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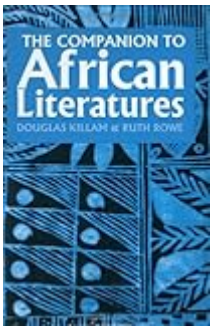

Douglas Killam, Ruth Rowe, eds. *The Companion to African Literatures.* Oxford and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. xiii + 322 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33633-0.

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Given the present need for comprehensive and accurate reference works on African literatures, Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe's *The Companion to African Literatures* is a volume that Africanists should welcome and demand that their libraries stock, although most of us will also wish to have our own copies conveniently at hand. Hundreds of entries cover individual authors and titles, overviews of fourteen African-language literatures, discussions of literary genres in Africa, topics such as apartheid and censorhip, as well as thematic entries like religion, politics, and war in African literatures. There are entries on Francophone, Lusophone and Afrikaans works when these are readily available in English translations. In some cases, these entries (e.g., on the novel, anthologies, women in literature, and so forth) are sub-divided by four regions: East, South-Central, South, and West Africa.

The scope of the project is impressive, with a great deal of information presented in an efficient and accurate manner. There is a handy guide to the volume's topics and structure at both the beginning and the end of the book. Within each entry, references to related entries and topics are conveniently marked. Where else will you find a handy description of Tsonga literature alongside a concise and lucid account of Amos Tutuola?

Killam and Rowe are listed as editors for this project, while Bernth Lindfors appears as a contributing editor, and Gerald Moser and Alain Ricard are associate editors. Although the authorship of individual entries is not indicated, the contributors' page lists 171 names, many of them well-known names in African literary studies. In at least one case (Stephen Gray of South Africa) a contributor is also featured in an entry of his own. Overall, Killam and his associates have done a fine job of editing all the entries for consistency of style and presentation.

The volume's title probably ought to indicate it, but despite the attempt at a broader focus, this is a reference work that is mostly interested in Europhone literatures, and especially works in English. This leads to some interesting editorial choices. Take the entry on Gikuyu literature, for instance. Fully one-third of this entry is dedicated to Gakaara wa Wanjau (who, sadly, has passed away since this work was published), but because Gakaara wrote only in Gikuyu, he gets no entry of his own. The other major figure mentioned in this section is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, but since he has written in English as well as Gikuyu, he gets an additional, individual entry elsewhere in the text.

There are other interesting quirks, none of them necessarily a problem, but all of which point to the complexity of defining and organizing this unwieldy category known as African literature. In most instances,

the editors categorize authors by their birthplace. Thus, the Malawian writer Zeleza is counted as a Zimbabwean, while the Tanzanian/Canadian Vassanji is listed as Kenyan. Curiously, Taban lo Liyong does not fit this pattern; he is listed as a Ugandan, even though he is Sudanese-born and has for quite some time been proclaiming Sudan to be his true home.

Inevitably, a reference work of this type becomes dated the moment it appears. In this case, it seems the editors had to close up shop and send the manuscript off to the publishers around the end of 1998. There is no mention, therefore, of newcomers like Moses Isegawa. At least one attempt to "cheat" the time deadline failed-this in the section on Ngugi, which mentions his new novel as likely to appear in 1999, although two years later that work has yet to be published.

Also inevitable will be some sniping about editorial choices. Why, for instance, do the four regions of sub-Saharan Africa merit special attention, but discussion of North African literature must be gleaned from within individual author entries? Is the preponderance of South African and Nigerian writers–with ninety-four and eighty-one entries respectively, compared to twenty-eight from Zimbabwe, twenty-six from Ghana, one from Zambia, etc.–justified? Are Stephen Ngubiah and Godwin Wachira really among the most significant twenty writers from Kenya?

Two final complaints are more objective. The first is that while there is a list of "Suggested Further Reading," there is unfortunately no bibliography. This means that when individuals or works are mentioned within the text but do not have an entry, there is no further documentation; it would be useful to have that. For instance, the entry on literary theory mentions "an important essay" by Biodun Jeyifo (p. 144), but the unenlightened reader has no way of knowing where to find it. Secondly, reference works of this type often include introductory essays from their editors explaining their aims and methodology; this one does not. It would have been interesting and instructive for us to hear Killam and Rowe reflect on the challenges of compiling this otherwise useful and impressive new reference work.

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