a pour ainsi dire pas d'âme. On fait une nichée d'enfants, le destin s'acharne sur eux, on assiste immobile à leur extermination; puis on en refait d'autres sans trop y songer. De la même façon, la rivière coule toujours dans le même sens, le soleil aussi se lève toujours du même côté. C'est stupide, c'est désespérant; et c'est cela que je n'arrive pas à accepter chez nous ici. (p. 302)

Why not try to break this curse, he asks. Because it is not only the girls who suffer, but the boys as well. The predators are lying in wait to carry them off. Norbert's answer, "C'est pourtant la vie," will only assure their fatal destiny. An older and wiser Mongo Beti can no longer find any matter to laugh at in these realities.

## CONCLUSION

A candid appraisal of the evolution and development of the African novel of French expression in the past fifteen years leads to five conclusions:

1) A specific reorientation in theme and substance has taken place and is continuing to invest the subject matter with new dimensions. Increased politicization of the novel is a discernable trend.

2) The literary genre of the novel is being exploited and adapted as a perfectly natural and African form of expression.

3) African literature in French is no longer quite the contradiction in terms that it once seemed. Theater and the novel will continue to be written in French if an author feels comfortable in that medium, according to Cheikh Aliou Ndao. Indeed, a writer may choose to use more than one vehicular language.<sup>1</sup>

4) The role of the writer in society and the nature of the public for whom he writes have undergone considerable transformation. The growing rate of literacy of an African public will influence quantity, and perhaps quality, of production.

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<sup>1</sup>Personal interview with Cheikh Aliou Ndao in Dakar, January 30, 1976.

5) A new critical approach is being formulated as universities in Africa and abroad are bringing African literature into its own as a field for academic investigation.

In The Emergence of African Fiction Charles R. Larson wrote, "the hope for continued existence of a literature rests on its ability to change and develop."<sup>2</sup> The changes and developments which the francophone African novel has manifested in these five areas of content, form, language, mission, and literary appreciation augur well for its future. However, these points require some summary remarks to put the current state of the novel into perspective so that we may better assess the possibilities for the future.

Before 1960 the novel was largely preoccupied with anti-colonial themes. These may have taken on many aspects, but they all had to do with focusing attention on the colonial situation and indicting the anomalies and injustices of the system. The cross-cultural encounter loomed large as the subject around which the themes were distributed. Tragedy was inherent in the confrontation even when the treatment was lightly or ironically handled. The spirit of Negritude was then a common denominator. The few novels of the early 60's faced a bright new world of newly-gained independence with hope and optimism. There was a spirit of throwing off the shackles of the past

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<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction (Bloomington, Indiana, 1971), p. 26.

implicit in such otherwise different works as Sembène's L'Harmattan and Bhêly-Quénum's Le chant du lac. The themes were positive ones of rebuilding, recreating, reinvigorating the society of the present to insure a better future. A common idealization of africanité eclipsed the concept of Negritude. By the middle of the decade, however, the grim realization that all was not well began to take hold of the novelists again. Disillusion and despair entered the novel. Violence, protest and revolt returned as themes, but with the difference that this time they were tinged with resignation. There was a crisis afflicting society as traditions continued to crumble and fondly held myths of African solidarity cracked. Helped along by such powerful works as Fall's La plaie, Kourouma's Les soleils des Indépendances and Ouologuem's Le devoir de violence, the African novel of French expression began to assert some of its former authority and grow stronger. A tendency towards greater nationalism emerged. As Africa moved into its second decade of independence, the process of nationalization continued to become more marked in the novel. Themes took on local and regional coloration and were more and more preoccupied with concerns in which the writer's homeland figured first, and Mother Africa second. Regional diversity adds to rather than detracts from the contemporary interest of novels from Cameroon or Senegal or Zaïre. Themes fall roughly into two large categories: those concerned with the patterns and institutions of human life--birth,

