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African Theatre

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
& Wole Soyinka



African Theatre

13

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Notes on Contributors

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Biodun Jeyifo is Emeritus Professor of English at Cornell University and Professor of African American Studies and of Comparative Literature at Harvard University. He was educated at the University of Ibadan (B.A.) and New York University (M.A., Ph.D.). He has taught at the University of Ibadan and the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (both in Nigeria) and at Oberlin College and Cornell University in the USA. He has lectured widely in Africa, Europe, North America and Asia. He has also served as an External Examiner in several African, European, Canadian, Caribbean and South Asian universities. Biodun Jeyifo has published many books, monographs and essays on Anglophone African and Caribbean writings, drama, Marxist and postcolonial literary and cultural studies. *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism* won one of the American Library Association's Outstanding Academic Texts (OATS) awards for 2005. The two-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought* which Professor Jeyifo co-edited with Professor Abiola Irele was published in 2010. He is presently completing a monograph on 'Nollywood', the national video film industry of Nigeria.

Ketu H. Katrak, originally from Bombay, is Professor in the Department of Drama at the University of California, Irvine. Katrak has published widely in the fields of African Drama, Indian Dance, and Postcolonial Literature and Theory. She is the author of *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy* (Greenwood, 1986), *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers* (Rutgers UP,

2006), and *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Katrak is the recipient of a Bunting Fellowship (Radcliffe/Harvard), and a Fulbright Research Award.

David Kerr has lived most of his adult life in Southern Africa (working at universities in Malawi, Zambia and Botswana) where he practises theatre for human rights and social transformation. He has written widely on the topic (especially his book, *African Popular Theatre*) and has also published plays, a novel, stories and poetry.

Fredrick Mbogo teaches at Moi University's Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies from where he received a PhD after a dissertation on the interaction of aesthetics and pedagogy in popular drama on Kenyan television. Previously he received a Master of Arts degree in dramatic arts from the University of Witwatersrand. While at Wits he directed the play *I Will Marry When I Want*. He has directed other plays in both South Africa and Kenya in such venues at Wits Amphitheatre in Johannesburg, the Alliance Française and Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi as well as in other towns in Kenya.

Mũgo Mũhĩa teaches in Kenyatta University and specializes in Folklore, African Literature, Theory of Literature and Eco-criticism. He holds a PhD and B.Ed from Egerton University, Kenya, and an MA from the University of Nairobi.

Silvia Namussasi has been with The Theatre Company since 2011 and has been a facilitator at the *Story Moja Hay Festival Children's Theatre Workshop*, *Caroline Wambui Children's Home Theatre Workshop* and *Naro Moru Home* for the disabled, assisting colleagues in the project *Sanaa Ponyevu (Healing Art)*. She has performed in *Kimbia*, based on Kenyan Athletes, for which Silvia and her colleagues travelled to Eldoret for a hands- (and feet-) on experience and research to develop the play. She has also featured in *Shungwaya* and *Wanawake wa Heri wa Winsa* among other productions.

Gĩchingiri Ndigĩrigĩ is an Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His most recent work on Ngũgĩ has appeared in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o* and *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. He was the Guest Editor for *Mũtiiri* (8). His edited collection of essays on the African dictator novel is forthcoming from the University of Tennessee Press.

Tunde Onikoyi teaches Film Production and Studies in Digital Culture in the School of Visual and Performing Arts, Kwara State University, Malete-Ilorin, Nigeria.

Tunji Oyelana is a multi-talented artist – a guitarist, actor, dancer, singer, composer, band leader, impresario – based in London. He is the founder and

leader of the musical group *The Benders*, which has featured in many of Wole Soyinka's plays and films.

