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BLACKSTAGE

In this issue the authors try to situate African drama in history and in relation with European drama. This attempt gives, in view of the complexity of the subject, rise to several approaches. The articles by L. De Vos, P. Wymeersch, P. De Bruyne and R. Vandenbrande are rather general reflections on theatre, while K. Pelsmaekers, A. Lefevere, L. Delcourte and A. Dillen start from a given play to approach the subject. J. Pauwels uses the two perspectives.

A EUROPEAN READING OF AFRICAN THEATRE — L. De Vos

Besides a short historical survey of African drama, an explanation about it and its authenticity, L. De Vos defines African drama as "literarily oriented, dramatically structured and authentic in intention and manifestation." This definition seems too rigid for the matter discussed because African drama is not always dramatically structured, it often lacks a well-defined plot. Furthermore, does drama have to be literarily oriented? What to do with the nonverbal forms of experimental improvising theatre? On the other hand, the definition given by Soyinka seems too vague. Soyinka sees drama as the loading of an energetic, which is formally and historically modelled, but at the same time flexible. Are these features specific for drama? Does the whole spectrum of art not fit in this given frame?

MYTHIC RITUAL IN AFRICA, THERAPY OF THEATRE IN THE MAKING? —
P. Wymeersch

Wymeersch approaches theatre from an anthropological angle and relates it with ritual and psychotherapy. He enumerates a few causal explanations of myth, describes the main different rituals (transition, healing, intensification, teleological, inversion) and emphasizes the social impact of ritual as well as therapy. Both are expressions of the need for belonging to a group and the (unconscious) fear of losing contact with

that group. The author agrees that, when making a historical study of drama, it is necessary to keep in mind the link between drama and ritual. A separation of the two would limit the field they cover. According to Wymeersch the difference between drama and ritual lies in the fact that in drama the participants play a role, while in ritual they incorporate that role. But how can you determine whether someone is playing a role or whether he really IS that role? Is theatre of the absurd (Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov) drama or ritual? Are the plays of Grotowski and Brook, which aim at a trance with the spectator, drama or ritual? Is ritual always ritual in the way Wymeersch defines it? Once again the definitions seem too rigid for subjects as drama, ritual and perhaps art in general.

OBA WAJA — THE KING IS DEAD. MODERN AFRICAN FOLK THEATRE
AS A PROLONGATION OF AUTOCHTHONIC, TRADITIONAL FORMS —

J. Pauwels

J. Pauwels gives a survey of different kinds of African drama and their interrelation, whereafter he talks about the Yoruba Folk Opera in Nigeria, its historical evolution and its characteristics. He also tries to define the distinction between ritual and theatre by asserting that in ritual the effects of the actions are situated outside the performance, while in theatre cause and effect are part of the performance. Is political theatre, which aims at effects outside the performance, a ritual? The author then discusses *Oba Waja*, a play written by Duro Ladipo and based upon an incident in 1946 in Oyo (Nigeria). According to the tradition, the *Commander of the King's Horse* has to commit ritual suicide a certain time after the death of the king. A British police officer prevents this suicide and causes commotion within both black and white community. Pauwels discusses the psychological, dramatic, rhythmic, melodic construction, the time-concepts, the language (metaphors, repetitions...) and concludes that the Yoruba Folk Opera forces the Western reader to invoke extra-literary sources in order to understand form and content of this kind of theatre.

THE TRIAL OF DEDAN KIMATHI. A HYMN ON THE MASSES —

K. Pelsmaekers

Pelsmaekers explains in her article why East African theatre is more committed than West African theatre. The rigid structures in East Africa led to a hard reaction which found its way on stage. An example of this commitment is the play written by Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Micare Githae Mugo. It's an anticolonial piece in which power and abuse of power are accused and in which the persons are metaphors rather than psychologically drawn characters.

SOYINKA'S "DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN" — A. Lefevere

This play relates the same events as "Oba Waja". A. Lefevere deals with the dilemma of the African writer, the choice between English and an African language as bearer of the dramatic message. Soyinka's vision on culture and cultural interaction, on the pro's and contra's of belonging to different cultures is discussed and A. Lefevere concludes that the existing tension between function and individual in a culture can lead to the destruction of both function and individual.

"SONG OF A GOAT" — L. Delcourte, A. Dillen

L. Delcourte and A. Dillen compare Clark's *Song of a Goat* with *Oedipus*. Zifa, a fisher, has become impotent and sends his wife, Ebieri, to a massagist. He thus tries to accuse her of the fact that they can't get children any more. But the massagist discovers the truth and advises Ebieri to take another husband. She refuses the advice. One day Ebieri seduces Tonye, Zifa's younger brother. When Zifa discovers this, he wants to kill Tonye. Tonye commits suicide. Zifa feels guilty, confesse his impotence in public and drowns himself in the river. Ebieri has a miscarriage. The structure of the play, the persons, the notion of curse and even the title refer to Greek drama, but the absence of music and dance makes it a modern Ijaw work with typical proverbs and metaphors which hinder the Western reader in his effort to understand the play.

THE USE OF A THEATRE PATTERN IN THE STUDY OF SCIENCE MAKING AND PEDAGOGY IN AFRICA AND WESTERN EUROPE — K. Vandenbrande

Vandenbrande compares the organisational structure of theatre, pedagogy and science, and uncovers an essential opposition between African and Western European science, pedagogy and theatre. In Western Europe the makers are completely integrated in society and the performance creates a gap between public and performer. In Africa the makers constitute a socially separated group and the performance throws a bridge between public and performer/maker.

MOUSSEMS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES — P. De Bruyne

Since 1980, Moroccan immigrants organize a European Moussem (countryfeast) in different countries every year. De Bruyne indicates that Moroccan theatre exists and that it has important social and aesthetic values. It clearly shows the evolution between Moroccan and European culture, the selfconsciousness of the immigrants and their politization.

L. Vermeersch, Ghent