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AFRICA & THE WEST INDIES

Barbados

Edward Kamau Brathwaite. *Roots*. Havana. Casa de las Américas. 1986. 308 pages. \$5.50.

Academically trained as a historian, Edward Kamau Brathwaite has become perhaps the world's most articulate and provocative social historian of the Caribbean and one of the region's important poets (see e.g. *WLT* 57:3, p. 500). In the tradition of C. L. R. James and Eric Williams, he has challenged long-established, Eurocentric theories of West Indian history, religion, art, politics, and music, and though iconoclastic, has been granted the position of public voice and advocate of the Caribbean folk.

Earlier in his career a critic of emigrant West Indian intellectuals, Brathwaite now sees that the "shortage of material on which the spirit is sustained becomes a famine in the soul of the West Indian artist. . . . He comes to seek a solution in moving away." He can never move away, however, from the African roots (particularly the religious underpinnings) of his culture and the "nation language" in which this is best expressed, so that physical migration is not necessarily destructive to writer or culture.

Brathwaite acknowledges V. S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* as "the first significant artistic expression of a minority culture in the West Indies" and looks for similar works; he believes, though, that Naipaul (see *WLT* 57:3, pp. 223-27) displays a reprehensible undervaluation of black culture. Of the other West Indian writers, he particularly values John Hearne, Derek Walcott (see *WLT* 56:1, pp. 51-53), George Lamming, (see this issue, p. 70), and Roger Mais. Unfortunately, the essays that constitute the volume (all written originally between 1957 and 1981) have not been brought up to date; hence many of the vital new West Indian artists, writers, and critics—including a large number of women—are not considered, and this is a weakness. Still, the bringing together of the eight essays (some really monographs) that make up *Roots* allows readers to consider Brathwaite's views as a philosophy of black Caribbean culture based on extensive research.

The book is heavily documented: it alludes to almost every study of consequence on the topics considered, whether Caribbean literary critics, creative writing during the era of slavery, jazz and the West Indian novel, or the development of "nation language," which has its own rhythms, its "collective forms, ridiculing individualism, singing the praises of eccentricity." *Roots* is, in effect, a study in the search for a genuine West Indian esthetic.

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General Area

European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa. 2 vols. Albert S. Gérard, ed. Budapest. Akadémiai (Humanities, distr.). 1986. 1,290 pages. \$89.

In a general preface for the entire "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages" series sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association, Henry Remak describes it as having the "two fundamental premises" of pannationalism and "structured teamwork," adding: "We realize that volumes dependent on the collaboration of many scholars . . . will not always be evenly balanced in . . . merit." May I contradict him to say that every section of installment 6 in the series, *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, is extremely good, from its eighty-odd ascribed essays by luminaries of the field to the *génial* editorial segues. Look indeed especially for the latter at the beginnings of parts, chapters, and essays, such as the two by Gérard that introduce part 3.

EWAS's table of contents does not show clearly its encyclopedic nature because of so many contributors. Still, if one tries to find omissions, one will try in vain. If there is a fourteen-essay chapter devoted to "English: Nigeria," it is followed by ones on "English: The Other West African Countries" and "English: Eastern Africa." Incidentally, this last is the most patently encyclopedic section of the whole work, in that seven of its eight essays each treats a different country.

The four parts are arranged, *grosso modo*, chronologically. Part 1, "Under Western Eyes," centers in the main on the geneses and goes through World War II. There is some backtracking in part 2, "Black Consciousness," whose chapters present "Negritude" and "Protest Writing outside French Africa" before, during, and after the war. Part 3, "Black Power," deals exclusively with the Anglophone and Francophone literature, primarily from the post-World War II years to the present.

Although the fourteen essays in part 4, "Comparative Vistas," would seem to depart from the temporal progression by their eclectic and/or critical essence, this is in fact the normal order of things: Literary Criticism follows on the heels of Literary History, and the near future cries out for a vast expansion of the critical approach. May I personally (for one thing, because the two essays informed me of so much I did not know) cite Janis A. Mayes's "Ironic Stances in Cameroon and Nigeria" and André Lefèvre's "Changing the Code: Soyinka's Ironic Aetiology"? In fact, EWAS's principal function is to serve neophytes and specialists alike: the former about the general field, and specialists about those aspects of it on which they need filling in.

We are immensely indebted to Gérard for his magnificent orchestration of EWAS, not to speak of his own segues and eight formal essays. All research libraries should have a copy, as well as those scholars who can come up with the purchase price.

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