

ABSTRACT

History and the Politics of Representing Black Women in Anglophone Fiction in the Post-Colonial Americas

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The study takes as its premise that in patriarchal Caribbean societies, women are treated according to stereotypical representations that affect perceptions of their roles. Furthermore, Black women are marginalized to a far greater extent than Black males—even if their class positions are similar—as a result of their history of African enslavement and colonialism which relegated the Black woman to the base of the racialized social ladder. This impact of history and colonialism on perceptions of the Black woman is reflected in historical works as well as in literary (especially fictional) works that appear to be influenced greatly by historical “truths”. Literary critics such as Kenneth Ramchand, Selwyn Cudjoe, Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, among others, have contended that such historically rooted marginalization is reflected in works of post-colonial fiction which consistently represent Black women as powerless, inferior, objectified, alienated, invisible, and voiceless—mirroring the factors of their marginalization.

This study attempts to test the hypothesis that there is a relationship between historical accounts and representations of Black women, as well as their historical condition, and the ways in which fictional works represent or treat the Black female subject.

The study does not claim to be pioneering in its account and exploration of Black women’s historical experiences as there are numerous histories that look at gender discourses in Caribbean history. Neither does it pretend to be within the genre of literary criticism. Its usefulness lies in its analysis of the intersection of history (fact?) and literature (fiction) – indeed the impact of history on literature in the representation of Black women in colonial societies.

The study concludes that despite Black women’s struggle to defy stereotypical notions, whether in contemporary and/or post-colonial history or post-colonial literature, there are certain recurrent features of their marginalization that even today result in the limitation of their roles in society.

Keywords: Yvonne Valda Blagrove Smith; history and politics; representations; black women; Anglophone fiction.