

Sony-Ciano Soyinka, Two of a Kind: A Stylo-Linguistic Analysis of Selected Works of Wole Soyinka and Sony Labou Tansi

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ABSTRACT This paper establishes the level of influence of Wole Soyinka's literary works on Sony Labou Tansi's. The two writers, separated by their colonial and linguistic backgrounds, Anglophone and Francophone, have many things in common. They are both African writers. They share the same experience of colonialism and especially post-colonial Africa which is characterized by corruption, dictatorship, poverty, struggle, revolt and incarceration. They are both playwrights, novelists, poets and human rights activists. This paper examines some works of the two writers with a view to bringing out the similarities in their literary creations. The article concludes that what constitutes Soyinka's literary ingenuity is not only his thematic preoccupation but his language use, and it is indeed this unique way of linguistic manipulation and thematic creativity that endeared him and his literary works to a relatively younger writer like Sony Labou Tansi

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a great factor in human endeavours. For every human activity, motivation plays a primordial role. This is true of Sony Labou Tansi to whom Wole Soyinka's works remain a great source of inspiration and indeed a rare motivation.

Sony Labou Tansi, whose real name is Marcel Labou, rose from the position of a secondary school English Language teacher in Congo-Brazzaville to become a writer of great note. He had been an astute admirer of Soyinka's literary works and he was highly inspired by these works. Sony Labou Tansi practises the three literary genres: drama, prose and poetry. He was also an actor and a play director. He participated in a competition organized by Radio France International (RFI) in 1966 "*concours théâtral inter-africain*". In 1969, he wrote a play titled *Monsieur Tout Court* under the pseudonym, Sony Ciano-Soyinka (Devésa 1996: 71).

Our focus in this paper is to establish the level of influence of Wole Soyinka's literary works on Sony Labou Tansi's. We shall not only look at the thematic points of convergence in their works but also at their stylistic use of language, especially the influence of their respective mother tongues (Yoruba and Kikongo) on their literary languages. This paper will demonstrate how much their writings have enriched the linguistic repertoire of their respective mother tongues; or

how much they have achieved in the creation of another variety of both English and French Languages. In this linguistic analysis, we shall look at neologism and intertextuality or text incorporation in selected works of the two writers.

Text Incorporation or Intertextuality

Text incorporation is the use of parts or features of an existing text in the creation of another or new text. It should be noted that text incorporation is different from reference. Adejare (1992: 124) attempts to draw a distinction between reference and text incorporation. "Text incorporation must, however, be distinguished from mere reference. References are usually short and may even be paraphrased, whereas, incorporation involves the extensive use of materials or features of an existing, normally identified text".

The main idea behind intertextuality or text incorporation is to affirm that every text is posited at the junction of several other texts which is at the same time the rereading, accentuation, condensation, movement and depth (Devésa 1996: 155). Derrida (1979: 107) also argues along this line. He maintains that "each text is a machine with multiple reading heads for other texts...where, one text reads another". It is necessary to insist further that a text is not just a rereading of another text but a text dialogues with another text and indeed with history. When a text refers to or

dialogues with another text, that activity is an intertextual one. What we are saying, in essence, is that sometimes, we rely on the knowledge or the experience acquired from a text for the reading and understanding of other texts. It now becomes obvious that the concept of intertextuality is similar to Adejare's concept of text incorporation. Incorporation can be from outside sources or from the other works of the author or from the texts of other writers. When the material of a text of the same author is reused, it is an internal intertextuality, but when the material is borrowed from outside his works, from another writer's work, it is external intertextuality. Mbanga (1990: 156) describes internal intertextuality as "...le point de référence implicite ou explicite entre les œuvres (les textes) d'un même auteur" [...an implicit or explicit reference point between literary works of the same author].

Intertextuality or text incorporation is common with the texts of Wole Soyinka and Sony Labou Tansi. It has become fashionable to find some sarcastic allusions to the scriptures: Old and New Testaments in literary texts. Like Bolonge (1996: 160) rightly opines "Consciemment ou non, la Bible est constamment présente dans nos discours. Est-il possible de comprendre certains textes sans se référer à la Bible ?" (Consciously or not, the Bible is constantly present in our discussions. Is it possible to understand some texts without referring to the Bible?)

There exist many features of the Bible in some of Sony Labou Tansi's writings. In his first two novels, *La vie et demie* (LVD) and *L'Etat honteux* (LEH), we have strange and deformed allusions to the Bible. The writer sometimes modifies some biblical sayings to suit his purpose of utterance. In *LEH* for instance, he changes the biblical verse "celui qui verse le sang de l'homme, son sang sera versé" (whoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed) to "Qui se sert de sa hernie, périra par sa hernie" (p. 143) (He who serves himself with his hernia, will perish by his hernia). The dictator president, Lopez, actually modifies this biblical saying to intimidate his opponents not to plot any evil against his government. Still in *LEH*, we have expressions which make comical and deformed allusions to the Bible. For example "il le lui a mis entre les dents « et ceci est mon corps, ceci est ma hernie, prend et mange" (p. 75) [He put it between his teeth and this is my body, this is my "hernia," take and eat].

