
Review

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Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et l'histoire antillaise

by Bernadette Cailler

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movement was undertaken in one of the contributions to the important collection of critical and bibliographical essays offered to Césaire on his seventieth birthday, *Césaire 70* (Paris: Silex, 1984), edited by Steins and Ngal. Although Michael states in her preface that "an attempt has been made to include all material published until June 1987," this book, currently a cornerstone of research on Césaire and the negritude movement, is not included in her bibliography (despite a review in *Jeune Afrique* for 19 June 1985: 68).

In sum, the principles of exclusion from this bibliography are no more apparent to the advanced researcher than the principles of inclusion (which are nowhere articulated). Is it enough to say, as the compiler does, that "admittedly the selection of subject divisions is subjective"? There is an element of subjectivity in all selection, of course; but some recognizable principle must be established and faithfully adhered to. That is simply not the case in this volume. For all these reasons, one is hard pressed to find arguments to recommend this book either to libraries or to individual researchers.

A. James Arnold

Bernadette Cailler. *Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et l'histoire antillaise*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988. 180 pages.

Cailler's work might be considered a praise song to Martinique's poet-novelist Glissant, a somewhat abstract and impersonal song, expressed in the cerebral melodies of postmodern literary theory and criticism.

Of the three parts, only the last focuses directly on the author and his first four novels; the first two parts deal in a general way with two problems Cailler judges basic to the understanding of her author, whom she characterizes as "difficult" and better known in France than in the Antilles. Part 1 deals with the "apories" (paradoxes) of time, examining various philosophies of history from St. Augustine to Fernand Brandel, Paul Lacombe, Gérard Genette, François Simiand, Derrida, Barthes, and Yourcenar. She settles upon Paul Ricoeur's three-volume *Temps et récit* as a touchstone for her methodology. The central concern is how the *récit* can be used to valorize history, so she studies Freudian writers, deconstruction, rhetorical analysis, and hermeneutics to clarify Glissant's complicated way of handling time.

The second part deals with the image of the maroon (*le marron*) and *le marronnage*, which she sees as both a political and literary key for the Caribbean states to get out of the impasse in which they find themselves. She provides a short, but useful, biography of Glissant, analyzing his distancing of himself from negritude, explaining his ideological and practical commitments, his understanding of the need for a "national literature" and a national culture that would be "*non-généralisante*." We are told that as a young man he was active in setting up the "*Front Antillo-Guyanais*" to work for independence, but was then expelled from the Antilles when the organization was banned by De Gaulle. Later he returned to found the *Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes*. Many readers will desire more information on these activities, and an analysis of the relationship of the literary works to these social commitments.

Cailler subdivides Glissant's "politico-cultural project" into three parts: (1) the Epic of Resistance, (2) *La trace du Négateur*, and (3) a truly popular history and literature. This leads into a more specific study of Glissant's political conceptions, especially his conception of the central role of the maroon, his interest in voodoo, and the "Amerindians." Then we must return to the problem of "discourse." Part 2 ends with a rapid contrasting of Glissant with Joseph Zobel, André Schwarz-Bart, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Daniel Maximin, all of whom she states fail to meet Glissant's standards for a true "*Antillanité*." Although she seems to consider ideology and poetry as contradictory, she defends Glissant's ideological way of writing.

The first two parts finally generate a method for approaching the four novels. Part 3 focuses on the figure of "*Le Négateur*," who is also the archetypal "*marron*" as manifested throughout the history of the Antilles. There are four parts. In "*Négateur-personnage*," Cailler introduces the four novels, *Le quatrième siècle*, *La lézarde*, *Malemort*, *La case du commandeur*, with a brief analysis and interpretation of each, before launching into a study of the four main families presented and what they represent. *Le Négateur-terre* deals with the "*symbolique*" of the land, the forest, rocks, the tree, the wind, fire, and water and focuses on three major obsessions of Glissant, the degradation of his land through pollution, the slave trade, and the alienations implicit in technological development. *Le Négateur-mémoire* provides a time frame, incorporating lists of dates to clarify Glissant's view of history, and makes explicit the similarity to Mallarmé and his ambition to write *Le livre* to subsume the world and its meaning. *Le Négateur-texte* does an in-depth analysis of stylistic aspects using hypermodern critical machinery.

