

Simone Schwarz-Bart. *The Bridge of Beyond*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1982) xviii, 174 pp., \$5.50 paper.

Simone Schwarz-Bart's first novel (1972) makes highly commendable reading for anybody interested in Afro-Caribbean literature. Barbara Bray's translation does remarkably well in capturing the poetic texture of the narrator's (Telumee) account; Bridget Jones' introduction is useful but could have focused more on the novel itself and on its sources.

Caribbean literature is rich in books written in a fictionalized autobiographical vein, but the number of women novelists has so far remained rather small. Merle Hodge with *Crick Crack Monkey* and Jean Rhys with her classic *Wide Sargasso Sea* are among the exceptions.

Simone Schwarz-Bart, a Guadeloupean, creates a series of unforgettable black female characters in *The Bridge of Beyond*, which spans three and alludes to five generations of strong Lougandor women. The work is a tribute to suffering and endurance in black life and is seen distinctly from a woman's perspective. Telumee is abandoned by her mother and taken over by her grandmother who leads her across the symbolic Bridge of Beyond where her learning process begins. The portrait of the grandmother Queen Without a Name dominates the gallery of women. She serves as example and teacher, is a repository of folk wisdom, boundless courage in the face of adversity, of unfailing love, of mystical dreams and sober practicality. Her speech, deeply couched in black Creole proverbs and sayings, her movement between material poverty and spiritual richness shapes to a large degree the language of the book. At times it seems to run breathlessly and, by association, from one story to another. Threads of folk myths, like the flying witch Ma Cia, move into "real" persons and encounters. Many of the events and narrations contain moral lessons and insights; many are attempts at coming to grips with the history and self-definition of poor blacks on Guadeloupe. These statements of definition range from bitter self-doubts and self-hate to affirmative pride. Slavery is not forgotten, nor is still-existing social injustice. Whites are felt as distant, unreal, arrogant and exploitative beings but they occupy a marginal position in the plot. Black men are more than once seen as unstable partners and as victims themselves, who cruelly humiliate their women and later expect forgiveness. Schwarz-Bart's vision is not without a sharp, pessimistic feminist slant. And while the women frequently do have the function of a "chorus," a collective commentary, and do act admirably in a spirit of female solidarity, they are also shown as ruthless rivals to each other, destructive societal elements. The reader is not presented with a simplistic, idyllic, or folksy panorama.

One of the fascinating qualities of *The Bridge of Beyond* lies in its belief in the magic of the spoken word. The word contains prophecies, and may decide over life and death, happiness and desolation, salvation and doom. This appears plausible only because of the close adherence of structure and speech to the Creole Afro-Caribbean oral tradition and to the collective wisdom enclosed in proverbs, songs, magical tales.

The “Bildungsroman” *The Bridge of Beyond* is, along with the works by the Haitians Jacques Roumain and Jacques Alexis and those by the Martiniquians Rene Maran, Joseph Zobel and Edouard Glissant, a potent and moving voice from the French Caribbean. Any course on women or black writers of the western hemisphere will be enriched by its inclusion.

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Reuben K. Udo. *The Human Geography of Tropical Africa*. (Exeter: NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1982) 244 pp., \$21.00 paper.

The author explains in the preface that his book “is written for students preparing for the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)” as well as “students in Advanced Teachers’ Colleges, Colleges of Education and undergraduates taking courses on Africa or African Studies.”

Reuben Udo defines tropical Africa as the entire continent exclusive of Lesotho, Swaziland, Republic of South Africa, Egypt, Lybia, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara. He is to be congratulated for taking-on the Herculean task of writing a human geography of tropical Africa but he must be criticized for (1) presenting an unclear geographic picture, i.e., subordinating observed reality to theories and methods. (2) vague, often poor, writing, and (3) frequently offering a neo-colonialist vision for an African cosmos. Although generous, the number of figures, plates, and tables, for the most part, have no relationship to the text. For example, the author himself notes about Table II, which occupies more than half a page, that “Table II is not very helpful in assessing the importance of livestock to the economy of the various countries” (p. 131). Furthermore, Udo uses Nigeria as the focal area for his work and adds incidental information about other countries. The information contained in the text is