

Kenneth Ramchand. *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*. 2nd Ed. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983) 310 pp., \$15.00 paper.

Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* is a useful guide for exploring this literature. First published in 1973 and reissued in 1983, Ramchand's book (which has a complete bibliography of West Indian writers) gives us some of the information necessary to understand the difficulties facing the offspring of British colonialism in the West Indies.

The education system following Emancipation in 1833 was a utilitarian, missionary-run disaster, the results of which in the twentieth century are wide-spread illiteracy and a black middle class alienated from the people. Because the system was based upon holding up as the supreme model all things English (what Ansell Hart has called Anglolatry), it served to undermine the possibility of the cultural integrity of the native population. All of these factors have forced writers to look to England for a reading public which in turn has determined, to an extent, what has been written. This led in some of the earlier works, such as the Jamaican H. G. de Lisser's *Jane's Career* (1913) and, earlier, Tom Redcam's *One Brown Girl And* (1909), to an attitude of authorial superiority and middle class prudery in dealing with characters from the peasant class and often a depiction of the West Indies as merely picturesque.

Appropriately, the longest section in *The West Indian Novel* is Section VII: "The Negro." Ramchand demonstrates that the Negro and his African heritage have been treated in a variety of ways by West Indian writers, from the derisive tones of J. B. Emtage (representing the white planter class) in *Brown Sugar* (1966) and the romantic over-sentimentalization in Namba Roy's *Black Albino* (1961) to what he feels is the most successful of this type of novel, George Lamming's *Season of Adventure* (1960) in which Lamming invokes Africa to explore the inner workings of West Indian culture. In this section Ramchand uncharacteristically places himself in a controversial position over the question of the influence of African culture in the West Indies. His position is clear on what he finds in the literature: "There are few indications in West Indian prose of the survival of African Cultures in West Indian secular life." Ramchand takes the same position on the influence of the aborigines' past in the Islands. Nonetheless, there is a tradition to be built upon in the West Indies represented in part by the steel bands, the Carnival, and, yes, even the artistic expression of the various cultists (whose activities cannot always be divided into sacred and secular) that begins to suggest cultural identification separate from the imperial powers that so long occupied the area.

Finally the most interesting part of Ramchand's study and the most interesting and unique aspect of West Indian prose fiction lies in the writers' use of dialect. Thus as opposed to those earlier peripheral dialect speakers who are not taken very seriously, we see in Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952) dialect being used not only by a central, introspective character but by the narrator as well. We see this as well in the work of John Hearner, George Lamming, and V. S. Reid (part of a larger group of West Indians writing in the picaresque tradition). These writers have come to realize the virtues of dialectical expression in its simplicity, directness, grace, and lucidity, and that expression is one way to get to the essence of their society.

One can look at a pluralistic society such as that of the West Indian peoples as merely troubled or troubled but filled with vitality. Those who see it as the latter are also those who show us through their writing that the breach between the vernacular of a society and its literary language is not the true mark of a great literary product. Mark Twain showed all of us this exactly one hundred years ago.

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Glenda Riley. *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984) xvi, 336 pp., \$24.95, \$12.95 paper.

This book makes a simple, but important, point and proves it on the basis of painstaking research: pioneer women went to the frontier with a mental baggage of myths and prejudices about themselves and Indians, but while living in the West they changed their self-image as well as their image of the natives, establishing close relationships with them more frequently than men.

Glenda Riley has researched innumerable diaries, journals, memoirs, and daybooks by travelling women, women settlers, and army wives, concentrating on writings by those who did not think of publication and who had no prolonged or professional contact with American Indians, like missionaries or teacher. "The writings of nearly 200 westering men were also employed in this study. As with the women's sources, these male writers ranged from the very literate to those barely so, young to