Oby Obyerodhyambo has taught literature at Kenyatta and Nairobi Universities. He is the author of several plays: *Positive Identity*, *Kit Mikayi*, *Drumbeats on Kerenyaga*, *Wanjiku's Dilemma*, *Striped Leopard*, and *La Femme Fatale* which have been performed in Kenya since 1986. He has acted and directed as a member of the Kenyatta University Creative and Performing Arts Centre and University of Nairobi's Free Travelling Theatre. Currently he works in the field of Public Health, using community theatre for mobilization and education.

Obituary

Yulisa Amadu Maddy

(27 December 1936–16 March 2014)

Yulisa Amadu Maddy, known as ‘Pat Maddy’, was a Sierra Leonean playwright, theatre company creator and director who had a major impact on theatre in Sierra Leone, and made contributions to theatre in the United Kingdom, Nigeria and Zambia.

Born in Freetown and educated at St Edward’s Secondary School, Maddy travelled to Britain in 1958 where he trained at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama. His play, *Yon Kon (Clever Thief)* was broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme and in the African Theatre slot on the African Service (21 February 1965). He worked as an actor in London, playing Chief-in-Town in the 1965 production of Soyinka’s *The Road*. However, at some point after the 1965 production Maddy moved to Denmark, where he worked in radio and had a book of poetry translated and published: *Ny afrikansk prosa* (1969). The radio play mentioned above, together with *Obasai (Over Yonder)*, *Alla Gbah (The Big Man)* and *Gbana-Bendu (Tough Guy)*, were brought together in *Obasai and Other Plays* and published in Heinemann’s African Writers Series (1968). Some of his work, such as *If Wishes Were Horses* (broadcast by the BBC (27 November 1963) remains unpublished, but *Life Everlasting* can be found in Cosmo Pieterse’s collection of *Short African Plays* (1972).

Back in Sierra Leone at the end of the ‘sixties, Maddy became Head of Radio Drama. Prompted by the vital role he ascribed to the arts, he founded ‘Gbakanda Afrikan Tiata’. ‘Gbakanda’, meaning ‘strength or endurance’, was intended ‘to bring all the arts together into a living reality for the people of Africa’ and it came to life in the different countries in which Maddy worked. 1970 found him working in Zambia, where he prepared the Zambian National Dance Troupe for the Montreal World’s Fair (1970) and for Expo ’70 in Osaka. The challenge of working in Lusaka proved considerable and Michael Etherton, his patron who was already established in Lusaka, has referred to the difficulties Maddy had in ‘coming to terms with the theatre’ there (quoted in Currey, 2008: 83). After Expo ’70, Maddy worked for a year in Osaka as a dance-theatre director, but by 1973 he was visible once again in London, where he directed *Gbana-Bendu* at the Keskids Centre, Islington.

Maddy had submitted a novel, *No Past, No Present, No Future*, to Heinemann Educational Publishers and, according to James Currey, had 'responded to a series of tough reports on the text'. As a result, it joined his collection of plays in the African Writers Series (1973). During the mid-seventies, Maddy returned to Sierra Leone where he was both given weighty responsibilities and harassed because of his social concerns. According to David Kerr, the authorities objected to his 1976 play, *Big Berrin (Big Burying)*, which showed 'the brutality and degradation resorted to by the inhabitants of an urban slum' (Kerr, 1995: 251). During 1977, Maddy was Director of the Sierra Leone Dance Troupe and led the company to Lagos where it participated in the major cultural gathering of that year, Festac '77. On his return to Sierra Leone, he was imprisoned.

Eventually released, his health impaired as a result of torture, Maddy went into exile, moving initially to England where he re-established his theatre company. Gbakanda took *Pulse*, 'a psycho-political satire' by the Asmara-born Ethiopian Alem Mezgebe, to the Edinburgh Festival where it won a Fringe First Award.

