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**Fanon for Beginners, written and illustrated by Deborah Wyrick,
Writer and Readers Publishing, Inc. New York, 1998, 188 pages, \$15.95**

Book Review by Julian J. Samuel

In the current age of "Cultural Studies," "Postcolonial Studies," and "Postmodernism," when preference is given to incoherent writing and thinking, Dr Wyrick's *Fanon for Beginner's* is a lighthouse in a sea of self-promoting nonsense. She clearly introduces Frantz Fanon's rich understanding of the psychosis of colonized people and colonizers to anyone no matter what their educational background happens to be; readers with just high school diplomas to the loftiest of logicians will learn something from this book. And her illustrations are cheekier than the Gazette's Aislin. They are twisted, hilarious, vaguely recalling the images of James Ensor and the wry wit of cartoonist Ralph Steadman. Has Fanon's influence waned since his death thirty-seven years ago? No. His books are used throughout not only the Third World, but by many institutions of higher learning in America and Europe. Third World leaders of liberation movements, and most Québec's separatists (some of whom ought to re-read Fanon's views on racism) are familiar with his ideas. Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925, studied psychiatry in France, went to Algeria to head a hospital at Blida where he joined the struggle for Algerian liberation (1954-62). In 'The Wretched of the Earth,' he exposes the violence of the colonialist and sides with the counter-violence of its victims.

This work has been translated into 25 languages including Urdu, (now a native language of England); and, into Farsi, by Dr. Ali Shari'ati, a major influence on the Iranian revolution of 1979. Fanon died in 1961. Wyrick's book leads to a deeper understanding of popular culture, geopolitics, the psychological basis of racism, colonialism and is free of sleazy political correctitude. Fanon's thinking on homosexuality et cetera is dated, those easily wounded should read 'Foucault for Beginners' instead. However, Fanon does explain the radical participation of Algerian women in their war against France with rigour and elegance. Wyrick traces Fanon's development through his books. 'Black Skin, White Masks,' (1952), details sex and politics: "When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine." (black skin white masks, 63) And fear: "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly...The Nigger is shivering with cold, that cold goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the Nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into this mother's arms. Mama, the nigger is going to eat me up." (bs 113-14)

In 'A Dying Colonialism' (1970) Fanon devotes many pages to the veil and its political importance:

"For the tourist and the foreigner, the veil demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine counterpart." (a dying colonialism, 35-36 {l'an cinq de la rev algerienne)

Here Wyrick offers us the complexity of the role of the veil in the Algerian revolution: "...European bosses tried to reacculturate their male Algerian employees, demanding that they bring their wives to company functions. Algerian men were caught in a double bind: if they agreed, they violated cultural prohibitions against women being on display; if they refused, they risked losing their jobs."

She shows how Fanon looks at this question from many points of view; he says:

"The rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European...is always preceded by a rending of the veil." (dc 45)

Wyrick does not show whether Fanon saw the few so-called modernizing effects of colonialism: what for example was the position of the average colonialist regime on clitoridectomy? When discussing 'The Wretched of the Earth' (1963), Wyrick deals with Fanon's controversial views of anti-colonial violence by showing the very concrete link between the devouring colonizer and the terror he imposes.

Conservative commentators on Fanon have intentionally deformed his reading of counter-violence. The Globe and Mail's Robert Fulford recently wrote this about Fanon: "God knows how many deaths his madness helped justify." (22 April, 1998). Fulford, in his youth, may have fallen under the influence of Time Magazine: "Fanon ... an apostle of violence...a prisoner of hate..." (April, 1965).

Fanon's words are:

"The practice of violence binds [colonized people] together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning..." (the wretched of the earth, 93)

Richard Nixon, George Bush, Saddam Hussein and Benazir Bhutto are not scented replicas of Florence Nightingale. Would it not be naive to expect Third World populations to lie down and hand over raw materials, oil, postcolonial sex tourism, and cheaply made running shoes free of charge?

"Fanon for Beginners" could be terrifically useful: think of all the dinner parties you've gone to where you have felt inadequately informed on the colonised world. Reading this book will get you solidly grounded in these matters, and you will be able--if you feel like

it--to use verbal violence against people whose arguments you've found inadequate, smug or mildly schizophrenic.

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