SATIRE AND CENSORSHIP IN TCHICAYA U TAM'SI'S *LE DESTIN GLORIEUX DU MARÉCHAL NNIKON NNIKU, PRINCE QU'ON SORT*

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In Tchicaya u Tam'Si's second and last published play, ***Le Destin glorieux du Maréchal Nnikon Nniku, Prince qu'on sort*** (1979), political satire in drama attains a level of originality and achievement only rarely seen in modern Black francophone African theater. Central to the play is a poetic dislocation of nightmare and reality or of nightmare as reality. Within these unstable boundaries, Tchicaya transforms political oppression into a surrealistic vision whose semantic underpinning is supported by satire and its attendant ironies. This study examines the rhetorical devices of satire in ***Destin*** and how they function to demystify the archetype of the African tyrant and expand the text's literal meaning. Ultimately, the satirical mode serves to destabilize fixed conception and involves the audience in the cathartic deposing of the self-appointed "Supreme Guide," and President-Dictator for life.

The repression and violent measures used to gain and maintain power and silence the "enemy" in the Congo and nearby countries have inspired some of the most political theater coming out of francophone Africa.[1] Tchicaya's play illustrates the self-perpetuating cycle of military coups and the dehumanizing, inane and arbitrary policies of their leaders' ensuing governance. While the common soldier is not spared the author's wrath, Tchicaya's concentrated ire is aimed specifically at the military dictator and his henchmen. His frightening yet derisive representative, Corporal Nnikon Nniku, is indeed a type-cast of the neocolonial tyrant. Presented as a grotesque fool, he is nonetheless a fool who maims, tortures, and kills to satisfy his vanity and quest for absolute power. Although the author disclaims any external parallels with his central character *"qui ne peut être que le produit d'un cauchemar* (13) [who can only be the product of nightmare], it is evident that Nnikon Nniku is a magnified composite of both experienced and invented African dictatorship figures.

Satire is a type of literary censure. It takes for its object some person, group, institution or phenomenon which stands as a potential or genuine threat to the well-being of another person or entity. Generally, it is the satirist's intent to expose and reduce what he or she sees as the

hypocrisy, vice, or misperceived status of the object in order to inform or galvanize the unaware or resigned to its sinister nature. One of satire's primary functions, then, is to criticize and correct.

This notwithstanding, the art of the satirist is not the work of the pamphleteer. Since one of the satirical writer's objectives is "persuasion" (Bloom and Bloom), he or she must strike a difficult balance between aesthetic features and those of attack. In large part, this balance is necessary in order to induce a tension in the audience's emotional reactions. These reactions can range from amusement and scorn to indignation and apprehension. Indeed, the work of satire gains in affective and corrective as well as aesthetic force through the interplay of disparate emotional responses. Oftentimes, these responses are to be experienced simultaneously. In part, this fusion results from the reader's reaction to the mixing of fiction and contemporary reality. In Tchicaya's play, this reality is a poetic rendition of many Africans' political experience rather than one that holds up to empirical verification.

While realism is not among satire's components, reality must remain within view in order for the satire to effectively expose the object under attack. As a result, that object cannot be too deformed or the setting too outrageous so as to go unrecognized in the extratextual context. As Bloom and Bloom have noted, the object must not be travestied or distorted beyond the "range of verifiable experience." (111)

The tools of satire are those designed to ridicule and deflate the victim and thus to impart a sense of superiority to the reader. Hyperbole, understatement, antiphrasis, caricature, and the ironies that often underlie them are only a few of the rhetorical devices used to accomplish such effects. Yet despite the ability to pick out figurative speech patterns and the tonal features of satire, it remains difficult to define with accuracy.

Western scholars tend to focus on the elements necessary to satire while agreeing that it is both a genre and a fictional mode. Northrope Frye says that satire contains two essential ingredients: "One is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (224). Likewise, Matthew Hodgart explains that the primary characteristic of satire is a "combination of aggressive attack and fantastic travesty" (132). Gilbert Highet indicates that some of the elements of satire are that "it is topical; it claims to be realistic (although it is usually exaggerated or distorted); it is shocking . . . informal; and (although often in a grotesque or painful manner) it is funny" (5). Bloom and Bloom believe it is "one of the literary 'modes of feeling' (along with elegy and idyll)" (56). Along with other critics, they do also concede that "satire that observes certain organizational and metrical principles may be a genre" (36-37).