The year 1980 found Maddy in Nigeria where he taught drama at the University of Ibadan and, once again, established Gbakanda Afrikan Tiata. A note in the programme for the group's first Nigerian outing reads in part: '... [Maddy's] approach [to re-establishing Gbakanda] was so unorthodox it quite frankly shocked many people, especially those in the Premier University (Ibadan). He did not limit his contacts to established drama groups or professional actors; he merely collected his actors as he found them.' The inevitably uneven group he gathered made its Ibadan debut with a double-bill consisting of *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Pulse*. This was followed by *Big Breeze Blowin* (July 1980), a domestic drama by Maddy set among members of the African Diaspora living in South West London. The play involves both psychological and physical violence and ends with the stabbing of a policeman. During May 1981, and reflecting its broad cultural remit, Gbakanda promoted an exhibition of art work by Tunde Allen-Taylor in Ibadan.

During the last two decades, Maddy spent extended periods in the USA where he was at one point a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Maryland as well as spending a period of time at Morgan State University. Briefly, it can be said that he enjoyed an academic career in the course of which he published works with Donnarae MacCann on images of Africa, and on neo-imperialism in children's books

Maddy returned to Sierra Leone in 2007 to continue his research into the country's cultural heritage. He died in Choithram Memorial Hospital, Freetown, on 16 March 2014. The programme note by 'F.D.' from which I have already quoted provides a sentence that is worth reproducing here: 'Wherever he went Pat Maddy ... left two vivid and lasting impressions – that of a theatrical gadfly, a constant centre of controversy, questioning, probing, demanding, and that of a highly polished, versatile and successful performer and director.' He is remembered by many who were touched by his writing and by Gbakanda Afrikan Tiata.

(In preparing the above I have used the following sources: Maddy's novel, published with Heinemann (1973); James Currey's *Africa Writes Back* (2008); Simon Gikandi's *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (2003), and David Kerr's *African Popular Theatre* (1995). I have also drawn on the programmes prepared for Gbakanda Afrikan Tiata productions in London and Ibadan. It is to be hoped that more extensive research with access to records of Maddy's work in different countries will be encouraged and, in due course, published.)

James Gibbs

Introduction

MARTIN BANHAM, FEMI OSOFISAN
& Guest Editor KIMANI NJOGU

The editorial team of *African Theatre* welcome Professor Kimani Njogu as a guest editor of this volume, which is devoted to the theatre of Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Kimani Njogu, formerly of Kenyatta University, is now an independent scholar, Director of Twaweza Communications in Nairobi, and publisher of *Jahazi*, a journal of the arts, culture and performance. He has brought us his wide range of contacts amongst the theatre community of Kenya, and his deep knowledge of the theatre of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Femi Osofisan, of the core editorial team, has brought together the material on the theatre of Wole Soyinka.

This volume opens with contributions from two of the most distinguished contemporary scholars of African theatre, David Kerr and Biodun Jeyifo. Kerr offers a personal response to the influence that both Soyinka and Ngũgĩ had on him as both scholar and practitioner. Biodun Jeyifo offers a preview of what is destined to be a major monograph, suggesting that although there are differences between Soyinka and Ngũgĩ as theatre theorists, there are strong resonances between them.

We then turn to individual encounters with the plays of Soyinka and Ngũgĩ. Tunji Oyelana, in discussion with Sola Adeyemi, talks of his long association with Soyinka, from the days of the Orisun Theatre in the 1960s, through the Nigerian civil war, and up to the present day. His own contribution to Soyinka's theatre through his work as a composer and musician has been of the greatest significance. What follows are three experiences of working with Soyinka's theatre: Tunde Onikoyi on the challenge of a 'neophyte' staging *The Beatification of Area Boy*, Bisi Adigun on his 'pentecostalization' of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and Silviah Namussasi on adapting and staging *The Lion and the Jewel* in Mombasa. Turning to Ngũgĩ, it is not surprising that in the contributions of Mũgo Mũhĩa, Oby Obyerodhyambo and Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ the discussion focuses on Ngũgĩ and the Kamĩrĩĩthũ experience – an episode in the contemporary theatrical history of East African theatre that still resonates. Finally, Frederick Mbogo relishes the experience and describes the challenges of staging *I Will Marry When I Want* in South Africa.