

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

Oog en Spel: Opstelle oor die drama

Rena Pretorius 1987

Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik

Omdat daar na verhouding in Afrikaans so min boeke is wat in hul geheel aan die drama gewy is, moet die verskyning van hierdie bundel opstelle oor die drama verwelkom word. Slegs twee van die bydraes is alreeds gepubliseer; een van hulle word in effens gewysigde vorm hier geplaas.

Die eerste twee opstelle is meer teoreties van aard. Die eerste bespreek Aristoteles se “plot-teorie” en maak allerlei interessante afleidings op grond van sy uitsprake oor die intrige van die drama. Hoewel Aristoteles miskien nie vir al hierdie gevolgtrekkings verantwoordelik gehou kan word nie, kan hulle beskou word as ’n geregverdigde uitbreiding van die beginsels wat hy neerlê. Ek moet net daarop wys dat die term “denke” by Aristoteles baie meer beperk is as wat die skryfster impliseer en eintlik net op die retoriese element betrekking het.

Die tweede opstel bespreek Vondel as tragikus en is waarskynlik die mees aanvegbare bydrae in hierdie bundel. Die skryfster kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat Vondel nie daarin slaag om ware tragedie te skryf nie, maar die maatstawwe waaraan sy hom meet, word op ’n skoolse wyse gehanteer en laat nie reg geskied aan die gekompliseerdheid van die probleem nie. Dit blyk duidelik uit die slotsin van die opstel: “As *besondere* produk van die Grieke van die vyfde eeu voor Christus se *bepaalde* manier van dink en kyk na die lewe as *besondere* produk van die *hoogste piek van die Attiese kultuur*, is dit duidelik waarom tragiek en die klassieke tragedie so moeilik in ander tye en kulture herhaal kan word” (21). As hierdie benadering tot sy uiterste konsekwensie gevoer word, sou dit beteken dat ware tragedie slegs deur die Grieke in die vyfde eeu geskryf is, en dat selfs Shakespeare en Racine nie sal kwalifiseer nie. Daar is egter nog ’n verdere komplikasie. Die skryfster neem die klassieke tragedie as maatstaf, maar sy onderskei glad nie tussen die praktyk van die Griekse tragedie in die vyfde eeu v.C. en die teorie van Aristoteles nie – en daar is nogal belangrike verskille. So verklaar sy heel beslis: “Die tragedie daarenteen eindig ellendig” (15), en noem as enkele uitsonderings die *Oresteia*-trilogie en *Oidipus by Kolonos*. Maar Sophokles se *Elektra* en *Philoktetes* het ook ’n gelukkige afloop, om nie eers van die sogenaamde tragikomadies van Euripides te praat nie. Dit beteken dat byna een derde van die Griekse dramas wat as “tragedies” behoue gebly het, in hierdie groep val. Verder stel sy as grondbeginsel van die Griekse tragedie dat die mens die maat van alle dinge is (18). Dit mag miskien vir Euripides geld, maar beslis nie vir Aischulos en Sophokles nie wie se tragedies deur ’n diepe eerbied vir die goddelike magte gekenmerk word. Die *Trachiniai* van Sophokles eindig met die woorde: “En daar is geeneen van hierdie dinge wat nie Zeus is nie”.

Hieruit blyk duidelik dat 'n kritikus wat 'n beperkte siening van die tragiese aanhang, in allerlei probleme verstriek raak. Dit is egter ook moontlik om die tragiese ruimer te beskou en te aanvaar dat elke periode sy eie vorm van die tragiese ontwikkel. Albin Lesky, vir wie die skryfster meermale aanhaal, maak voorsiening vir tragedies met tragiese situasies wat nie in 'n algehele katastrofe eindig nie. Pretorius gee self toe: "Ek ontken nie dat die Jeftasituasie 'n tragiese kwaliteit het nie; ook nie dat Vondel aanvanklik iets van die ware tragiese tot sy reg laat kom nie" (17). Die volgende uitspraak van J. Culler klink miskien ekstrem, maar mag tog daartoe bydra om groter ruimte in ons denke oor die tragiese te bring: "To read a text as tragedy is to give it a framework which allows order and complexity to appear" (Culler, 1975: 136).

