

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

trained activists who both draw their themes and techniques from the indigenous Nigerian dramas and also adapt the techniques and ideas of imported texts. Included for study are the better-known new generation Nigerian playwrights Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Kole Omotoso, Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, Olu Obafemi, Tunde Fatunde, Akanji Nasiru, and Segun Oyekunle. Dunton writes with sympathetic insight and probing analysis on the efforts being made by a good number of these drama activists to wean their art from the university campuses and create independent, experimental theatres in their search to address the broader Nigerian public. In the course of showing how this led to the birth of semi-professionalism or professionally commercialized companies located in the big cities, the author creates a fine theatre history. He not only discusses the educational background, careers, and the ideas about art held by each playwright but also analyzes each writer's published works in relation to critical comments on and audience response to actual productions.

One could have wished that some of the equally talented and up-and-coming but largely neglected figures such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, Bode Osanyin, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, Sola Osofisan, and Femi Akintunde—neglected only in terms of being less featured in published literature—were included. Nonetheless, the book is appealing in a number of ways. It relies on information corroborated with theatre practitioners both within and outside Nigeria, and on Dunton's direct acquaintance with some of the playwrights as well. Concise chapters each devoted in turn to one of the ten playwrights, detailed notes, a long bibliography that includes many local sources, and an accurate index are some of the book's other noteworthy features that should appeal to the international readership interested in the contemporary English-language drama of Nigeria.

Despite the lacuna deriving from the absence of a concluding chapter, *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English Since 1970* is a crucial addition to the field of African theatre scholarship. Highly informative, full of intelligent judgement, heightened textual analysis, up to date, compact, and elegantly expressed, the book is highly recommended to all scholars and students of African drama and the general reader alike.

ODE S. OGEDE

Michael Schmidt. *Reading Modern Poetry*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. pp. 128. \$62.50; \$17.50 pb.

It would be both easy and tempting for a North American reviewer to dismiss this book. Michael Schmidt sets sail on the wide, stormy seas of modern poetry in an extremely light craft: 128 pages from stem to stern, with no ballast of footnotes, no auxiliary theoretical engine, and a