The above expression is the deformed version of the original Biblical saying that "take, eat; this is my body...drink for this is my blood" (St. Matthew 26: 27-28), and it is used by the Christians during the Holy Communion. This same word is reproduced in another context in the novel. It is, however, further modified to suit the situation. The expression goes thus:

"Puis vint ce jours honteux, matin de la nation où il invita mes collègues et tous les Européens de maman...il invita le pape et consorts...il les servit en murmurant cette chose qu'ils n'entendaient pas ou que certains entendaient sans comprendre: « Prenez et mangez, ceci est Vauban »" (LEH. 156)

(Then came this shameful day, national morning when he invited my colleagues and all Maman's European (friends)...he invited the Pope and companies...he served them while murmuring these things that they did not hear or that some heard without understanding: Take and eat, this is Vauban).

In the first novel of the Congolese writer *LVD*, there is the use of a traditional liturgy which sounds biblical "Granita! Granita! Sodome et Gomorrhe" (p.189). Sodom and Gomorrah remind us of the Biblical story where some people perished for homosexuality and immorality. In *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez*, there exist the following allusions to the Bible "Dieu créa la lumière, disons-nous, la lumière inventa le temps" (p. 125) God created the light; we say the light invented the time.

Similar allusions are found in *Les Yeux du Volcan*; this statement goes thus "Au commencement, Dieu créa le ciel et la terre... Dieu dit que la lumière soit, et la lumière fut" (p. 93). (In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth...God said let there be light and there was light).

The above two examples are borrowed from the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible where the creation of the universe by God is described. Wole Soyinka's literary creation is also enriched with similar biblical allusions. The incorporation of the scriptures is detailed in *Les Yeux du Volcan*. It also involves the use of the sermon format and long biblical quotations. There is, for example, the following statement incorporated word for word from the Bible (John 11 verse 25). "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me shall not perish".

The remarkable difference between Soyinka's biblical incorporation and Sony Labou Tansi's biblical allusion is that the former incorporated verbatim from the Bible, while the latter merely makes allusions and deformed the biblical statements to suit his purposes.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Christian religious text is incorporated into Lakunle's dialogue in order to reflect the source of the teacher's inspiration. Lazarus' sermon in *The Interpreters* which covers several pages is in the same format. Wole Soyinka reuses existing materials in his previous texts in the creation of other texts. For instance, in *The Road* and *The Interpreters*, there is the use of a text already used in the former in the creation of the latter. The expression in *The Road* is "And showers of crystal flying on broken souls (p. 11). Part of this expression recurs in the creation of *The Interpreters* as follows "shower of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth" (p. 155)

If one looks at the aspect of the material reused, one will see a sort of structural resemblance in what is used in the two texts: showers/of/laminated glass/around him, "and the second is: shower/of/crystal flying/ on broken soul". Adejare (1992: 128) describes this usage "showers of crystal flying" as a paraphrase of "showers of laminated glass". There are also instances where external intertextuality becomes internal intertextuality in Soyinka's works. For example, in his translation of Fagunwa's work, *The Forest of a Thousand Demons*, there is an expression which is later reused in two of his works. The expression is "to dialogue rapidly with one's legs". The first incorporation occurred in *Kongi's Harvest* and later reused in *Death and the King's Horseman*. The expression used in *Kongi's Harvest* is as follows: "...began a rapid dialogue with his legs" (p.135) and in *Death and the King's Horseman*, it is retaken as "He begins a rapid dialogue with his legs" (p.12).

This expression is obviously a transliteration of Yoruba expression, "ba ese soro," meaning "to start going immediately" or "to move away immediately and very rapidly". What we see here is not a text incorporation but a transliteration of local expressions and thoughts in creating a literary text in the English language. "Doing a rapid dialogue with one's legs" may be difficult for a non-speaker of Yoruba to understand. Understanding of this expression depends largely on the knowledge of the writer's mother tongue, Yoruba.