Die res van die bundel bestaan uit besprekings van agt Afrikaanse dramas. Die snelle ontwikkeling van die literatuurwetenskap in die afgelope aantal dekades maak die analise van 'n literêre werk al hoe meer problematies. 'n Mens moet dit die skryfster ter ere nagee dat sy terdeë van hierdie probleme bewus is. In die eerste plek besef sy dat alle dramas nie volgens dieselfde maatstawwe beoordeel kan word nie maar dat die verskillende dramatradisies 'n groot rol speel. Sy onderskei veral twee: die Aristoteliaanse en non-Aristoteliaanse drama. Hierby sou ek ook die Middeleeuse drama voeg, aangesien dit onjuis is om te sê dat die klassieke tradisie vanaf die vierde eeu v.C. tot die begin van die twintigste eeu as standaard beskou is.

Die skryfster pas dus haar metode van ontleding aan by die aard van die betrokke drama. By die ouer dramas volg sy 'n struktuuranalitiese metode, soos sy dit ook duidelik stel aan die begin van die opstel oor *Oorlog is oorlog* van Grosskopf. Hier kan Aristoteles se vereistes vir die eenheid van handeling in al hul strengheid gestel word, maar by Uys Krige se eenbedryf *Alle paaie gaan na Rome* moet sy hulle aanpas om die fundamentele eenheid van die episodiese intrige aan te toon. Dieselfde geld vir Fagan se *Ousus* waar daar nie die tradisionele eenheid van tyd is nie. By die meer moderne dramas besef sy dat sy ander metodes moet gebruik. *Die keiser* van Bartho Smit behandel sy veral as tragikomedie en beklemtoon die naasmekaarpasing van komiese en ernstige tonele. By Van Wyk Louw se *Die pluimsaad waai ver* en *Kanna hy kô hystoe* van Adam Small behandel sy die "epiese" elemente in hierdie dramas soos die losse struktuur, die rol van die verteller, die deurbreking van die illusie van werklikheid en die strewe om die toeskouer aan die dink te sit.

By al hierdie besprekings val die hoofklem op bou en karakteruitbeelding, maar ander elemente word nie verwaarloos nie. Die skryfster sê telkens interessante dinge oor die taalgebruik en die woordpatrone in die betrokke dramas, byvoorbeeld by *Oorlog is oorlog* of *Ousus*. Intertekstuele verbande word ook telkens aangetoon veral by die bespreking van *Kanna hy kô, hystoe*. Omdat die skryfster hierdie dramas veral as literêre werke behandel, word daar nie so baie aandag aan die nie-literêre elemente soos dekor en kostumering gegee nie, maar by geleentheid word hulle tog bespreek, veral by *Ousus* waar sy daarop wys hoe die rekwisiete dien om die mens in sy ruimte te teken. Ook by *Kanna* kry hierdie elemente heelwat aandag.

By al die waardevolle insigte wat hierdie besprekings bied, is daar tog enkele aspekte wat hinder. Die skryfster hanteer begrippe met 'n sekere gebrek aan soepelheid wat dikwels tot alte dogmatiese uitsprake lei. Terwyl sy aan die een kant ontken dat Vondel 'n tragikus is, is sy aan die ander kant alte gereed om *Oorlog is oorlog* as 'n "tragiese drama volgens Aristoteliaanse beginsels" te beskryf en sy praat ook van "die hartklop van ware tragiek" by *Ousus*. Dieselfde geld vir die maklike manier waarop sy die *hamartia* van hoofkarakters identifiseer. Verder is daar ook 'n hinderlike neiging tot moralisering. Daar word breed uitgewei oor die hoë morele waardes wat Rachel en die Engelse soldaat aanhang sodat die eg menslike situasie naderhand op die agtergrond raak. Die ergste geval is seker die "les" wat uit *Kanna hy kô hystoe* gehaal word, naamlik "dat die moontlike antwoord op die bruinkleuriges se probleem by Makiet en in haar lewenshouding gevind mag word. In die Christelike liefdesbeoefening kan die bruinman sy pynlike lot besweer" (93). Daarmee hang saam die uitspraak dat hierdie drama vandag nie meer so aktueel is nie omdat die sosio-politieke situasie ingrypend verander het!