death, marriage, family, education, career, friendship, and the emotions connected with them--love, hate, jealousy, ambition, greed, hope, despair; and those concerned with political and social problems--dictatorship, freedom, oppression, bureaucracy, corruption, poverty, tribalism, technology, modernism. There is evidence of growing radicalization of the novel in these areas , as exemplified in the recent works of Mongo Beti and Alioum Fantouré. There is also a great deal of overlapping, as the condition of one theme may affect or determine the outcome of another. By and large, the themes are those which have been the novelist's domain since novels have been written. They are made African only by their application to a certain set of circumstances and their treatment in the context of an African situation. This is where the craft of the African novelist becomes vital. He is interpreting the individual in society, and society as it shapes the individual, in an entirely new way. Do Elspeth Huxley and Nadine Gordimer write African novels? Not exactly. They write novels about Africa. It is not the same thing. The African novel is a genre which reflects and interprets from the inside out, not from the outside in. It has a raison d'être which shaped its growth and development quite apart from that of any European writing about Africa. Francophone Africans who have adopted the novel form as a vehicle of expression have imparted to it a concept of what the novel is and what it should do that meets both their needs as artists and the expectations of their



growing public. They have exercised the traditional right of the conteur to satisfy both the didactic and the esthetic exigencies of an artistic creation. They have mixed story, song, legend, poem, with their narratives. They have explored the novel with both first-person and third-person protagonists. They have embroidered social, psychological, political, and philosophical themes. They have experimented (rarely) with fantasy and preferred realism. They have used the French language in order to rethink and reevaluate what is really unique about African culture. African thought cannot be expressed entirely in French, but it can be gotten across by careful writing through which both flavor and content emerge. Proverbs, idioms, transliterations of local speech habits, and other stylistic devices can be used to capture the mood and context which an original African word or phrase conveys. Albert Gérard maintains that the only language in which a writer can fully express himself, "c'est le langage dans lequel il rêve."<sup>3</sup> While this may be quite true on an emotive level, it is also true that many African languages simply do not have the vocabulary to accommodate much of modern life. One has only to ride a public bus in Dakar, for example, to hear the number of French terms with which the Wolof speakers lard their daily speech. And Wolof is a written language with a developing body of literature. French is

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Gérard, "La francophonie dans les lettres africaines," Revue de littérature comparée (année 48, 1974), 3/4, p. 386.

still a necessary and useful tool, made all the more valuable to the novelist as it serves an inter-African purpose. Since many African languages have at best only a few million speakers, rather than leading to sterility and frustration, the use of French has provided an instrument by means of which the African writer can open a wedge throughout Africa as well as abroad. A dozen years ago Obiajunwa Wali snapped that "African literature in English and French is a clear contradiction, and a false proposition, just as 'Italian literature in Hausa' would be."<sup>4</sup> That die-hard position has given way among African scholars, writers and critics who want to be published and read. It seems possible in 1976 that "Francophonie" is more than an artificial prolongation of the language of a detested colonial power. African literature in French exists just as surely as Canadian literature in French exists. French expression is not a throw-back to the linguistic domination of a European oppressor, but a magnificent gift of bilingualism, the best of both worlds. Together with those contributions of other national literatures in French, Africanisms "feront éclater les limites étroites dans lesquelles on a tendance à enfermer et à voir évoluer l'esthétique du roman d'expression française."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Obiajunwa Wali, "The Dead End of African Literature," Transition 3 (1963), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ngal, Tendances actuelles de la littérature africaine..., p. 28.

The African writer has always occupied a position among the educated elite of his country. He was among the privileged with a European education, and it was often his own feelings of insecurity, ambiguity and frustration vis-à-vis the West that motivated his literary efforts. His first role was that of social conscience on behalf of his people and spokesman for their silent protests. In recent years the novelist has been charged with another mission. He can vent all of his spleen now only at the risk of exile, since his responsibility is to guide the awakening of a national consciousness and reflect the policies of national endeavor in the field of culture. The role he plays must be a positive one; therefore negative criticism must be kept general and muted. Where accommodation with the regime in power was possible, this has been accomplished by such anodyne works as Ngomba Mbala's Deux vies, un temps nouveau. Where accommodation was not possible, we get the bitterness of Alioum Fantouré's Le cercle des tropiques or Mongo Beti's Perpétue. The novelist who is relatively apolitical has chosen yet another course. He writes of problems in the lives of people like his readers, adrift in changing times, who try to make some sense out of their existence, to snatch at happiness if they can. Thus we have Ndao's Buur Tilleen and the whole range of popular novels from Cameroon. But diversity of purpose and multiplicity of themes serve a single end: the novel as didactic weapon. The moral lesson is usually always present; sociological commentary overflows the narrative.