Leon Guilhamet, in ***Satire and the Transformation of Genre***, makes a point of separating satire into two categories—modal and generic. In his view, generic satire (which also contains modal satire) follows certain rules of a host genre, for example, classical rhetoric, but "transforms" the genre into satire by "deforming the rhetorical structures with strategies calculated to disrupt the normal logic of the rhetorical text" (13). Modal satire, according to him, is what most scholars call "satiric"; that is, it deals with tonality, the author's objectives and with his or her presentation of and attitude toward the subject. It is the "persuasive verbal pitch" (Bloom 120) and one of the features that gives a work its effective ethos.

The difficulty in defining satire is compounded when dealing with an African world view and African literatures. For if, as some Euroamerican critics state, wit or humor comprises a fundamental element of satire, then one must ask what wit or humor entails from the African perspective and more precisely from the perspective of the culture from which the text emanates.[2] I will thus attempt to leave humor to the humorists and deal rather with elements of satire in ***Destin*** which may be culturally specific in a limited way but which are contextually identifiable: 1) satire involves attack often using travesty, exaggeration or signs of the absurd; 2) satire employs ridicule, not necessarily invoked through wit, but through irony and other intratextual clues; 3) satire has as its objective an extratextual issue or evil that the author wishes to see reformed.

Destin, like most other contemporary works of literature, cannot be considered generic satire. Rather, it is what Guilhamet would call modal satire. While the voice of satire dominates the text, serious passages of lyric eloquence are embedded in the play which render the satire episodic rather than generic. Indeed, I agree with Highet when he says: "As soon as an author begins to arrange his thoughts under strictly logical headings, to cut away all irrelevancies and to speak in a tone of unvarying seriousness, he is not writing satire." (41). The play's structure may often appear to be that of comedy, deformed at times into satiric tragedy, but in fact, it conforms only to an explosion of moods and structures as its sub-title, *"comédie-farce-sinistre"* indicates. Moreover, the dénoument leaves us with a vision of the world which is ironic but not satiric.

Tchicaya's play is centered around a dramatic irony established in the title itself: ***Le Destin glorieux du Maréchal Nnikon Nniku, Prince qu'on sort.*** Its antiphrastic structure, apparent in the equation "glorious destiny" and "prince being deposed" not only ironically anticipates Nnikon Nniku's demise, but offers the audience knowledge that the antagonist will ignore throughout the ensuing drama. This knowledge emphasizes the futility of his antics and reverses the

"glory" that destiny holds in store for him. Moreover, the reductionist play on words that constitutes the "Prince's" name (*Ni con Ni cul*) [Neither cunt Nor asshole] leaves no doubt as to the author's satiric intentions and primary object of attack.

Many francophone African plays are set in an ambiguous time and place, not infrequently so as to avoid government censure. In ***Destin***, this ambiguity functions as a major structural component for the play's satire and establishment of ironies. Stage directions state: *"La pièce se déroule dans un pays imaginaire, quelque part ou nulle part dans le monde, en des temps qui pourraient être les nôtres"* (13) [The play unfolds in an imaginary country, somewhere or nowhere in the world, in times that could be our own.] Yet the imaginary world in which the play unfolds does not approximate the idyllic contours of romance often acquainted with faraway lands. Rather, it resembles a demonic vision arising from a nightmare. There are talking phantoms, soldiers with human skulls on the end of their rifles, ministers who have been ordered to poke out an eye, and army troops who must wear grenades in the place of testicles in order to fight the forces (i. e., kamakaze women) of the communist counter-revolution. But like the conventional and insistent disclaimer following these directions, which proclaims that nothing of the upcoming story is real, this imprecision of temporal and spatial boundaries hints loudly that the audience should look for temporal and spatial parallels with an extratextual reality.

Fiction and reality intersect not only in familiar settings—a roadside bar, a prison, a presidential palace—but in familiar symbols of political oppression and propaganda: transistor radios, military uniforms, machine guns, political slogans and sterile government policies. Obvious signs of travestied reality are visible in mocking parallels of countries and organizations such as *"Les Etats Muants de l'Ouest"* (i. e., the United States) [The Molting States of the West] or the O. U. E. C, (*"l'Organisation Universelle des Etats Consignés"*) [the Universal Organization of States on Deposit]. Government officials, required by Nnikon Nniku to poke out one eye as a sign of fidelity, wear black eye bands that remind us of Nazi arm bands. A slave whip and police club are the attributes of government power.