Die skryster is bewus daarvan dat verskillende benaderings by dieselfde literêre werk gebruik kon word, en sy gebruik twee dramas van Henriette Grové om dit te demonstreer. In een opstel gee sy 'n semiotiese analise van die eerste twee bladsye van *Die goeie jaar*. Sy probeer aantoon hoe "die sterk deiktiese aard van die taal van 'n drama" dit onderskei van ander genres. As *demonstrasie* is dit interessant, maar by tye is die toepassing van die metode ietwat meganies en 'n mens vra jou af of dit sinvol sal wees om 'n hele drama op so 'n omslagtige manier te ontleed. In die geval van *Ontmoeting by Dwaaldrif* word daar selfs drie benaderings gevolg. Eers ontleed die skryfster die eerste drie bladsye van hierdie drama volgens die eksegetiese metode van die Amerikaanse New Criticism. Die kontras tussen dood en digter as "kontrasterende kontrapuntale motief" is treffend, maar haar variasies op die woord "draai" is buitensporig en word glad nie deur die teks geregverdig nie. Baie vrugbaarder is die volgende afdeling waarin die botsing van verskillende literatuurbeskouinge in die drama aangetoon word. Ten slotte benader die skryfster die drama ook vanuit die resepsie-estetika en probeer nagaan hoe 'n leser daarop sal reageer. Ook hier is die resultate teleurstellend in die sin dat dit nie veel verskil van wat deur 'n strukturele analise bereik kan word nie.

Ten spyte van bogenoemde besware kan hierdie bundel as 'n waardevolle hulpmiddel by die bestudering van die Afrikaanse drama beskou word.

Verwysings

Culler, J. 1975. *Structuralist poetics*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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In Search of Semiotics

David Sless 1986

London & Sydney: Croom Helm

In the preface Sless indicates his intention to provide an introductory text on the subject of semiotics. Intelligibility is promised in the shape of as little obfuscation and technical jargon as possible, and is supposedly likely to emerge from a resolution to the failure of unified critical and empirical assessments of the semiotic phenomenon. It would appear that the value of the text must paradoxically be judged on the grounds of its success at introducing a subject which is itself among the obscurities and jargons which it intends to do away with as optional extras. At the time of publication much of the climate in which semiotics had flourished had already disappeared, and consequently it is also possible to add to the list of requirements for such a text an indication of the decline in status of its subject and views of possible successors.

The chosen format is well suited to the expository nature of the text, with short summaries at the end of each chapter pointing out the progress made towards the promised "discovery" of semiotics, an accessible index, and what would appear to be a fairly representative list of references, considering the scope of the argument.

In the first chapter, appropriately called "What is Semiotics?" Sless indicates his intention "... to redraw the map of semiotics, to provide a new perspective from which to enquire about our world" (Sless, 1986: 2). The rest of the sentence from which the quotation above was drawn refers to the fact that readers already familiar with semiotics might find the approach a little disorientating, since some deliberate modifications are incorporated, and it would appear that the reviewer is decidedly in the category of readers somewhat mystified by this project. In the light of its intended purpose as an introductory text, it is surely perverse to propose extensive modifications to the field about to be illuminated. Very sketchy accounts of Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, Eco, Foucault, and other important contributors are incorporated into what appears to be a communication-biased commentary on what might be considered the "semiotic", with the intention of generating interest in the important capacity of creating and using messages. (Sless, 1986: Preface)

Although a conventional restatement of those well-used introductions by Hawkes (1977), Guiraud (1975), and so forth, to which explicit corrective reference is made (Sless, 1986: 133) is not the intention, it is nevertheless necessary to evaluate the project on the grounds of its own merit.

Unfortunately, the clearest indication of the general orientation of the study emerges from its concluding chapter, in which the "proper role of semiotic research" (Sless, 1986: 146) is dealt with. Here we receive the first indication of the opposition to the linguistic bias in traditional semiotics.

In the early chapters it would appear that the linguistic basis might be replaced by a more broad communication-biased outline, and the thorough and convincing attack on the failure of semiotics to accede to the level of the

scientific (Sless, 1986: Chapter 2) seems to be moving in the same direction. This suggestion is however not borne out, as the next chapter then reverts to very standardized descriptions of semiotic phenomena in terms of ways in which they might be mapped on the text. No clear positioning of the project is possible, since an introduction to concepts basic to a semiotic appreciation of phenomena, such as the sign, is offered very much later in the argument, and then only in a way suitable to the illustration of the weaknesses of the linguistic metaphor.

