

Maryse Conde. *A Season in Rihata*, trans. Richard Philcox. Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1988) 191 pp., \$7.50 paper.

Born and now residing in Guadeloupe, Dr. Conde received the *Grand Prix de Littéraire de la Femme* from France for her contributions to Caribbean literature (an interesting honor, in view of Conde's perception of France as cynically instrumental in the destruction and dismemberment of African civilization).

A Season in Rihata, shortest and most contemporary of Conde's works, nevertheless contains as huge a cast of diverse characters as Conde characteristically depicts in her historic epics. The major characters are the handsome, once idealistic Madou, trained in Moscow but now in "high ministerial position [Minister for Regional Development] and . . . married [to] one of the President's younger sisters," and his older brother Zek, a traditional Moslem, who serves as "humble manager of one of the Development Bank's agencies." Zek has retreated with his wife, Marie-Hélène, and family to the backwater African town of his birth, Rihata, in order to disrupt a passionate love affair between Madou and Marie-Hélène. The book begins some years later, when Madou suddenly arrives in Rihata on a delicate diplomatic mission, which will have tragic consequences.

Conde intimates that men's only salvation from their existential round of petty intrigues, conflicts, wars, and unnatural deaths lies in women, who are by nature essentially at one with eternal forces, the "ancestors," the natural elements of the universe. She thus reveals herself as an "essentialist" feminist, as, for example, when she describes Muti, a doomed old woman who symbolizes Mother Africa, "*la détentrice des valeurs traditionnelles*" as Conde defined the type in *La parole des femmes*. Muti

has an unending stream of stories to tell of colonial times, the humiliations and extortions suffered under a white regime, and her husband's dealings with the colonial administration. She had no real political opinion. To talk Marxism or Socialism with her would have been a waste of time. She was simply driven by a calm conviction. The just and the good ought to be in power to dress the wounds of a people who had suffered for centuries. Africa should be in the hands of thinking Africans who would reinstate the virtues of the ancestors.

We do not meet the old dictator Toumany (he who so far has proved *too many* against all comers) until the end. Seemingly more secure in power than ever, he cuddles with his adolescent wife after love making. Her response to him, however, contains a subtle threat: "Toumany laughed out loud. The world was one gigantic safe. All you needed to do was find the combination. . . . They looked at each other and she could not help bursting out laughing at the sight of her sly old husband. Dear old Toumany. It wouldn't be that easy to get the better of him." Could Conde be hinting that Toumany (male as dictator) might be done in when and

where he least expects it (by his sex kitten)? Could he, like Lear, be harboring a "serpent's tooth" in his bosom, instead?

— Phillipa Kafka
Kean College of New Jersey

Therese Daniels and Jane Gerson, eds. *The Colour Black: Black Images in British Television*. (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1989) vii, 160 pp., \$9.95 paper.

The Colour Black is a concise reference source for scholars interested in research about ethnic images portrayed in television programs produced in other countries. This volume is largely a collection of television review articles for three prime-time television formats in Great Britain: (1) situation comedies, (2) drama series and serials, and (3) soap operas.

The primary thesis of *The Colour Black* is not only to note the black images in British television which are usually stereotypical but, also, to broaden the discussion about these images. For instance, Jim Pines, one of the four additional contributors who introduces the section on drama series and serials, suggests that through scholarship the industry should be challenged to make more interesting uses of the crime genre in relation to the wide diversity of black and white experiences so that the same stereotypes are not always used.

Furthermore, when discussing situation comedies, Andy Medhurst encourages scholars to view a comedy like *The Cosby Show* as only part of a spectrum that includes British comedy series like *No Problem*, *Tandoori Nights*, and *Desmond's* (which is currently being shown on Black Entertainment Television) and not to "inflict" it (*The Cosby Show*) with the "burden of representation." Just as Pines, Medhurst is essentially targeting the industry; after all, if there were more situation comedies about blacks or other ethnic minorities who had more participation in the production process, scholars would not overburden a series like *The Cosby Show* with as much analysis and as many expectations.

In addition to briefly introducing new approaches for critical theory concerning black images in television, *The Colour Black* actually includes reprints of review articles for a select number of programs which can be helpful to American scholars studying ethnic perspectives. Each article includes the author, the journal or periodical title, and date of publication, along with the credits and transmission dates for each television program featured. Overall, *The Colour Black* is an essential resource for the scholar of the ethnic experience in relation to television. Also, with the increasing need for cross-cultural research, this volume will definitely encourage and facilitate comparisons between United States and Great Britain television scholarship.

— Angela M. S. Nelson
Bowling Green State University