

Reviews/Film Festival

***Dürrenmatt Misanthropy
In an African Setting***

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN**

Anyone can be bought if the price is right. That is the message of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's viciously misanthropic drama "The Visit," in which a woman buys an entire town in order to wreak revenge on the lover who betrayed her decades earlier. In "Hyenas," Djibril Diop Mambety's pungent film adaptation of the story, the setting has been moved from Europe to Africa.

Although the film by the Senegalese director keeps the outlines of the Dürrenmatt play intact, the change of locale lends the tale a new political dimension. The vengeance that the richest woman in the world brings to the dusty African village of her birth is an avalanche of irresistible Western paraphernalia that will certainly eradicate the area's tribal culture.

The desert town of Colobane is so destitute that in the movie's opening scene its ramshackle city hall is repossessed. Its social center is a scantily stocked market run by its most popular resident, Dramaan Drameh (Mansour Diouf), a jolly white-bearded grocer who keeps his cronies happy by doling out glasses of cheap wine.

The village would probably go on wasting away on the fringe of the Sahara were it not for the triumphal return of Linguère Ramatou (Ami Diakhate), a woman who left the town in disgrace 30 years earlier. Linguère, who was Dramaan's lover at the time, has mysteriously emerged as the world's richest woman. The townspeople, hoping that she will end their poverty, fall over themselves to offer her a welcome-home banquet.

Though Dramaan is married, he woos Linguère obsequiously, ignoring the fact that she is now a stone-faced hag with a prosthetic leg and hand. At the height of the celebration, she announces that she intends to donate "one hundred thousand millions to the town." But there is a catch. She produces witnesses who swear that 30 years ago Dramaan paid them to testify that they had slept with her so he could deny the paternity of her unborn child. Before the town can get its reward, Dramaan must pay with his life.

Deeply insulted, the townspeople at first side with the grocer. But as greed eats away at their souls, their

Hyenas

Written and directed by Djibril Diop Mambety, adapted from Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play "The Visit" (in Wolof with English subtitles); director of photography, Matthias-KSlin; edited by Loredana Cristelli; music by Wasis Diop; produced by Pierre-Alain Meier and Alain Rozanes. At Alice Tully Hall as part of the 30th New York Film Festival. Running time: 110 minutes. This film has no rating.

Dramaan Drameh.....	Mansour Dteuf
Linguère Ramatou.....	Ami Diakhate
The Mayor.....	Mahouredia Gueye
The Teacher.....	Issa Ramagelissa Samb
Toko.....	Kaoru Egushi
Gaana.....	Djibril Diop Mambety
An Amazon.....	Hanny Tchelléy
The Head of Protocol.....	Omar

mood slowly shifts. The men in the town soon begin sporting fashionable yellow shoes from Burkina Faso. Truckloads of electric fans, air* conditioners, refrigerators and television sets arrive.

The more spoiled the townspeople become, the more luxuries they insist that Dramaan sell them on credit. In the film's most surreal moment, Linguère imports a carnival complete with a ferris wheel, fireworks and ads for Pepsi posted everywhere. The town goes delirious with the cheap thrills.

"Hyenas," which will be shown at Alice Tully Hall tonight at 9 and tomorrow at 4:15 P.M. as part of the New York Film Festival, inflects the grim drama with an edge of carnival humor. That may explain why the central performances are not very gripping. Ami Diakhate's Linguère, though imposingly grotesque, is something less than the fearsome apotheosis of revenge. And when she declaims the play's key lines — "The world made a whore of me; I want to turn the world into a whorehouse"—they ring slightly flat. Mr. Diouf's Dramaan behaves more like a victimized village idiot than the African equivalent of a petit bourgeois storekeeper betrayed by his friends as well as by every social institution* from the justice system to the church.

But even done so lightly, the film still carries a sting. And its symbolism is enriched by frequent shots of fiery-eyed hyenas restlessly stalking the outskirts of the town like evil spirits alert to the scent of decay.