We are informed that semiotic operations concern "stand for" relations (Sless, 1986: 2). The entire semiotic problem is reduced to the distinction between views of communication in terms of either transmission, or sharing, which do not appear to offer sufficient scope for the appraisal of such nuanced relations. Categories such as that of the reader and the author are used without any clear transition from talk of the broadly semiotic (stamp collection, traffic signs, and so forth) which were dealt with in the introduction and first chapters, to the semiotic in its literary applications. This text-bound understanding of the semiotic is then elaborated in more detail in chapters dealing with the reader (Chapters 4-5), and the author (Chapters 5-7) in the form of an extensive, but allusive account of the formal, Marxist, feminist and Reception-Aesthetical implications. None of these fields of involvement are introduced in a way suitable for uninitiated readers, and nor are they clearly identified.

The following chapters deal with the vexed issue of meaning as raised by the relation of semiotics to the philosophy of language. Although this is admittedly a problem central to the semiotic concern, it is again introduced in a very allusive way, tending to what look like sweeping generalizations, due to the extreme brevity with which highly complicated problems are dealt, and the reductive way in which they are constantly re-introduced to the somewhat simplistic communication model which structures the argument.

The most interesting arguments only seem to emerge from this book in the last chapter, on the possible scope of semiotic investigation, which offers fresh insights on that delineated earlier by Eco as "political boundaries". My quarrel with the cursory nature of the arguments presented here, and their questionable value to uninitiated readers remains, but the suggestion of alternatives to the linguistic metaphor as a basis for jaded semiotic insights is nevertheless highly illuminating.

Reference

Eco, U. 1976. *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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A J Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory

Ronald Schleifer 1987

Beckenham: Croom Helm

In recent years, writings which have their point of departure in French literary theory have become something of a growth industry in the Anglo-American academic world. For some reason, the work of his compatriots Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan. Ronald Schleifer's book fills an important gap in that it is the first comprehensive survey of Greimas' work to appear in English.

Schleifer's is one of the volumes in the Croom Helm series *Critics of the twentieth century*, edited by Christopher Norris. The first volume in the series was *Figuring Lacan*, by Juliet Flower Maccannell, and further volumes to be published include studies of Deleuze, Guattari and Barthes.

Apart from offering an extensive explanation of Greimas' theories, Schleifer seems to be working towards a synthesis, or at least a *rapprochement* of various currents in structuralist and poststructuralist theory and the ideas of Greimas. Chapter I discusses Greimas in the context of general discourse theory. Chapter 2 links *Sémantique structurale* to early structuralist linguistics, especially the Prague School, Bloomfield and Hjelmslev. In chapter 3, Schleifer focuses on the theory of actants, with special reference to Propp's narrative theory as compared to that of Greimas. Chapter 4 discusses Greimas' theory of narrative as exemplified by *Maupassant. La sémiotique du texte: exercices pratiques* and *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*. In the final chapter, Schleifer tries to bring together poststructuralists such as Derrida, Lacan and de Man on the one hand, and Greimas' hard-line brand of semio-structuralism on the other.

An examination of the bibliography gives one the impression that Schleifer has done extensive and thorough research. The bibliography only includes works cited in the text, which of course makes it difficult to detect gaps in his coverage of the field. However, it does seem strange that Anne Hénault's two-volume metatheoretical study on Greimas, *Les enjeux de la sémiotique*, published in 1979 and 1983 by Presses Uiversitaires de France, is not included, and one has to assume that Schleifer is not familiar with it.

As far as style of writing is concerned, this reviewer found Schleifer's prose clear, devoid of pseudo-intellectual obscurity, and fairly readable. He presupposes a good deal of background knowledge on the part of the reader, and the book is not simply an introduction to Greimas à la Fontana Modern Masters.

One could certainly find grounds for criticism in what has been omitted or overlooked. For instance, Schleifer does not question or investigate Lévi-Strauss' assumption, shared by Greimas, that the logical organization in which structure is arrested, is a property of the real. This assumption implies that structure is an essence, an objective given, which only has to be discovered (uncovered).

There seems to be various flaws in this assumption. It is more correct to

view structure not as a passive, pre-existing essence, but as something which is produced by the reader. In his striving for scientific objectivity, Greimas neglects the importance of the subject. One does not really need psychanalysis to know that some elements may be consciously or unconsciously suppressed. Literary analysis, for example in the case of the segmentation of narrative, always implies and involves some degree of arbitrariness.

Secondly, if structure were to be seen as an objective given, it would imply that any structural analysis could be verified according to certain objective criteria. At least as far as narrative analysis is concerned, structuralists have not succeeded in proposing satisfying criteria for verifying their analysis.

