
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Conquérants de la nuit nue*: Edouard Glissant et l'H(h)istoire antillaise
by Bernadette Cailler

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less, desolate province is not friendly to strangers of a different ethnicity, however. Unwittingly, Ranja infringes upon local taboos; irrationality and mass hysteria take over. Ranja has to pay with his life, but in doing so he finds silence and serenity. A younger assistant, Rija, will attempt to continue Ranja's work. In a way the two are complementary: Ranja a man of words, Rija "a man of images."

Fittingly, since the story line centers on the making of a film, the novel abounds with sharp visual and auditory notations. Film techniques are used in the narrative: close-ups, images used as leitmotifs, panoramic and zoom shots, and, above all, crowd scenes. Light and shadow play an important part, as does color, with red predominating. Richly informative, the novel is a quality documentary, often endowed with poetic beauty (the scenes on the river, for instance).

Le bain des reliques has literary distinction, simply attained, through a balance of effects and sincerity of feeling in short sentences and brief paragraphs. There is actually no ending. As one character says toward the close of the novel, "Le temps de la parole n'est pas encore venu." Turning to the imaginary to ward off fear of the future is no solution, as Ranja has discovered at his own expense, yet it is a beginning.

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Bernadette Cailler. *Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et l'H(h)istoire antillaise*. Tübingen, W.Ger. Narr. 1988. 180 pages. DM 48.

Conquérants de la nuit nue is the first extended study of Edouard Glissant's oeuvre. There has been no dearth of Glissant studies (see Alain Baudot's "Selected Bibliography" in the article section of this issue). The number of books, Ph.D. theses, sections of books, articles, and reviews is mushrooming, but generally they do not attain the depth and breadth needed to deal adequately with the author, whose stature looms large in contemporary writing, well beyond the confines of his native island.

As her starting point, Bernadette Cailler, who has already earned respectable credentials in Antillean and African studies, among others, examines the problematics of time—no doubt one of the major preoccupations of Glissant's published corpus—basing her approach on Paul Ricœur's *Temps et récit*. Elaborating further the theoretical framework of her study, she gleans notions from Vico, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and other seminal thinkers, who give a new amplitude of meaning to the African/Antillean context of Glissant's writing, particularly vis-à-vis Negritude and Antilleanity, which Glissant proposes as a counterpart of the former. The latter part of the monograph concentrates on the Maroon figure, which, complex and with multiple ramifications, serves as the central metaphor of Glissant's entire oeuvre. The author examines important historical works on the subject but restricts her study, for the most part, to Francophone sources. An extended examination of the phenomenon of *marronnage* and its impact on Anglophone writing in the other parts of the region would have tested, perhaps elucidated, Glissant's notion of Antilleanity.

In any case, Cailler's handling of concepts and facts and her thorough reading of Glissant demonstrate her magisterial erudition and affinities with poststructuralist thought, so often expressed with verbal dexterity, awe-inspiring and sometimes a bit befuddling. There is also an unevenness in the presentation of the study, from a carefully crafted, thoroughly documented introduction to a somewhat hasty and a bit repetitious conclusion, wherein the author engages in beauty-contest arbitration between Glissant and Césaire. (Glissant almost wins.) The reader would also greatly profit from an index and a bibliography, in a better typographical arrangement, presently contained in a long footnote. The monograph cannot and does not claim to be definitive, since Cailler did not have the opportunity to examine Glissant's latest publication, *Mahagony* (see *WLT* 62:3, p. 502), which is a significant amplification of his oeuvre. Furthermore, Glissant is poised to publish a new novel and a collection of essays. Whatever still needs to be done, the present volume stands as the most authoritative contribution to Glissantian studies.

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Raphaël Confiant. *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*. Paris. Grasset. 335 pages. 96 F.

Raphaël Confiant can be considered as a representative of a new generation of Antillean intellectuals and writers, distinctly post-Negritude, poised to forge a new identity, predicated on the concept of *Créolité*, a concept of high currency, yet to be debated and defined. Confiant, a comparative linguist by profession, has published plays and poems in Creole. *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* is his first novel in French.

The action of the novel takes place in Martinique during World War II, when Admiral Robert, Marshal Pétain's plenipotentiary, ruled the island, isolated by the Allied blockade from the rest of the world, like his fief. The main characters come from Fort-de-France's shantytown, Morne Pichevin, situated on the hillside, forty-seven steps above the city level. Among the characters are: Rigobert and Philomène, whose fated love is one of the leitmotifs of the novel; Alcide, a very talented and well-educated teacher; and Amédée, a mulatto intellectual. There are also scenes from the life of the *békés* (Frenchmen born in the islands, typically rich estate owners) and glimpses of Admiral Robert in action. These personages and others, such as the communist agricultural worker Vidrassamy, the son of an East Indian couple who came as indentured workers and are finally able to return home, give a cross section of the island's population, torn by traditional tensions, now aggravated by the war, arising basically from the hierarchical economic and social structures, intensified by divergent ideologies. The isolation and war brought about many paradoxes: the exploited black was more patriotic, eager to go to war to defend the country, than the *béké*, whose interests were threatened by war and dissidence.

Within this minuscule insular space there are tragedies, suffering, and death, as well as moments of comic relief, when the narrative focuses on the mating dances and the political maneuvers of the powers that be. Nevertheless, the centrifugal forces operating in this society on the verge of disintegration seem to be countered by an invincible resourcefulness, a determination to live together, and a