

(cuts, pauses, silences) employed so that repetitions do not reproduce the same but rupture the camera's tendency to valorize the natural world (in effect, the dominant ideology).

Lest Trinh's Barthesian tendencies be construed as an idealization typical of a universalizing late capitalism that further entrenches the status quo, the interventionist character of her project becomes clear in her discussion of women's writing, particularly in the essay, "L'Innécriture: Unwriting/Inmost Writing," which appears in the very centre of the book. Here she claims that the Barthesian aesthetic (read through Hélène Cixous's work) will urge women's writing beyond a mere reaction to male subjectivity and lead it to a fruitful exploitation of the doubleness created by domination. Such a writing will be a writing of the body rather than self-expression, a text of screams and silences that features (quoting Cixous) "a wrenching, a launching of self, a diving" (140) and that creates a space which is "fluid, distended, overabundant" and unclassifiable, with a centre "everywhere and a periphery nowhere" (142). The result will be an avoidance of the reductive impulse to establish an equivalency with men and a bypassing of male predilections for erasure of difference and specialization.

Trinh's version of French post-structuralist theory, then, has a decided and specific political character. It can be read beside the various strategies put forward by other women theorists of the subject, such as those collected in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 1992). Trinh's familiarity with the upper echelons of academe has not erased her position of marginality and Otherness but only supplemented it. Perhaps her greatest contribution is not only to critique academe but to transform it in ways that make it more empowering.

JOHN LEBLANC

Werner Sollors, ed. *The Return of Thematic Criticism*. Harvard English Studies 18. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. \$34.50, \$15.95 pb.

Did "thematic criticism" ever depart? Werner Sollors notes in an excellent introduction that with the transition from modernism to postmodernism, thematics seemingly disappeared only to re-appear under a new guise. Themes such as "love," "death," and "initiation" have been extended to "regionalism," "motifs," and "the absurd," and then into further subdivisions. Thus, "initiation" has been redefined within the postmodern context of "sexuality," and then further categorized as male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. Moreover, at this point, the subjects of "pure" literature have been transformed into a study of society and its values, or into the experience of reading as a form of personal consciousness. Given this context, the philosophical problem of literature that Sollors and his contributors address, in effect, is whether the cognitive values of a specific "theme" predetermine the

meaning of the reading experience, or are actually—as they seemed to have been conceived under modernism—concepts that derive from literature even as literature supposedly refers mimetically to life.

In response to this philosophical problem, Sollors has edited sixteen original contributions and translations of recent essays by an international group of scholars. The first six essays treat the history and theoretical fundamentals of thematics, and draw upon notions of “theme” derived from Russian film theory, French phenomenology, narratology, the Frankfurt School, psychoanalytic criticism, Proppian folklore studies, among other approaches. Menachem Brinker asserts the importance of “theme” to “interpretation,” and best presents the philosophical problem of cognitive predetermination in the process of reading. Nancy Armstrong gives “A Brief Genealogy of Theme,” in which the formalism of modernism devoured “thematics” and summoned a postmodernist response. Claude Bremond summarizes in “Concept and Theme” his long interest in the procedures by which “concepts” become “themes” in a specific work. Yuri K. Shcheglov provides a theory of thematics demonstrated by the techniques of film which sees “theme” as the complement to the “gaps” inherent in the unfolding visual form. Theodor Wolpers analyzes “Motif and Theme as Structural Content Units and ‘Concrete Universals’” and relates them to a process of argumentation. Michel Vanhelleputte in “The Concept of Motif in Literature: A Terminological Study” endeavors to show how the term “motif,” derived from musicology, subjects situations in literature to various considerations in the dynamics of literary art, as it actually does in a musical composition.

In ten additional essays, the actual practices of thematics criticism and several case studies are presented by such notable theorists as Lynn Wardley, David Perkins, Thomas Pavel, Holger Klein, Harry Levin, Francesco Orlando, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Leon Somville, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Theodore Ziolkowski, as they treat topics such as Shakespeare, the nineteenth-century novel, “bachelors” and “maids,” and Wagner’s *Parsifal*. The essays here demonstrate how the “praxis” of criticism compels the critical reader to adopt varying notions of “theme” pragmatically to make texts “meaningful.” The essays also touch upon certain limitations of varying approaches associated with postmodernism (the limits of modernism are passé), such as when Thomas Pavel scrutinizes the theoretical thinness of new historicist readings of Shakespeare.

Such essays, poised with self-criticism, are the most effective and enlightening essays in the volume. However, there is no final resolution to the philosophical problem noted above, as thematics has been complicated by a subtle sea change. Indeed, so subtle is this change that behind each essay—unannounced but unmistakably present—lurks a larger problem of literary theory. That is, built into the radical postmodernist thematicists’ use of the term “theme” as an analytic term to

deconstruct texts is an assumption that such deconstructions can enlighten one about life, society, and human values, which could not be mimetically represented within modernism. If language is a form of ideological construct, then how does a text bespeak a reality that is not coded? As for the more conservative thematicists, they seem reluctant to delve into the grey area of a reader-response approach, trusting that personal responses are the building blocks of an empirical verification of universal "themes." What both parties have in common is a focus to define what allows readers to trust a text to be a worthy construction about life and not merely an indulgence in personal consciousness.

With this in mind, this study of thematics opens up afresh the problems of literary theory. It should lead to a review of how one defines "universals" and authorial intentions in any application to literary analysis. It also might be an impetus to re-examine the history of postmodernist theory which has co-opted one aspect of thematics in response to modernism but appears to have blithely ignored what remains problematic.

JOHN STEPHEN MARTIN

Chris Dunton. *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English Since 1970*. London: Hans Zell, 1992. pp. 215. np.

Until the publication of *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English Since 1970* there was no comprehensive and concise book by one hand to offer comprehensive information on Nigerian Drama in English. Three earlier books in the field to rival it—*Theatre in Africa* (Ibadan, 1978) edited by Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele, and *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos, 1981) edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi do contain useful material, but they are not confined in their focus to English-language drama, and besides that, they are now in dire need of updating. On its part, Michael Etherton's 1982 ground-breaking study, *The Development of African Drama* (London: Hutchinson), employs a thoughtful, insider's perspective to amass, explore, and analyze material on the nature, context, and function of the drama of Africa; however, the continental scope he adopted meant that he could not carry out any detailed national studies. Chris Dunton's book therefore meets a real need in bringing together in one volume such a large body of information on recent Nigerian drama in English hitherto hidden in local newspapers and in the pages of journals and books around the world.

Although the reader might quarrel with the book's self-consciously foggy title—just what hard facts are being unearthed is never made clear—the text as a whole is valuable and welcome. Dunton first notes the existence of a variety of dramatic forms in indigenous Nigerian languages antecedent to the English-language drama. He traces the origins of the recent surge of interest in English-language dramatic production in Nigeria to the efforts being made at the universities by