A third point of criticism against Greimas, and probably against structuralism in general, which Schleifer does not make clear, is that the structuralists do not fully take into account the fact that both the subject and the text are conditioned by sociopolitical structures, by ideological considerations, and even by psychological factors.

It would also have been interesting if Schleifer could have investigated a possible parallel between the cross-referential organization of the *Dictionnaire raisonné* and the notion of intertextuality. This organization is derived from the premise that the elements of a linguistic structure exist and make sense in relation to one another; each element presupposes the others. In the same way, one could add, each text presupposes other texts, and each reading presupposes other readings of the same and of different texts. Of course, whereas Greimas was trying to systematically describe what he saw as a coherent system, the intertextual dialogue opens up onto infinite regress. This opposition raises interesting questions, such as, is it still possible to give a systematic description of a given literary system, or of a certain oeuvre? Would any such an attempt at description not simply result in an arbitrary reduction?

This brings one to a basic problem, not only with Schleifer, but also with this kind of text in general. One cannot deny Schleifer's competence, yet the fact remains that, at least in the first four chapters, he is dealing with rather familiar material. Moreover, his writing is mainly expository, and he does not seem to add much that is new. In other words, he does not really develop Greimas' ideas into a theory of his own; in fact, he does not even modify or refine them to a meaningful degree.

The final chapter is potentially the most interesting, and it is undoubtedly the most valuable part of the book. In it, Schleifer draws certain parallels between Greimasian semiotics, deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is especially valuable because one can easily fall into the habit of thinking in dismissive terms about structuralism now that the various ramifications of poststructuralism are dominating the scene.

Having conceded this, one has to voice one or two objections. In the first place, in any attempt at a *rapprochement* of Greimas and Derrida, it is surely essential, to also point out the ways in which deconstruction undermines some of Greimas' assumptions. For example, such a discussion has to take into account what deconstruction tells us about the ideal of scientific objectivity and about the status of scientific (or theoretical) discourse *vis-à-vis* its object.

Secondly, although the section on Lacan and de Man is quite enlightening, it does seem strange that Foucault should be omitted from any discussion of power, knowledge and language.

Despite the reservations which have been expressed, it can be repeated in conclusion that Schleifer has produced a competent work, which is especially useful for its synthetic approach and for the sections on Greimas and post-structuralism. It can safely be recommended to those who wish to undertake a specialised study of Greimas.

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Marxism and African Literature

Edited by Georg M Gugelberger 1985

London: James Currey

Whatever else Georg Gugelberger may be criticized for in his collection and editing of the essays in this volume it will not be for setting his sights too low. "What is needed", he declares in his introduction to a collection of essays which sets out to make a contribution to what is needed, "is a salvational or redeeming literary criticism, conscientization rather than 'banking education' (to borrow Paulo Freire's terminology)" (p. vii). In the context of Third World exploitation and oppression literary criticism seems an unlikely conduit to salvation and redemption, but even if, as is probable, readers of this collection come away unredeemed and doubtful about its capacities for widespread conscientization, the time spent reading many of these essays will not have been wasted.

Gugelberger sees the thirteen essays in the volume as falling into three categories: those discussing the development of African literary criticism, literary sociology, and the rise of radical theory; radical readings of selected bourgeois and/or progressive literary texts of various genres; and (I find myself unable to paraphrase because I'm not entirely sure what he means) "those which already come to terms with the issues of modernism and Realism, as in the previous group, but at the same time analyze the increasing tendency to account for the interest in populist literature from orature to populist writers to populist media (journals), praising this development to a certain degree while seeing at the same time its potentially limiting and system-enforcing aspects..."

An alternative way of categorizing these essays would be simply to divide them into those which have a go at Wole Soyinka and those that do not. The former take pride of place in dominating the first half of the collection. Most of the criticism directed at Soyinka is well-founded, it forms a salutary counter-balance to the often adulatory screeds written in response to his Nobel Prize for Literature, and Soyinka could have expected some kind of concerted response to his rather rash 1980 dismissal of Marxist criticism as

“radical chic-ism” (though most of the essays collected here were produced well before that date), but Soyinka could not be accused of paranoia if he were to feel that part of the *raison d’être* of this collection was the mounting of an exercise in Soyinka-bashing.

The opening essays, by Gugelberger himself and Omafume Onoge (two essays), on the development of African literary sociology and criticism provide a valuable and provocative (for Marxist literary critics as well as others) outline of the field, though Gugelberger is arguably taking on too much for a single essay in attempting to “look at the development of modernism in relation to Marxism while extending the implications of this development to Africa. . .” (p. 3).

