



Batouala

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Characters Discussed

Batouala (bah-TEW-ah-la), a chief of many villages in French Equatorial Africa. Vigorous and strong of limb, his prowess in the hunt, in love, and in war is a legend across his domain. He is a jealous, violent, and vengeful man. He honors Bissibingui with particular esteem until he becomes aware of the young man's desire for his favorite wife, Yassiguindja. From then on, he uses his friendship as a cloak for his jealousy and quietly plans revenge on his rival. On a hunt, he hurls a javelin at Bissibingui but misses his target and is himself ripped open by a panther's paw. As Batouala lies dying, Yassiguindja yields to Bissibingui's desire, and the two flee into the night.

Bissibingui (bee-see-BEEN- gwee), a desirable young man. Having received from eight of Batouala's nine wives proofs of their admiration and affection, he now desires his chief's ninth and favorite wife, Yassiguindja. He finally possesses her as Batouala lies dying.

Yassiguindja (yah-see-GWEE- njah), the favorite among Batouala's nine wives. Though she desires Bissibingui, she is aware of Batouala's jealousy and violence, and she will not give herself to his rival until she feels safe from discovery. She finally becomes Bissibingui's as Batouala lies dying.

Indouvoura (ihn-dew-VEW-rah), another of Batouala's wives.

Bibliography:

Cameron, Keith. *René Maran*. Boston: Twayne, 1985. A monograph of general criticism of Maran, an analysis of his fictional and nonfictional works, and an appraisal of the controversial French reception of *Batouala*. Chapter 1 provides a general background of Maran; chapter 2 sketches the genesis, structure, style, and reception of *Batouala*.

Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981. Contains a short but informative essay establishing *Batouala* as the likely precursor of French African prose and Maran as an important forerunner of the Negritude movement.

James, Charles. "Batouala: René Maran and the Art of Objectivity." *Studies in Black Literature* 4, no. 3 (1973): 19-23. Commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Maran's 1921 Prix Goncourt for *Batouala*. Revisits its controversial reception and affirms the novel as "the very epitome of Maran's subtle and overt rebelliousness," noting its success in objectivity.

Ojo-Ade, Femi. *René Maran, the Black French Man: A Bio-Critical Study*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984. Comprehensive, well-documented, critical study. Critiques Maran's passionate crusade to denounce victimization, injustice, and the evils of a colonial system. Questions the morality of Maran's stance and concludes that Maran's claim to "help the negro cause" is ambiguous and his reputation as "promoter of negro culture," paradoxical.

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