Symbols, when exposed to the light of satire, transform into something connoting more than their surface meaning. Tchicaya makes ample use of such symbolic satire but has a particular preoccupation with the radio, a common household item in urban Africa. Indeed, speaking about the modern orality present in television, cinema, and radio, he stated in 1986: *"Ils pourraient redonner à l'oralité une nouvelle énergie civilisatrice. Voyez l'usage qu'ils en font. Ils s'en servent pour somoniser. . . . Propagande, propagande et démagogie. Culte de la personnalité des présidencités à vie. Ecoeurant"* (Bekri, 59) [They could give back to orality a new civilizing energy. Look what they have

done with it. They use it to sodomize. . . . Propaganda, propaganda and demagogy. Personality cults of life term presidencies. Disgusting]. As an object that should be associated with information, news and entertainment, it is unmasked in the play as another form of tyranny linked to mystification, propaganda, and power. People wander about with blaring radios hugged to their ears and distant looks on their faces as if hypnotized. During the coup, these instruments of propaganda spit out machine gun fire that kills, symbolically, as surely as the bullets from the guns themselves.

The first scene of ***Destin*** presents the confines of a prison cell complete with instruments of torture and blood-stained walls (*"taches douteuses"*). Two soldiers and a phantom jailor serve as expositors. The décor is completed by a sign written on the wall: *DELIE TA LANGUE OU LIE TON CORPS A LA SOUFFRANCE* (15) [Loosen your tongue or resign yourself to suffering]. As the scene that opens the play, it is extremely powerful in that it will remain visible to the mind's eye until the dénoument. Indeed, the play is punctuated by short sketches that take place in this jail cell. Together with some of the more lyric passages and scenes of macabre imagery, it lends a dark complement to the lighter side of Tchicaya's satire, tempering our quiet applause when regaled with the absurdities offered by the satirist's victims. Such a framework acts as a reference point and a structural device for the irony that will produce the semantic inversion of government statements involving democracy, liberty, and happiness that follow. Prison thus symbolizes life under tyranny. As Lheki retorts to a disapproving onlooker at the bar who says he'll end up in prison for his anti-government ideas: *"En prison, en prison? Et où crois-tu qu'on est? Cette saleté . . . votre connerie, c'est pas la prison, peut-être. . . ."* (27) [In prison, in prison? And where do you think we are? This filth . . . your bullshit is perhaps not prison. . . .].

Irony is the most important weapon in the satirist's repertoire. However, defining irony is neither an easy nor a brief task and it is not within the scope of this paper to delve into it extensively (see Booth, Frye, Hutcheon, Muecke, and Tiefenbrun). In the most elementary of definitions, verbal irony involves saying one thing and meaning another, or having more than one meaning but only one signifier. In addition, as Muecke has explained in ***The Compass of Irony***: "The first formal requirements of irony are that there should be a confrontation or juxtaposition of contradictory, incongruous, or otherwise incompatible elements and that one should be seen as 'invalidating' the other" (29). Consequently, an ironic effect can occur only as the result of established conditions that "invalidate" one or more of the elements involved. When President Nnikon Nniku decrees *"le règime de la gaïté, de la joie"* (82) [the reign of gaiety, of joy] or proclaims his to be *"le régime de la liberté absolue"* (88) [the regime of

of absolute freedom], we are experiencing the semantic inversion of irony because the contradicting conditions have been pre-established by the text. People are, in fact, living in a land of fear, enslavement, hopelessness, and death. On the other hand, when the sorcerer, speaking of Nkha Nkha Dou and Mphi Ssann Po' rape of his sister says, *"Nnikon Nniku est crapule comme eux"* (60) [Nnikon Nniku is scum like they are], we are witnessing direct invective. There are no incongruities, no contradictions with what we know, no reversals of expectation and no expansion of meaning.

Invective is generally an undisguised tool of attack and must be used judiciously in satire in order to maintain an effective balance of emotional tensions. On occasion, Tchicaya nestles invective within ironic and other rhetorical features, rendering it more powerful because of its relief. One of the most striking uses of invective in the play is that which is self-directed by the victim. Excited about the sorcerer's false promise that he will reign for one hundred years (a belief which is in itself incongruous with the play's title and with the normal human life span) if he bathes publicly in slug slime Nnikon Nniku asserts:

> *Je serai gluant, insaisissable, imprévisible, invulnérable, impondérable, incassable, inimmortel. Oh, oh! Pourvoyeur de vices à ceux qui n'en ont pas, pour mieux corrompre* (60)
>
> [I will be sticky, ungraspable, unpredictable, invulnerable, imponderable, unbreakable, unimmortal. Oh, oh, purveyor of vice for those who don't have any, to better corrupt.]