There follow three essays with a common structure in which the work of a progressive writer is contrasted with that of a writer described in at least one case (Hunt on Soyinka) as “radically conservative”: Geoffrey Hunt sets the aesthetics of Soyinka up against those of Cabral; Biodun Jeyifo compares Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* with Ebrahim-Hussein’s play about the Maji-Maji rebellion, *Kinjeketile*, and finds himself having to engage with the question of literary value in a context in which the aesthetically successful work is seen as politically reactionary; and Tunde Fatunde explores the way working people are imaged in novels by Iyayi and Ouologuem. All three are good essays but Hunt’s is particularly fine. He argues that romanticism is the dominant feature of culture on the artistic plane in a society “under transition to capitalist economic structure and bourgeois legal-political superstructure” (p. 64) and locates Soyinka very convincingly within the romantic tradition. In the process he arrives at a formulation which is worth quoting for the succinctness with which it captures the essence of the attack on Soyinka mounted in this collection:

The “return to the source” in Soyinka’s universe is an escapist response, an attempt to recapture tradition which can only take place in the realm of pure consciousness. Meanwhile, the masses of working people in Nigeria go on as before, unable even to read the books which Soyinka writes in florid English. (p.89)

The second half of the collection contains three essays on individual writers, two on Ngugi and one on Ekwensi, and four essays which provide very welcome surveys of some of the less familiar geographical corners of the field of African literature: Urhobo Song-Poetry; the ideology of *Staffrider* in South Africa; poetry and resistance in Mozambique; and Angolan literature.

The essays on individual works are notably the least convincing area of this collection. Grant Kamenju’s essay “*Petals of Blood*” as a mirror of the African Revolution consists of little more than a string of quotations from Marx and Lenin juxtaposed with a string of quotations from Ngugi, with very little analysis or attempt to argue a link between Ngugi’s thought and that of Marx and Lenin. Peter Nazareth’s “The Second Homecoming: Multiple Ngugis in *Petals of Blood*” is tantalising in its recognition of conflicting ideological determinants at work on Ngugi’s text and makes some excellent

points, but it is surprisingly unselective in its choice of critical authorities, fails adequately to justify such spectacular assertions as “Ngugi is the most Christian writer Africa has produced” (p.120), and constantly falls back on normative aesthetic judgements which appear to betray literary critical leanings which are rather more traditional than one might expect from an essay billed as a “radical reading”.

Nazareth’s second essay, an exercise in the critical rehabilitation of Cyprian Ekwensi focusing on *Survive the Peace*, reads like a long review predicated on the same set of normative criteria, but it is nothing if not novel in employing those criteria to set accepted critical wisdom on its head and re-establish Ekwensi as “the man most responsible for the growth and development of modern African literature” (p.165).

Russell Hamilton’s essay on Angolan literature, Chris Searle’s on poetry in Mozambique and Godini Darah’s on Urhobo Song-Poetry are interesting and informative and will find an automatic place in select bibliographies of the literature or orature of their respective areas of specialisation.

The final essay in the volume, Michael Vaughan’s “Literature and Populism in South Africa: Reflections on the Ideology of *Staffrider*” is one of the finest in the book, both in the incisiveness of its analysis of the body of literature it covers and in its development of the theoretical argument in relation not just to populist literature but also to the major theoretical preoccupation which informs the majority of these essays: the race/class opposition as it manifests itself at the level of cultural production. This seems to me the one essay in the collection which unquestionably extends the boundaries of our theoretical understanding of the field covered.

This collection as a whole is a valuable, though uneven, addition to the corpus of African literary criticism, even if it is unable to live up to the claims made for it by Gugelberger’s introduction. If it is cause for some satisfaction it is also, however, occasion for depression. Given the enormous growth of the African literary criticism industry over the past twenty years, and given the lip-service paid to the relation of African literature to its social context, it is depressing to find that a collection of essays on African literature by materialist critics published in 1985 has to draw so heavily on essays written in several instances as many as ten years earlier. Nor is it encouraging to find two critics having to be represented twice in a volume which contains a mere thirteen essays. Either Gugelberger has not explored the field of Marxist literary criticism exhaustively enough, or this collection, for all the quality of some of its essays, bears indirect testimony to the hegemony within African literary criticism of bourgeois critical aesthetics, determined by colonial and neocolonial educational and political structures.

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