

Marxist formula. It appears that writers who show concern for social problems, including Dickens and company as well as African writers, have been influenced by Marxist principles. Ngara adds his own commentary: “. . . beggars, prostitutes, thieves, and other people of no definite occupation who have sunk to the lower depth of society, are the natural consequence of the capitalist mode of production.” Elsewhere, however, Ngara is more careful to be historically accurate, and he admits that Marxist criticism has “serious shortcomings.”

In contrast to the major portion of the book, Ngara’s index, bibliography, notes, and especially his capsule commentaries on more than fifty African writers and political figures make the book worthy of attention. In literature he ranges from Achebe and Dennis Brutus to Soyinka and Tutuolo, and in politics from Biko and Bagral to Luthuli and Nyerere. These passages come from an unquestionably knowledgeable person, and may even be described as brilliant.

It is not the fervent Marxist dogma which makes the scholar-diplomat Ngara enigmatic. Rather it is when the professor of literature turns politician with the statement that “. . . a significant number of African countries have chosen [to be] allied to socialist countries which are much more prepared than the West to give them material assistance”

Is Ngara saying that ideology is for sale to the highest cash bidder? After teaching in universities in Lesotho and Swaziland and serving as a diplomat from Zimbabwe, Ngara is now an administrator at the University of Zimbabwe.

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Beverley Ormerod. *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*. Studies in Caribbean Literature. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1985) 152 pp., \$12.50.

Beverley Ormerod displays real expertise in *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*. She is a West Indian herself, and she knows the background and culture of the Caribbean: its African slave origins and the present quest for pan-Caribbean identity. After post-graduate research at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, she earned her doctorate in French at Cambridge University. When necessary, she translates the

French originals into English. She also knows various creoles of the islands and appreciates the linguistic variety there. She has taught Caribbean literature for twenty years.

In order to give incisive, in-depth critiques of six early Caribbean novels, Ormerod has wisely limited and defined the scope of her study. Four of the five chapters are critiques on one novel each. Chapter II combines two novels of similar theme. Ormerod determines her selections not only on the basis of their recognized worth, but also on similarity of themes of loss and redemption. In her introduction, "Writers in Search of Paradise," she claims to "examine each of the six novels in terms of their transposition to a secular plane of the biblical themes of the Fall from Paradise and the return to the Promised Land." She earlier published a critical study of Césaire and uses his *Cahier du retour au pays natal* as a pervasive influence on all the novels she considers.

Chapter I treats Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew*, 1946 (available in English in 1978). Ormerod prefaces her analysis by briefly sketching Haiti's history of oppression, land despoliation, and peasant revolts. She emphasizes the continuing class distinctions which have divided Haiti for two centuries on the basis of legalistic definitions of skin color. She comments on the Negritude Movement's influence on the Haitian poets of Roumain's generation. She situates this novel with respect to Roumain's other works and to the events of his life. Even the reader familiar with Roumain's fiction and poetry will find much cultural background material of value here. "Set in a remote Haitian village . . . suffering from a crippling drought; a resourceful man, returning from abroad, finds a distant spring and organizes an irrigation scheme, attempting to heal a local feud in the process; he falls in love with a girl of the opposite clan, is attacked by her jealous cousin and subsequently dies of his wounds." Ormerod interprets Manuel's "passion, heroism and sacrifice" as symbolizing hope for change. The cooperating field laborers, in the spirit of the traditional *coumbite*, can work together to effect "the redemption of the village and its access to the Promised Land."

Chapter II concerns Edouard Glissant's *The Ripening*, 1958, (translated 1959). The French title, *La Lezarde*, names an actual polluted and diminished river in Martinique. "The river is a traditional symbol of the passage of time, its ceasing to flow denotes the absence of a sense of history and continuity in the French Caribbean islands today; and the failing of the water also represents the inroads of modern industrialization . . . symbolic of the destruction wrought first by slavery and then by economic and cultural imposition." Ormerod traces similar water imagery throughout Glissant's fiction and poetry. The action takes place on Election Day of 1945 when the election promised dignity and maturity to a country long colonized and exploited.

Next, in Chapter III, Ormerod discusses “The Plantation as Hell” in Joseph Zobel’s *Black Shack Alley*, 1950, (translated 1980) and Michel Lacrosil’s *Demain Jab-Herma*. Zobel situates his story in Martinique on an estate village between the two world wars. The child narrator, José, eventually escapes the destitution of the black sugar-cane workers by studying in France, but he cannot help his family left behind in squalor, despised and downtrodden. Lacrosil deals with three main characters, two white, one mulatto, on a Guadeloupe plantation in 1952. She stresses the continuing obsession with “complexities of skin shade and social class.” The visiting French engineer, Philippe, is juxtaposed with the local black *quimboiseur*, Jab-Harma, chauffeur-magician. Jab-Harma is a model for “the new ideal breed of West Indian, independent of white authority . . . able to transcend the brutalities, the shames, and the deviations of Caribbean history.”

Jacques Alexis was a martyr to the Haitian cause, stoned to death in 1961 for rallying local peasantry against the Duvalier dictatorship. Chapter IV treats his Marxist novel, *Comrade General Sun*, 1955. A black slum dweller, Hilarion, gradually becomes politically aware of the indifference of the rich bourgeoisie to the urban poor.

Simon Schwarz-Bart’s *The Bridge of Beyond*, 1972 (translated 1982) is the focus of Chapter V. The French title, *Pluie et Vent sur Telumee Miracle* actually summarizes the plot. Telumee, a Guadeloupean woman of the early twentieth century, survives the onslaughts of elemental forces, the winds of change and the torrents of misfortune. Her first idyllic marriage breaks down in disillusion; her second husband is killed; her adopted child is taken from her; the derelict she saves and befriends betrays her. She, however, continues indomitable, surviving on her wits and the herbal lore her revered grandmother had taught her. Curing the sick, she earns the title of Miracle Worker. Calm and serene, she dies symbolizing “all the women lost before their time, broken, destroyed,” the forgotten women of Guadeloupe who courageously survived elemental hardships.

Ormerod’s study might more aptly be entitled *Six Landmark Caribbean Novels of Loss and Redemption*, but her short conclusion is actually a comprehensive introduction to the French Caribbean novel. Here she analyzes recent fictional motifs: “the psychological complexes and the socio-economic deprivations which are the legacy of past slavery” in Martinique and Guadeloupe and “a horrifying literal relevance to the material condition of a people currently governed by brutal intimidation” in Haiti. Examples, footnotes, and a bibliography indicate the extensive research supporting these conclusions.

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