



Terry McMillan: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Paulette Richards

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The tremendous universal appeal of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* took the book world by storm. With her third novel finally earning her the recognition and respect she richly deserved, Terry McMillan followed up with *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, which continued to attract new and loyal fans from all walks of life. In this critical work Richards places these inspirational works, as well as McMillan's earlier writings, in their deserved cultural and literary context. Richards offers an insightful analysis of McMillan's narrative technique, which, while having roots in the blues aesthetic, has created a voice that sings out to readers across the lines of sex and race. McMillan's stories are inhabited by strong, dynamic African American women, yet these characters have universal lessons of life and love to share with all readers who appreciate good fiction.

A richly drawn biographical chapter examines the life of McMillan and the influences her own personal experiences have exerted on her writings. In the following chapter, Richards discusses McMillan's place in the literary tradition in which such writers as Zora Neale Hurston paved the way and inspired McMillan to write realistic, yet humorous accounts of the African American romantic experience. Richards devotes a chapter to each of McMillan's first four novels; *Mama* (1987), *Disappearing Act* (1989), *Waiting to Exhale* (1992), and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996). She discusses each novel in terms of plot, narrative style, character development, thematic issues, historical and cultural context, and alternative critical perspective. The comprehensive bibliography, including a list of reviews and index, covers the movie adaptations as well as the books.

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