Often, Soyinka reuses his own texts. This is usually limited to phrases and simple items. Few examples will illustrate this: "logolonto" occurs in *Kongi's Harvest* where Danlola, the Oba engages in a power-tussle with Kongi, complaining that the prison superintendent "paraded me to the world "logolonto" (stark naked) (p. 66). It also occurs in *The Interpreters* where Chief Winsala in self-pity declares that "it is no matter for rejoicing when a child sees his father naked logolonto" (p. 91). Another example of such usage is "smiled the smile". This phrase, a translation from Yoruba, is patterned after translated examples in *The Forest of a Thousand Demons* where we find, for instance, "walk the walk wise" (p. 20). In *The Interpreters*, the structure is reused in "Sageo smiled the smile of a contented voidante" (p. 187).

Like Wole Soyinka, Sony Labou Tansi reuses copiously texts already used in his other works. The expression of "eternity," for instance, is freely employed in the first two novels of the Congolese writer. In *LVD*, in the context where Monsieur L'Abbé and Chaidana are talking, we see an expression suggesting eternity and a long period of time in their discussion "il y aura onze ans de saison sèche, tout sera charbon, les rivières s'éteindront, la forêt mourra de chaleur puis il pleuvra pour des siècles et des siècles" (*LVD*, 171) (There will be eleven years of dry season, everything will be charcoal, rivers will dry up, the forest will die of heat, and then it will rain for centuries and centuries).

A similar expression is found in *LEH* where a dictator's corpse deposited in the national museum is described as opening his eyes permanently:

"Lopez de maman qui maintenant dort au musée de la Nation dans un cercueil de Pierre, avec son œil droit qui n'a pas pu se fermer, mais laissons-le regarder la patrie pour les siècles des siècles..." (*LVD*, p. 22)

(Lopez of Maman who is now sleeping in the national museum in a marble coffin, with his right eye that could not close, but let us allow it to look at his fatherland for centuries upon centuries).

Still in *LEH*, the expression of eternity recurs in a context where the crowd shouts "Comme ça! On les fit taire pour les siècles des siècles" (p. 27) (Like that! They silenced them for centuries upon centuries).

Martial, the revolutionary leader in *LVD*, always writes instructions in the palm of his daughter, Chaidana, to tell her to run for her dear

life. This instruction is always reechoed in Sony Labou Tansi's second novel, *LEH*. This expression is "tu es la dernière tige de notre sang, il faut partir avant l'enfer" (*LVD*, p. 27). (You are the last stem of our blood, you must go before hell). The above statement is incorporated into *LEH* thus "regardez l'histoire, je suis le tout dernier de la génération". (p. 65) (look at history; I am the very last of the generation).

The above expressions in the two novels and contexts are to show the importance of Chaidana and Lopez's people in *LVD* and *LEH* respectively. They both symbolize the hope of their families. Chaidana represents the last hope of Martial and the revolutionary struggle, while Lopez sees himself as the last of his generation.

Another striking example of incorporation from *LVD* into *LEH* is the word "pognon" (dough) that is firstly used in *LVD* which later reoccurs in *LEH* "et dans tout ça, le plus simple, c'est le pognon. Pognon vient de là haut" (*LVD*, p. 34) (And in all that, the simplest thing is (dough) cash. Cash comes from up there).

The exact word is repeated in *LEH* to mean the same thing "il continue au ministre du pognon l'ordre de donner à Maman Nationale trois cent douze millions pour la cuisine et autant pour les costumes et consorts" (p. 39) (He orders the minister of cash (dough) to give three hundred and twelve million to National Mother for cooking and the same amount for dress and companies).

From the foregoing, it is evident that Wole Soyinka and Sony Labou Tansi use extensively text incorporation as a form of style.

Neologism and Word Coinage

The term neologism is used to describe the creation of a new word either in its signifier or in its signified or even in both, at the same time in such a way that the newness is understood historically (Mazaleyra & Molinié 1989: 234). Neologism can be the creation of new words out of existing ones. Lexical creation is a linguistic activity which is found very commonly in the writings of Sony Labou Tansi and Wole Soyinka.

In Soyinka's style, two features of lexis are remarkable; these include coinage and the projection of meaning of text through a simple lexical item. Such lexical items are repeated several times either by themselves or through synonyms in different contexts within the text. This feature is prominent in *The Interpreters* and *Death and*

the King's Horseman. In the former, it is "apostasy" and "apostate," according to the context, and in the latter it is "honour". This fusion of lexical meaning also occurs at the syntactic level.

Noteworthy also is the prominence of coinages in *The Interpreters*. The coinages can be subdivided into analogy and dislocation of fixed collocations. Some of the dislocated collocations in *The Interpreters* include "do or burst" (p. 81) from "do or die"; "sit-down-strike" (p. 75) from "a sit down strike" and "to shit is human, to voidate divine" (p. 158) from "to err is human, to forgive, divine". There is also the word "matterdom", a word created out of "martyrdom". This word occurs in the discussion of the Managing Director in *The Interpreters* (p. 75). The real word "martyrdom" has already surfaced on page 70 before the writer comes out with the coined form of it on page 75. Also on page 76, the word "in-lawfulness" used is another example of coinage. There is a tendency to take this word as meaning "unlawfulness" but what the writer drives home is that the appointment into high political office is based, in most cases, on connections like marriage, family, etc (see Adejare 1992: 30).

