

Obituary
Eckhard Breitinger (1940 - 2013)

Eckhard Breitinger, professor emeritus of English and Anglophone Literature, theatre photographer and publisher, died on August 15, 2013, after a serious illness in Bayreuth, Germany. From 1981 until his retirement in 2005, he taught at the University of Bayreuth which he helped establish as one of the major centres of African Studies in Germany. Breitinger mentored three generations of students, researchers and artists from and of/on Africa, the Caribbean and African-America. He can be also considered a 'second-generation' pioneer of African and African-diasporic cultural production, following in the footsteps of Ulli Beier and Janheinz Jahn, who helped establish the study of postcolonial literatures at German universities.

Breitinger studied English, History, Archeology and Philosophy at Tuebingen, Bangor and Geneva before completing a PhD on 'the Gothic Novel' at Tuebingen in 1971. This was followed by a Habilitation (the second PhD required for full professorship in Germany) on 'Radio Literature and Drama in the US' at Bayreuth in 1987. In-between these two book-length studies, he taught and researched at universities and colleges around the world, starting with a two-year lectureship at the University of the West Indies (Kingston, Jamaica) in 1966-68; a senior lectureship at UST Kumasi (today Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana); and visiting professorships in countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Cameroon, France and the US. Kingston was indeed decisive for his career; the personal encounters with such writers as Derek Walcott sparked off a life-long interest in postcolonial cultural production. Even after retirement, Breitinger remained an active teacher and researcher, his last visits taking him to Krakow, Poland, in 2006 and Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008. His was an enduring engagement with both North and South, theory and practice, research and teaching. His writings on Anglophone Cameroonian literature and the cultural landscape in Uganda remain scholarly milestones to this day. All in all,

Breitingner published over a hundred articles in books and journals, excluding countless reviews, journalistic pieces and editorial work. One of his greatest passions was theatre in Africa. An internationally acknowledged expert in the field, he also worked as a theatre photographer and translator of plays. His photographic exhibitions on theatre-for-development and theatre in Uganda and South Africa toured internationally, from Grahamstown to Texas, from Accra to Barcelona. He translated radio plays by Somali, South African, and Cameroonian writers for German radio stations; and he also worked as author and broadcaster, among others for Deutsche Welle, North German, Bavarian and Hessian broadcasting services, and Radio Free Berlin.

One of his most important achievements has been the founding of an academic publishing house in 1983 – the Bayreuth African Studies Series (BASS) – which brings out the well-known eponymous book series. The company was his second professional passion. BASS enabled the publication of numerous studies on cultural production, religion and language in Africa and her Diaspora; languages of publication were English, German and French. This was particularly important for many African scholars with little to no access to international distribution. Ninety numbered and fifteen unnumbered volumes have been published in BASS, the last one on ‘ritual in Cameroonian drama’. In 2003, Breitingner’s wife, the literary critic and scholar, Pia Thielman, joined the company. When Breitingner was diagnosed with cancer in May 2013, she completed the editing of BASS 91. Even during his ill health, Breitingner remained as active as possible. Mentoring graduate students from Africa had always been his heart-felt concern, so he was adamant to attend the viva of a Kenyan PhD candidate in July 2013 despite his rapidly failing health.

We have lost a colleague of profound expertise, experience and scholarly stamina; we will miss Eckhard Breitingner as an exceptional mentor, human being and friend.

Christine Matzke
(University of Bayreuth, Germany)