Cailler has written a very rigorous, thoughtful, well organized, probing book which goes far to further the understanding of Glissant. Her most important contribution is her reasoned justification of Glissant's obscurity and literary complexities, her amplification of the context for her author's works. The theoretical complications of her own work may make it more suitable for scholars and critics than the common reader who seeks guidance in appreciating Glissant.

Although *Conquérants* is a systematic work, there remain some loose ends to puzzle readers. Besides some unresolved paradoxes (Cailler states Glissant is primarily a poet, but she does not analyze the poems; Glissant is said to be against elitism, but writes in a way that alienates many readers, etc.), a number of statements apparently defining criticism and/or literature as "science" tend to mystify: "l'effort de donner présence à la subjectivité de recherche sur la subjectivité passionnelle demeure le devoir de tout esprit scientifique" (21). Later she states that the new writers "exigent d'eux-mêmes une plus grande précision scientifique" (51) (than the negritude writers). She claims that David Geggus's historical work is strong because of its "effort d'objectivité scientifique" (67) and its "realism," while at the same time deriding realism in literature and stressing that Glissant is in effect an antirealist (116). This latent assumption about science should be defined and clarified.

Other somewhat gratuitous statements may discourage future readers: "Le texte . . . paraîtra des plus 'incompréhensibles' sans initiation contextuelle au sens complexe du terme: intertextuelle, intratextuelle, métatextuelle" (151) and "ce discours [Glissant's] . . . ne saurait prendre quelque sens au regard du lecteur sans un travail minutieux sur l'Histoire" (178). And what are we to make of "comment s'y prenait

le texte pour éviter de retomber platement dans la tappe du sens et de la vérité'' (173).

Hal Wylie

Keith A. Sandiford. *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-Century Afro-English Writing*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1988. 191 pages.

This is a timely and well-written book, likely to prove of great value not only to students of its particular field, but to anyone interested in slave narrative and in the continuity of black literature. The place of the early British black writers in the history and development of black American literature recently has been acknowledged with different degrees of emphasis in Andrews's *To Tell a Free Story* (1986), Costanza's *Surprising Narrative* (1987), and Davis's and Gates's essay collection, *The Slave's Narrative* (1985). As Gates writes in his introduction to *The Classic Slave Narratives* (1987), 'I am not the only scholar who believes . . . that the 1789 slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano was [Douglass's] 'silent second text.'''

Like these other commentators, Sandiford draws attention to the importance of a literary as well as a political/historical approach to these writers. We need to consider the way they say things, not merely to abstract some general statement. Such literary approaches are not quite as new as he suggests, being apparent in the work of a number of commentators whom he does not always adequately acknowledge: Baker, Stepto, Andrews, Chinosole, and Samuels. This shortcoming is no more than a blemish, to which I shall return after having said more positive things.

Sandiford recognizes both the similarities and the differences in the three writers discussed: Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano, and Equiano. The differences lie, he argues, in 'three distinguishable phases in the evolution of anti-slavery thought' that the writers represent (10): Sancho as sentimental benevolist, Cugoano as aggressive polemical, Equiano as committed and articulate persuader. This is a fair general assessment, though one needs to recognize a degree of overlap. As Sandiford acknowledges, each author also displays a range of attitudes that elude general categorization. His very useful chapter 'The Intellectual Milieu'—drawing upon the work of Curtin, Shyllon, Sypher, and others—provides a broad but detailed survey of ideas in the period leading up to and including that of the three books discussed. My only reservation about this excellent chapter is that while it concentrates, reasonably enough, on social attitudes to the slave trade, it does not pay much attention to the place of these writers in the growth of British radicalism of which they were a part. By the 1790s the tavern chapels of such movements as the London Corresponding Society were attracting a black radical membership, and during 1792 Equiano was living at the house of one of the society's leaders, Thomas Hardy, the shoemaker. A fourth black writer, Robert Wedderburn, would illustrate the radical extreme, far beyond Cugoano and Equiano. He is given an important role in Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld*. Wedderburn, the author of *Axe Laid to the Root* (1817) and *The Horrors of Slavery* (1824), was a licensed Jamaican dissenting minister who lived