



René Maran's «Batouala»: Jazz-Text

By Susan Allen

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The polemic excited by *Batouala*'s controversial Preface has conditioned an enduring, near-universal acceptance of a disjunction of Preface and novel. This is the first book to challenge that premise. The fallacious underpinnings of the origin persistence of this view are shown to lie in Western, dichotomously structured thinking. Through offshoots of the civilised-*versus*-savage dichotomy, namely oral-*versus*-written, form-*versus*-content and music-*versus*-narrative, *Batouala*'s Signifyin(g) discourse spills beyond the novel's borders to reveal the sterility of dichotomy as a conceptualising structure. Dichotomy's anachronism is thrust upon it through the work's faithful representation of African ontology, whose water-inspired philosophy precludes it. *Batouala*'s structural basis is compared with that of jazz, which similarly bridges European and African civilisations, and whose African philosophical stance also acts as a provocation to the dichotomous thinking model. As *Batouala* «Fixed» transmutes to *Batouala* «Free», the pejorative implications of its widely touted ambiguity evaporate to expose a novel that is both lucid and coherent when viewed as jazz-text and jazz performance.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Susan Allen is a Conjoint Fellow of the University of Newcastle, Australia, a jazz musician (boogie/blues/New Orleans piano), and a senior teacher of F. M. Alexander's work.

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