

Review

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sents the contrary view. He, the main character, is a decent young man who goes to Angola as a medical aide (*enfermeiro*) taking care of the African population of the smallest administrative unit, a *posto*. Belonging to a family attached to the pre-Republican aristocratic regime, he unselfishly turns against the inhumane majority of his countrymen. One can guess what will happen to him after the death of the black girl with whom he had intended to live. Another touch that makes the tale different from Uanhenga Xitu's others is the locale of the Huambo Plateau, which logically leads him to use Umbundu songs and phrases instead of the Kimbundu that colored the previous tales, laid in his native Icolo e Bengo region.

If the author had told the tale straight, the book would have been good indeed. As it is, the title does not fit the tale. There are no "depositions of the survivors of the colonial system"; there is *his* deposition only. And he could not resist the idea of putting into it long digressions on the three kinds of contract labor and the abuses to which they gave origin. Other extraneous matter lengthens the book—a series of fourteen moving dedications, which in reality are his recollections of remarkable fellow sufferers in the struggle for independence, including some Portuguese; reviews of his previous works; and an interview ending with the question: "What useful function does a writer fulfill in our society?" To this he has given an answer befitting the tale: "Stimulating future writers to gain a greater knowledge of our Culture. Educating the reader to see the difference between the past and our present socialist society."

Gerald M. Moser
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General Area

Patrick Mérand, Séwanou Dabla. *Guide de littérature africaine*. Paris. Harmattan. 1979. 224 pages. 40 F.

Good reference works on African literature have been not at all numerous. The present guide to Francophone African literature addresses itself primarily to students and teachers in Africa. However, for all beginning and established scholars interested in black literature of French expression, it is also a valuable tool for verifying titles, dates, references and nationalities of black African authors.

The guide is divided into four sections: a historical introduction tracing the great moments of black literature from the beginnings of the Negro Renaissance in the United States to 1975 and beyond; reference works, anthologies and critical studies; 250 authors listed alphabetically and their works; and 1,000 literary works arranged by countries in alphabetical order. All of this is followed by an alphabetical index of titles, an alphabetical index of authors mentioned and a list of the abbreviations used in the text. Limited information is supplied on Caribbean French literature, anglophone African literature, literature from the Indian Ocean and on non-African writers who have written about francophone African literature. As a bonus, several tables are included listing literary works that have won grand prizes, supplying names of women writers and providing data on collections of proverbs.

The guide is not all-inclusive, for in spite of all the care taken, certain errors or omissions are inevitable. It nonetheless remains a valuable source of information for the already

informed researcher as well as for the person who desires to be acquainted with this literature.

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Ghana

Ayi Kwei Armah. *Two Thousand Seasons*. London. Heinemann. 1979. xii + 206 pages. £1.50.

In his earlier work Armah has demonstrated a willingness to take great artistic risks. *Two Thousand Seasons*, written in 1971–72 and now part of Heinemann's African Writers Series, is a daring experiment; but in spite of some powerful passages, it is not entirely successful because of the limitations Armah has imposed upon himself. It is a mythic account of the "two thousand seasons" of contact between the Africans (presumably the Akan peoples of Ghana) and Arab and European slave traders. (The historical period apparently is the five centuries before the British abolition of the slave trade.) The book is hard going because it almost totally lacks the traditional methods of the novel—no plot as such, no characters who are not mere embodiments of mythic elements, and a narrator who speaks only as the voice of the collective will of the people through the centuries.

The story begins in the mystery of tribal origins and the definition of "the way" given to the people by a culture heroine who prophesies two thousand seasons of oppression. It continues through the first encounter of the people with Muslim "predators" and their migration over the mountains to the coastal lowlands, where they encounter European "destroyers" and native kings who enrich each other in the slave trade. At this point, in the more readable section of the book, the historical parallels break down in an account of a bloody mutiny on a slave ship, a successful insurrection against a native king and a war of liberation against the slavers.

Armah's earlier novels dramatize his contempt for the African ruler who overthrows European injustice only to impose his own. He seems to have intended his book as a definition of racial pride and Ghanaian nationalism. The ancient ideal of "reciprocity" between tribal members which he extols is less important as historical reality than as the political ideal which he considers the only salvation for modern Ghana. In this sense *Two Thousand Seasons* is not a work of art at all, but a rather special piece of propaganda on behalf of ideals which, whatever their value for an African audience, will seem to most readers to be fatally flawed by oversimplifications that are at their worst racist and at their best merely naïve.

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Robert Fraser. *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction*. London. Heinemann. 1980. xiv + 107 pages. \$15.95 (\$5.95 paper).

Robert Fraser's study has two purposes: to analyze Armah's development as an innovative novelist and to assess his achievement. Excluded are his short stories, poet-