

K AMAU BRATHWAITE

The
Zea Mexican
Diary

7 Sept 1926–7 Sept 1986



"One of the finest living poets of
the Western hemisphere."

—London Times

IN MAY OF 1986 Kamau Brathwaite learned that his wife, Doris, was dying of cancer and had only a short time to live. Responding as a poet, he began "helplessly & spasmodically" to record her passage in a diary. *The Zea Mexican Diary* is a collection of excerpts from this diary and other notes from this period of the Brathwaites' lives, and few who read this book will fail to be caught up in the depth of Kamau Brathwaite's grief.

The Zea Mexican Diary is a tribute to Doris Brathwaite and an exploration of the creative potency of love. (The title comes from the name Brathwaite gave Doris, who was originally from Guyana, of part Amerindian descent.) Exposing the intimacy of his marriage, this book is the closest Brathwaite has ever come to an autobiographical statement. In examining his life with Doris he found the courage to reveal something of himself. But, more than an autobiography, *The Zea Mexican Diary* is an extraordinary work of literature, much of it written in the expressive "nation language" of Jamaica and the Caribbean. Brathwaite filters his pain through his poetic gift, presenting it to the reader with all the poignancy poetry conveys.

The force of Doris Brathwaite's character takes shape through Brathwaite's thoughts. She was a significant presence in West Indian culture in her own right, as an inspiration for her husband's poetry and through her efforts in the creation of the Caribbean Artists Movement and her contributions to the publishing cooperative, Savacou. Brathwaite writes fondly of Doris's immense generosity toward him and toward the community at large.

Brathwaite's journal, and the poetry he composed during this time, is also an exploration of his relationships to women—his mother and sister as well as his wife. The latter portion of *The Zea Mexican Diary* is a selection of letters Brathwaite wrote to his sister, Mary, after Doris's death. In these letters he accuses Mary of abandoning him in his time of need. These letters reflect the emotions generated by his great loss.

BI.3268

ΔΩΡΕΑ
ΕΛΛΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΙΚΟΥ
ΠΑΙΟΝΙΔΗ

for

Σίλλι Ρεονίδου of Cyprus

to mark, if I may,

meets you in New York

& the 1994 Newstart
Prize

K Brathwaite

March 94