

★ **The Silence of the Spirits****Wilfried N'Sondé****Karen Lindo, Translator**

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*Wilfried N'Sondé delivers a deep slice of the human experience in luminous prose.*

Flight, forgiveness, and the plight of an illegal African immigrant in Paris are the subjects of Wilfried N'Sondé's accomplished and richly expressed novel, *The Silence of the Spirits*.

In a gray, unpoetic suburb of Paris, undocumented African refugee Clovis Nzilla wakes in the arms of his lover, Christelle, a French woman whom he has known for less than forty-eight hours.

The story, told mostly from Clovis's point of view, traces his life from an Africa of warlords and child soldiers to an unwelcoming Paris alive with immigration police. Braided into this narrative are the stories of Christelle, who has endured disappointments and indignities of her own, and of Marcelline, the lovely and much-loved twin sister Clovis left behind, her whereabouts and fate unknown.

The story, haunting in its outlines, is burnished by fine writing that never falters. Precise, knife-sharp word choices evoke the emotional atmosphere as well as the physical scene. Given a night's respite from the immigration police, Clovis wakes "beneath a beautiful disorder of white sheets," while a summation of his lover's dismal childhood reads, "Christelle was surrounded by pink and boredom, her ballet shoes nailed to a wall."

Clovis's memories, scattered and nonlinear, accurately capture the fragmented thought patterns of trauma survivors. As his story comes together, the revelation of tragic events told through prose that sparkles like cut diamonds increases the emotional impact.

The weight of Clovis's guilt, fear, and longing for absolution are almost palpable. Listening, Christelle dismisses her own woes as ordinary next to Clovis's, but her compassion for him, juxtaposed with her lack of pity for herself, make her an equally sympathetic character. Though Marcelline never appears in the present tense of the book, she's drawn with full, lush brushstrokes and given a compelling story of her own.

*The Silence of the Spirits*, by Wilfried N'Sondé, is a slim novel that delivers a deep slice of the human experience in luminous prose—moving, memorable, and beautifully crafted.

SUSAN WAGGONER (July/August 2017)

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