

# BOOK REVIEW

**Victoria Ellen Smith, editor. *Voices of Ghana. Literary Contributions to the Ghana Broadcasting System, 1955-57, Second Edition.*** Suffolk: James Currey, 2018. xx + 276 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$99.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 1847011926, 978-1847011923.

The publication of the second edition of *Voices of Ghana*, edited by Victoria Ellen Smith with a new, well-researched extended introduction, assembles contributions that appeared in the initial 1958 printing with detailed biographical information about the contributors. The volume is an homage to Ghanaian literary figures and their oratory; their public stature and writing emerged in relation to the evolution of Ghana radio broadcasting in the era preceding independence in 1957. Smith's detailed introduction describes the role of Henry Swanzy, an Oxford graduate who joined the BBC in 1941 and was appointed Head of Programming in colonial Ghana in 1954 after having been in charge the BBC-produced program "Caribbean Voices" and having served as editor of the Royal African Society's *Journal of African Affairs* from 1944 to 1954. Swanzy was the editor, or the self-described "compiler," of *Voices of Ghana* as radio producer and literary advisor to the authors.

Many of the contributions to *Voices in Ghana* were originally presented on the air, and as Swanzy explains, their texts were only "slightly" edited for the volume. Though focused on promoting literature written in English, the volume and related initiatives foregrounded the wide range of languages spoken in Ghana. For this reason, the volume is divided into two sections, "The Countryside" and "The Town." The reader comes to understand the significance of the initial publication as part of a collaborative working relationship that evolved between Swanzy and a wide array of Ghanaian contributors. As Smith explains, most of the contributions had been presented verbally on the flagship Ghana Broadcasting literary program titled "The Singing Net," which Swanzy initiated three months after arriving at the Ghana Broadcasting headquarters in Accra.

Many of the contributions to the volume are poetic invocations or short stories. In addition, there are descriptive pieces such as J.H. Nketia's article "The Poetry of Drums," which explains drumming as a language that serves as the basis for poetic speech. While the articles in this first half of the volume

represent various genres of spoken radio broadcasting, they also serve as a basis for a more adventurous approach to poetry and storytelling that refers to the patterns of life in the countryside. The second half of the volume (“The Town”) is focused on urban life and its culture of modernity, as with the musical and poetic rhymes in Peter Kwame Buahin’s “This is Experience Speaking,” where he asks, “Should I blow or should I not blow my own trumpet?” Radio scripts are also included, as with Henry Ofori’s “The Literary Society,” Isaac B. Dadson’s “The Journey to Independence,” or J. Aggrey-Smith’s “The Dawn of the New Era.” These contributions culminate in a celebration of Ghanaian independence. On the one hand, the ascension of Kwame Nkrumah as Prime Minister is evoked in Prince Haasnem Nehrbot’s “Ode to the Hon. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah,” and on the other Robert Gardiner’s gloss on “The Meaning of Independence,” which makes a claim for the successful outcome of the struggle against the history of slavery and “alien rule.” However, Gardiner refers to independence while yet maintaining a high regard for British statesmanship that has “attempted to consider our aspirations and has today granted our demand in full.”

Within the contemporary climate of postcolonial and decolonial critique, the conciliatory nature of the Ghanaian contributors and Swanzy’s seemingly patronizing enablement seems antiquated. Nonetheless, they all point to an important intermediary context between the departure of the British administration and Nkrumah’s appointment as Prime Minister and parliamentary leader of the Convention People’s Party. Finally, Smith provides important archival sources for Swanzy’s papers that are held at the University of Warwick and at Oxford University. I would also like to note that Smith, along with Helen Yitah and Audrey Gadzekpo, who are currently colleagues at the University of Ghana-Legon, have co-edited a complementary special issue of the journal *Obsidian* titled “Radio, A Platform for Creative Writing: Ghanaian Literature and Broadcast Culture” (Fall 2018). This publication provides an expanded historical context that supplements this volume, which remains a key resource for the study of radio broadcasting and literature in late colonial Ghana and thereafter.

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