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The Seasons of Beento Blackbird by Akosua Busia

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AFRICA & THE WEST INDIES: GHANA

Akosua Busia. *The Seasons of Beento Blackbird*. Boston. Little, Brown. 1996. viii + 367 pages. \$22.95. ISBN 0-31611495-2.

As the African diaspora continues to define its own unique position and global contributions, African diaspora studies are necessarily asserting themselves as essential to the cultural-diversity and multiculturalism discourse in the U.S. and, most important, as an indispensable part of the current discourse on pan-Africanist consciousness, global identity, and the new world order. Increasingly, the assumed "sameness" of blackness and the black experience in the world and the linkages between Africa and African descendants in the New World are promising a rethinking, reconceptualizing, and reframing of the hitherto anecdotal position of the diaspora as well as the implications of diasporic transformation. In this regard, Akosua Busia's *Seasons of Beento Blackbird* joins a growing number of diaspora novels by black women writers--Maryse Conde, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Paule Marshall, Myriam Warner-Vieyra.

A sprawling first novel, ambitious in its thematic inclusiveness, *The Seasons of Beento Blackbird* is the story of regrets, irresponsibility, obligations, the search for home in the right/wrong places. It is about careless pleasures, complicity, and human relationships in their simplicity and complexities. More important, it is the story of physical and psychological migration--specifically the diasporic migration of Solomon Eustace Wilberforce, a welltraveled, intelligent, cultural-roots-hungry sojourner who "jets" across the expansive black diaspora, seeking roots, "Home," on three continents. Hence the appropriateness of his symbolically implicit pseudonym, "Beento Blackbird." In search of Africa so Africa can live in him, Solomon is keenly aware of and driven by the fact that "when others tell your story, they control your memory and your life." A gifted and successful children's author, Solomon dedicates himself to educating "the lost children of Africa" about their heritage. It is in the course of this magnanimity that Solomon admits that, ironically, the self-styled bard is himself woefully lost.

The rhythm of the seasons and the devotion of three women on three continents--winters with childless wife Miriam (nine years his senior) on the Caribbean island of Corcos, summers in Ghana with young Ashia, the African bride (mother of his only son) wedded on one of his trips to Ghana "to recuperate from the ravages of Western society," and spring in New York with Sam (anthea), his literary agent--constitute a life of seeming

fulfillment until Solomon is caught out of season, his father's sudden death breaking this unwholesome Corcos Island-New York-Ghana cycle. Solomon mistakes winter for summer and is tangled in a confrontation with all three women on Corcos, each vying for her place beside him. Ashia's departure with her son to study in London, Sam's return to New York, and Miriam's lethargic dependence force Solomon into a five-month self-exile during which he faces the crucial question of identity: where does he belong, and with whom? The reality of the difficulty of finding "the years to start again" force long-suffering, devoted Miriam to cast her lot with unconvincingly and perhaps undeservedly redeemed Solomon, who still loves Ashia.

A compelling love story, its lucid style, though sometimes sentimental, makes the lengthy saga of Solomon Eustace Wilberforce accessible despite an interesting but burdened structure. Far too late in the novel, it seems-more than halfway through---do the characters come to a real crisis, the resolution of which is less than convincing or satisfying. Nevertheless, the romantic plot's complexity and the deftness with which Busia handles her lush language are marks of the author's potential as an up-and-coming storyteller/novelist.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): A novel by Akosua Busia

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By Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, University of Nebraska, Omaha

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