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Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The icon and the image*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. Xxi + 368 pp. 54 photographs, chronology, notes, bibliography, discography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-252-03157-1. \$25.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-252-07412-7.

Review by Elizabeth Ezra, University of Stirling.

Published just over a hundred years after Josephine Baker's birth in 1906, and the most comprehensive study of the entertainer's life and work to date, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* is a welcome contribution to the fields of cultural history, African-American Studies, and French cultural studies. Bennetta Jules-Rosette conducts what she terms a 'semiography' of the African-American song-and-dance legend who made her career in France, which takes both its subject's life and work as the objects of its analysis. Coming from a background in sociology, Jules-Rosette strives to defend and explain an approach that is taken for granted by many in the fields of literary and cultural studies, in which she analyzes Baker's life as a series of symbolic events with narrative value as significant as that of her songs, films and stage shows.

Throughout her many modes of reinvention—as a dancer, singer, movie star, stage actor, model, writer, soldier, political activist, nightclub owner, and Earth Mother—Jules-Rosette argues that Baker maintained and manipulated the master narratives of both her rags-to-riches Cinderella story and her Marian complex, in which she was a model of self-sacrifice. Jules-Rosette contends that Baker's public persona was, to a large extent, self-fashioned, thus staking out her position in the ongoing debate over the extent to which, if any, Baker was the passive object of media-driven representations of her. As Jules-Rosette demonstrates, images of self-sacrifice are paramount not only in Baker's films and stage shows, but also in the star's role as the adoptive mother of a dozen children from around the world (which she referred to collectively as her "rainbow tribe"), and in her activities during the Second World War, when she volunteered to drive an ambulance for the Resistance and carried classified information written in invisible ink on her sheet music for a Free French underground espionage unit.

The discussions of Baker's music-hall and recording career are interesting and informative and the analysis of Baker's films is insightful, although there is very little discussion of *Fausse alerte* (released in the U.S. as *The French Way*), the film Baker made in 1939 during the *drôle de guerre*, which is not widely available, but which yields fascinating insights into French culture at the twilight of the interwar era. In this film, Baker plays Zazu Clairon, a world-weary entertainer and nightclub owner with a colourful past—a far cry from the ingénues she played just four and five years earlier in *Princesse Tam-Tam* (1935) and *Zouzou* (1934), respectively (in fact, *Fausse alerte* could be read as a kind of sequel to her 1934 film, a kind of *Zouzou Goes to War*).

A particularly welcome feature of Jules-Rosette's book is the chapter devoted to the long-neglected writings penned or dictated by Baker, which are always either explicitly or implicitly autobiographic, and which invariably reinforce these master narratives. The 1931 novella *Mon sang dans tes veines* (*My Blood in Your Veins*), for example, which was apparently conceived by Baker and 'told to' Félix de la Camara and Baker's manager and partner Pepito Abatino, recounts the tragic tale of the saintly Joan,

daughter of a black maid who works for a white millionaire's family. Joan falls in love with the millionaire's son Fred, who does not return her affection but instead becomes engaged to a bigoted white woman. When Fred is injured in a car accident, Joan selflessly offers herself up for a lifesaving blood transfusion. This story is notable not only for its foreshadowing of the plot of *Zouzou*, in which the heroine's love for her white adoptive brother is unrequited, but also for its implicit condemnation of the discourses of racial purity beginning to take hold in Europe in the run up to the Second World War.

The book is also notable for its impressive array of photographs that go beyond the usual familiar images of Baker. There is a wealth of contextual information that situates Baker in the interwar period especially, some of which may appear somewhat superfluous at first, but which ultimately provides insight into the tumultuous times in which Baker was working and living.

A full chapter near the end of the book is devoted to Baker's considerable influence on later twentieth-century performers such as Grace Jones, Madonna, and Michael and La Toya Jackson (to this list could surely be added Beyoncé and Lil' Kim), and on the novelist Calixthe Beyala. The work of these artists, like the continuing scholarly interest in Baker's career as evidenced most recently in Jules-Rosette's book, is a testament to Baker's enduring legacy.

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