

Joanne V. Gabbin. *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) xvi, 245 pp., \$35.00.

Numerous and diverse agendas have competed for consideration in attempts to establish and set the parameters of the black aesthetic tradition. W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson are only two of several prominent Americans who have participated in this continuing and frequently intense dialogue. Yet perhaps no voice has been more consistently consulted and valued than that of Sterling A. Brown, distinguished teacher, scholar, poet, and critic. Despite the general acknowledgement of Brown's contributions to American literature in general and black American literature in particular, comprehensive scholarly analyses of his unique contributions have been limited. Joanne V. Gabbin addresses this void in the scholarship in *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition*, a work that includes an analysis of Brown's own creative efforts as well as an outline and discussion of his critical views.

One distinct advantage in studying the life and career of a scholar as active and versatile as Sterling Brown is that the reader receives much more than insight into a particular discipline. Gabbin's account of Brown's work with the Federal Writers' Project (1936-1940), for example, is particularly instructive in matters pertaining to the general culture and the prevailing social climate of the time. The difficulties encountered by Brown in his capacity as National Editor of Negro Affairs for this project are reflective of the biases and distortions that have prevented or significantly limited an accurate presentation of the black experience in America. Strategies used by various states to circumvent the project goals requiring an essay on black history and lore in each state guidebook have perhaps equal analytic potential for historians, sociologists, and political scientists.

Of interest to a possibly more esoteric audience is the chapter on poetry in which Gabbin analyzes and explicates a representative number of Brown's poems that students of literature have come to appreciate. This section of Gabbin's work demonstrates careful attention to prosody, explication, and thematic analysis. She discusses these features impressively, relating the prominent themes in Brown's poetry to their classical literary antecedents. Parallels evolving from this analysis not only attest to Brown's comprehensive academic background but also affirm his belief that universality in literature is inevitable.

The intellectual and cultural milieu in which Brown grew up, his family's value system, and the multidimensional societal forces that impacted on his career receive adequate attention in the early chapters of this work. An understanding of these influences will, at least partially, serve to clarify or illuminate Brown's critical perspective, the last consideration in Gabbin's work. Her analysis of Brown's critical perspec-

tive is comparative and includes opposing philosophical perspectives as well, an inclusion that is particularly valuable for an informed evaluation of the range of critical views at that time. Brown's efforts to correct the misconceptions and to counteract the effects of the stereotypes abounding in the literature of white and black writers are presented concisely but clearly and sympathetically.

Gabbin is less successful, however, in reconciling two threads of Brown's critical perspective, somewhat problematic when combined. Brown attempted to maintain a definite place for the black folk tradition, viewed by Gabbin as "the single most pervasive influence on the literary career of Sterling A. Brown" and at the same time to insist on a single standard for the evaluation of all literature. Nonetheless, the specificity characterizing Gabbin's presentation of the various components of Brown's critical perspective is commendable and can be used as a springboard to a more concrete blending of the strands in his critical stance. End-of-chapter notes and an extensive selected bibliography provide valuable references for students and scholars who will continue to impart order to this growing body of scholarship until it attains the coherence that its importance deserves.

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Irene L. Gendzier. *Franz Fanon: A Critical Study.* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985) xx, 300 pp., \$8.95 paper.

This "revised" biography of Franz Fanon (first published in 1973) is a welcome event for those who either missed feeling the impact of his work in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s or were so blinded by the period's turmoil that Fanon's life and work could not be critically evaluated. Grove Press must be congratulated for re-issuing Gendzier's study, particularly since the political fervor for radical political action has passed (for now) and little profit can be expected from this book. In this day of corporate mergers and greed, a commitment to publish what is in the public interest is meritorious.

A concern with Fanon, who was a spokesman in Africa for the Algerian revolution (1954-62), requires a rekindling of interest in the possible international dimensions of the AfroAmerican. Although ambivalent about Negritude, Fanon considered himself an internationalist, finding Negritude finally too confining, yet he is one of the contributors to its endurance. Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) remains a critical work concerning black consciousness in the "white world." In the spring of 1982 in Fort-de-France, Martinique, a conference was held: