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Bennetta Jules-Rosette. *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. xviii + 350 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02066-7.

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In *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape*, Bennetta Jules-Rosette makes a groundbreaking contribution to scholarship on the complex interrelationship between African writing and identity in France. A dense and well-researched work, this book explores three generations of African writers as they struggle to carve out a space for their literary and cultural identities in France from 1947 to 1993. In a wide-ranging discussion, Jules-Rosette convincingly explores such important topics as Negritude; the Presence Africaine movement; revolutionary writing of the 1960s and 1970s; and the new generation of writers emerging in Paris during the 1980s and 1990s.

Staking out the position that the vitality of African writing in France is a major contribution to twentieth-century literature (p. xviii), Jules-Rosette's goal possesses four distinct thrusts. First, she offers a sociological study of the African writers under discussion by dividing them up into three broad categories represented by the early Presence Africaine movement, revolutionary writing, and the new generation. Second, she charts the evolving historical relationship between contemporary African literature and French culture. Third, Jules-Rosette brings a sociosemiotic reading to the space of black Paris and the African writing that is conceived within it. Finally, she places into context the relationship between African writing and French intellectual discourses.

One of the strengths of this work is that the author avoids presenting an anthology of African writing, but actually seeks to investigate the writers' worlds through interviews and archival documents which are used to uncover the "social and cultural conditions under which African works in France have been produced and received" (p. 2). This "dialogical dimension" (p. 3) gives voice to the writers themselves and encourages culturally sustained readings of their works. Perhaps most importantly, Jules-Rosette underscores the fact that easy categorization of the writers and their writing is impossible by emphasizing the multiplicity of their perspectives.

In addition to the Foreword, Preface and Introduction sections, the book is comprised of eight chapters organized into three major sections. These foreground interviews with such literary pioneers as Jacques Rabemananjara, Bernard Binlin Dadi and Paulin Joachim to Paul Dakeyo, Simon Njami and Calixthe Beyala. Part One begins with an overview of the uneasy relationship between French anthropology and black Paris. It documents the rise of Ngritude and the journal and publishing house, Prsence Africaine whose goal, in the words of Paulin Joachim, "was essentially to insert African culture into the civilization of the white man" (p. 35). Jules-Rosette does an admirable job of illuminating how Presence Africaine, as a cultural movement, took on the role of organizing conferences and seminars from the 1950s to the mid 1970s in order to provoke the emergence of new values for the black world. It was during these events that participants debated the advantages and disadvantages of identities and cultural politics rooted in Africa versus those with more universalistic features.

Part Two deals with the literary challenges to Negritude extending from the liberation movements for independence to "postpartum disillusionment with the broken promise of modernity" (p. 88). In the wake of these movements a new form of revolutionary writing emerged and was transformed during the 1970s as writers began to explore what type of literature would best represent the people by raising questions of locality, nationality, transnationality and Pan-Africanism. The author chronicles the rise of the revolutionary genre beginning with Fanon as an early and prototypical writer in this genre. Moving through the antingritude works of Adotevi, Depestre and Ouologuem to Paul Dakeyo's poetry of revolutionary love which "preserves the fervor of combat while simultaneously focusing on problems of exile and psychological suffering" (p. 99), Jules-Rosette's inquiry throws new light onto the issues and complexities of this emerging genre. She further argues that Dakeyo's work as an editor and publisher of the literature of the postindependence generation "positions him as a prime mover

in facilitating a new African literature in France" (p. 99).

The passage in Chapter Five which deals with the legal and social dimensions of black immigration in France is a real strength in this book. The discussion of the legal context of black immigrants as well as resistances to assimilation offers a unique perspective on black Paris as a space. If Section Two has any shortcomings, they lie in the sheer breadth of Jules-Rosette's topic, which leads, in some cases, to underdevelopment. An example of this occurs in Chapter Five when the author asserts the existence of a literary gaze with three levels including virtual desire, loss and environment. The application of this concept to Beyala's *Le Petit prince de Belleville*, although extremely interesting, exposes a certain lack of clarity when Jules-Rosette comes to discuss the "televisual gaze." It is not clear whether this gaze is linked to the prior concept or a literary device unique to Beyala, or both. Thus, although the reader wishes for more information, the context of the gaze is never fully developed and thus becomes somewhat confusing.

Part Three evidences one of the real strengths of this volume in its critical literary analysis of the works of the new generation of African writers in France. This offering is especially interesting because scholarly work on these authors is still sparse, especially in English. Jules-Rosette begins by effecting a critical analysis of "Parisianism" and "Universalism" as literary movements, and then brings them together in a discussion of identity discourses. The author describes Parisianism as a challenge to the existing canons of African literature, orality and African cultural specificity in order to reconfigure point of view and characterization in writing (p. 179). The author's examination of works by Yodi Karone, Simon Njami and Calixthe Beyala, three major writers of Parisianism, places this work within an accessible discussion of the social and political contexts in which they arose. For example, Jules-Rosette points out that the antiheroes prevalent in this literature mirror the shortcomings of the society in which they live, resulting in social criticism. Another interesting point the author makes is that standard anthologies of African literature avoid Parisianism because it is a hybrid genre (p. 181).

In contrast, Jules-Rosette interrogates the concept of universalism as an ideal attainment for African writers searching for a distinctive place in world literature. Through the examination of the works of Jean-Baptiste Tiemele, Edouard Maunick, and Bolya Baenga, she explicates universalism as "a dream, an ideal, and a set of strategies for contemporary African writers in France" (p. 238). The author offers a perceptive analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of universalism as a literary strategy, pointing out that some writers of Parisianism are skeptical that this precept's veiled Eurocentrism excludes those who assert a marginal identity.

Jules-Rosette is very successful in demonstrating throughout this book that black Paris is not a unified space, but is, rather, experienced "in disjointed, incomplete, and contradictory ways by the writers who live in and portray it" (p. 253). Excellent in scope and organization, this well-written volume is an invaluable asset to African and world literature as well as cultural and diaspora studies.

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