Edward “Kamau” Braithwaite

• Born in 1930 in Bridgetown, Jamaica, he attended an elite Jamaican college before transferring to and graduating from Cambridge in England.

• He took a job in the textbook department of the Ministry of Education in what would soon be Ghana in 1957. Brathwaite’s time in the rebelling and developing nation allowed him to familiarize himself with traditional African folklore, as well as the relationship between dominant and subdominant language and literature.

• In 1968 he received a PhD from the University of Sussex, where his dissertation was titled The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica.

• Brathwaite remains one of the Caribbean’s most influential writers, and has published everything from professional essays to poetry books.

Nation Language

• He defines it as “the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors.” -310

“...It is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people.” -313

• Other languages of the Caribbean: English, French, Dutch, and Spanish were dominant, while other languages thrived beneath the surface: creole English, Amerindian, Hindi, variations of Chinese, African languages from the Ashanti, Congo and Yaruba areas.

• He says that many of the results of the complex interactions between these languages are still only beginning to surface in Caribbean literature.

• The educational system taught European history, language and literature, so that the people were forced to learn things which had no relevance to themselves. “Paradoxically, in the Caribbean (as in many ‘cultural disaster’ areas), the people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English kings and queens than they do about our own national heroes, our own slave rebels, the people who helped to build and to destroy our society.” -312

• He says that many of the developing differences in literature can be seen in rhythm, as poets, writers and students move away from the older iambic pentameter and begin to think and write in terms of more flowing, African-based rhythms.

• While he thinks language is a very important part of culture, he does not believe that either the whole-hearted adoption or complete abandonment of English and other European languages is necessary for social change. “It is not English that is the agent. It is not language, but people, who make revolutions.” -313