Public censorship is an active fact with which writers in Africa have to deal. The identification of their public is another. Unlike the communal participation of a listener in a storyteller's group, reading is a solitary pursuit. It is an antisocial activity. Reading for pure pleasure, to lose oneself in a book, is a form of escapism which in Africa has not yet, and may never, become the motivation for indulging in the printed word. Self-improvement and information are the main reasons an African takes up a book. Where books cost a great deal relative to one's income, frivolous reading matter is disdained in favor of more serious publications. A UNESCO study of a few years ago indicates that "92 per cent of francophone African readers buy only text books and school materials."<sup>6</sup> As a rule, publishers will accept only material which will be largely usable in schools. It is unfortunate that African writers have to take this into consideration, as a school readership is one thing and a general readership is quite another. Interest in other types of reading material is increasing, however, among students and adults alike. Professor Bernard Fonlon, editor of the literary review, Abbia, and professor of English and African literature at the University of Cameroon, asserts that there is a novel-reading public which can and will read for pleasure when books are provided which are real and relevant.<sup>7</sup> The criteria "real"

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<sup>6</sup>UNESCO study cited in Van der Werf, "Francophone Publishing in Africa," Africa Report 16, 3 (March 1971), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup>Personal interview with Dr. Fonlon in Yaoundé, Sept. 10, 1973.

and "relevant" can be interpreted only by the African writer, since he is, in the Sartrean sense, "en situation" with his African public. The African writer is indeed now in what Sartre, in Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, identified as "la phase constructive" where the primary concern is the establishment of mutual confidence and commitment between writer and reader. Sartre may have been defining the situation of the French writer after the Second World War, but the task and the means he set before the French writer are strikingly like those which challenge the contemporary francophone African novelist, who finds that in relation to his public he is now the "médiateur par excellence, et son engagement c'est la médiation."<sup>8</sup> Political leaders and the majority of writers alike feel that it is the writer's responsibility not to destroy, but to educate the people and assist in the process of construction. The writer who strays too far from this mission will lose contact with his public; both African esthetics and the African mentality are hostile to the concept of writing for writing's sake. As a result, many writers are finding an outlet for their creativity through other media: film, radio, and television, which enable them to reach the masses far more quickly and in greater number. It had once been speculated that Africa might move from a pre-literate stage to the stage of mass media without passing through the literate stage of books and writing. This does not, however, appear to be happening.

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<sup>8</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature (Gallimard, Collection Idées), p. 98.

The advantages of being able to read and write are still enormous, and the skills are becoming daily more necessary. A readership, which it is the novelists' duty to supply, is being formed at the level of the general public. More sophisticated literary tastes are being trained at the university level where an authentic school of African criticism is slowly establishing its authority. A new comparative approach to African literature which these universities are beginning to undertake will enable students to consider novels in English and French in comparison with each other, to search for similarities that are inherently African, rather than to examine the novel only in relation to those of its parent language. African scholarship continues, of course, to work in the field of traditional literature as well, with the result that the storehouse of themes, genres, characters, and events from which a novelist may draw new ideas and inspiration is constantly being enlarged. A comprehensive study of the contemporary African novel in French may in the future, as the literature continues to develop, involve three components: contrast with the French novel, contrast with the African novel in English, and contrast with the oral literature of the novelist's vernacular language. The comparative approach will enable us to determine differences as well as similarities in all three of these areas, and will reveal what is specifically Western, what is specifically African, and what is specifically regional or national in a writer's work. Cross-cultural influences, both African

and European, are bound to permeate the work of African writers more and more. Writers' workshops and a merging of interest are contributing to this trend. A degree of métissage culturel is necessary and desirable for the future survival of both literary scholarship and literary production in francophone Africa. But this approach will also avoid the error into which so much of contemporary criticism now falls for want of such scholarship--that of considering this or that feature to be "African" without taking national diversity into account.

As for the novel itself, the African novel of French expression can interpret the richness and variety of a multi-ethnic society, while still defining larger concerns and aspirations, as fluently as can the American novel in English. This is the present challenge for the francophone writer. It is from this perspective that the survival of the African novel of French expression will be assured in the future.

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