In *Season of Anomy*, coinages include "Intellectual quota" coined from IQ – Intelligence Quotient (p. 35). This word is further deformed and re coined as "muscle quota" on page 36. While explaining the coinage of the "golden slize" on page 35, Adejare (1992: 97) posits that it is coined from "golden fleece," a metaphorical expression from the Greek mythology which means knowledge.

Coinage is also evident in the writings of Sony Labou Tansi. In *LVD*, he changes some verbs of the third group that end in – RE to those of the first group with – ER ending. For instance, "sourire" (to smile) becomes "sourissoner" (pp 71 & 76). He also uses some slangs and jargons specially created for each situation. For example, the registers of money he uses include "fric" (dough, cash) (*LVD*, p. 77) "pognon" – dough, cash (*LEH*, p. 39): He uses "le type, le mec" to mean "young man" (*LVD*, p. 35). The words "pingre"- "stingy" and "faire pipi" "to urinate" are used in *LEH*, pp. 89 and 46 respectively. These lexical items give a comic tone, which dulls the sharp edge of his satire, to his literary texts. They also make the satire less vicious and a little more acceptable because there is a lot of comedy behind the seriousness.

Sony Labou Tansi coins long, compound names which are meaning-inclined. Adebayo 2000: 79 affirms this when she says “Sony Labou Tansi fondly uses compound names and terms that are pregnant with meanings and which are of African source”. Some of these creations are “Sacré – Jean cœur de Père” (*LVD*, p. 127) (Sacred John – Heart of father), “Jean l’ Ami des peuples” (*LVD*, p. 143) (John Friend of the masses), “Jean – Brise – cœurs” (*LVD*, p. 142) (John Hearts – Breaker), “Mallot l’Enfant-du-Tigre” (*LVD*, p. 176) (Mallot son of Tiger).

If the names of Labou Tansi’s characters carry strong meanings, it is not surprising because it is a feature of African tradition. In Africa, parents give names to their children according to events (past and present) around them before or at the birth of such children. Names of children sometimes express the wishes and prayers of their parents. They may also be a sort of positive prophecy for the family. Status and religious belief of different families also inform the kind of names given to their children. Bestman (1981: 204) claims that a name is never, in Black Africa, a simple etiquette; it has both meaning and efficiency.

In Sony Labou Tansi’s two early novels, the names of characters are suggestive of their characteristics. The dictators bear very bizarre names that suggest wickedness like John Hearts – Breaker, Mallot son of Tiger etc.

We also see some nominal creations from verbal groups in Labou Tansi’s works. These are nouns created as common nouns. They are always long, bizarre and comical. In *LVD*, for instance, there are nouns like “pas tout-à-fait vivant” as contained in the context where Providential Guide is carrying out the murder of Martial in the presence of his daughter, Chaidana and other members of the family. Chiadana is referred to as “pas tout-à-fait vivant” (not quite alive). “Elle était devenue cette loque – humaine habitante de deux mondes celui des morts et celui des ‘pas tout-à-fait vivant’ “ (*LVD*, p. 17) (She became this human rag of two worlds - that of the dead and that of the ‘not altogether alive’).

Another example of nominal coinage in *LVD* is “les listes des à fusiller” (p. 17) (The list of to be shot). The noun is “à fusiller” (to be shot). This is a verbal phrase nominalised by the author. It therefore functions as a noun. The list of “to be shot” refers to those on the death roll of the dictator, Providential Guide. There is also another

coinage, which is “les près-de-mourir” (The nearly dead). This is always used in the text to refer to the oppressed people of Katamalanasia. Another striking example of nominal coinage in Labou Tansi’s first novel is “L’homme-venu-de la forêt” (p. 171) which refers to Monsieur L’Abbé. It means “the man who came from the forest”. This long name is given to Monsieur L’Abbé because of his very bushy beard that touches the ground, his dry body and his haggard look. At this point, it is evident that Soyinka and Labou Tansi coin words to express better their thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed some selected works of Wole Soyinka and Sony Labou Tansi, it is obvious that the prowess of Wole Soyinka as a literary writer is not only his thematic concerns but his special way of using language. This qualities no doubt endeared Soyinka’s work to younger writers like Sony Labou Tansi. The commitment noticed in the literary creation of the two authors is clearly distinctive because they have both created a linguistic spectrum that is convenient and appropriate for the expression of the socio-cultural and political values in their immediate societies in particular and on the African continent in general.

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