The avowal, *"pourvoyeur. . ."* surprises and affects more directly because amid all the lies and self-delusions, the truth—that is, Tchicaya's opinion—stands strangely alone when juxtaposed to Nnikon Nniku's joyful (and ironic) "un-" qualifiers.[3] It is not just a deflationary device, but shows his evil as being willed, yet gratuitous and illogical, thus more frightening, for it is the incurable evil of a madman.

Far more conducive to the aesthetic demands of satire than the direct denunciation provided by invective, irony has infinite possibilities for reduction, mockery and the systematic expansion of surface meaning. In the following example, irony manifests itself as a variation on the technique of praise to blame by way of unexpected negation. A drunken soldier tells Lheki, who, as a civilian has ironically become the "enemy" under a military government:

> *Et pourquoi que t'aurais pas droit au fusil? (un holquet.) T'offres une bière? . . . Tu serais colonel avec tout ce que tu ne sais pas, tu serais bien pour commander à nous autres,*

> ***premières classes, qu'on est des cons. Et aux affaires aussi.*** (45)
>
> [And why wouldn't you be entitled to a rifle? (hiccup). Buy me a beer? . . . You'd be colonel with all you don't know, and good at ordering us soldiers about, assholes that we are. Good at politics too.]

The soldier, a symbol of gun-waving authority, not only naively belittles himself but succeeds in reducing the entire governing military body to a level of ineptitude. The irony in this passage emanates not just from the negation of the expected linguistic formula "avec tout ce que *tu sais*," but from the incongruity of the conditional equation indicating that ignorance imparts leadership qualities. As inverted condemnation, it confirms the audience's impression of the military by way of ironic self-deprecation. Moreover, the context of the surrounding scene makes it clear that the soldier no more believes he is a "con" than we believe he is anything but one.

Much of the irony in Tchicaya's satire originates in contradictions and incongruities that function to defy common sense. It is often initiated through a kind of absurd rationalism and is best illustrated in Nnikon Nniku's official governing policy, *"Nnikonnikunisme."* The main feature of this policy is the philosophy of *"régressisme"* which is based on a travestied variation of the *"retour aux sources"* (return to origins) theme. It is symbolically represented in Nnikon Nniku's ritual enthroning ceremony as a return to an exaggerated animal-like primitivism perverted with lascivious dances, scatological incantations, the miming of fornication, and other sexual activities. In conjunction with this distorted return to archaic customs, the goals of Nnikonnikunism are the radicalization of the country's poverty through the prohibition of work and industrialization and ultimately, a Gross National Product of zero.

Extracted from the context of the real world, the apparent absurdity of such a policy is, in fact, infinitely logical: with no work, there will be no strikes, no unemployment and no proletariat. And Nnikon Nniku prides himself on being the *"fossoyeur acharné de la dictature sous-prolétarienne"* (49) [the unrelenting gravedigger of the under-proletarian dictatorship]. The irony is formed through comparison with a real world of common sense in which Nnikonnikunism would be incompatible with the demands of survival. The ironic effect of this comparison demonstrates satire's social intention. For in holding an ideology such as *"régressisme"* up before the light of satire, Tchicaya reminds the audience how false, ineffective and deceptive these "campaigns of authenticity" and other official plans are in the extratextual world. They will not cure the country's problems

or improve the quality of life, nor will they, under such leadership, instill a sense of worth or pride. They are diversionary tactics not solid, active policies of government.

One of the primary components at the heart of a satirical attack is the reduction or deflation of the object or victim. This process of demystification is most striking in Nnikon Nniku's naïve self-revelations. Many of the cases of self-deflation in the play involve ironies which rely specifically on what Muecke calls the victim's "confident unawareness," either of the actual situation as the audience sees it or of the duality underlying the signifier (19-20). The element of confident unawareness implies a blindness on the part of the victim to "the very possibility of there being . . . [a] point of view that invalidates his own" (20). That other point of view in ***Destin*** is held both by the audience and by the play's unseen Mutulufwan population.

The first impression given of Nnikon Nniku is one that immediately compromises his stature and casts him in the role of anti-hero. Since it is stated over government controlled radio, it is apparent that Nnikon Nniku, the leader of the coup, has ordered and sanctioned the announcement:

> *Un comité militaire contre-révolutionnaire a pris le pouvoir. Le comité militaire de la contre-révolution est présidé par le caporal Nnikon Nniku, un ancien de la guerre d'Indochine, de la guerre d'Algérie! Il fut dans le civil un cureur de latrines à l'Hôpital Général où, râce à son action, beaucoup des nôtres ont échappé à la mort par asphyxie tant l'ammoniaque de la merde. . . . Réjouir. . . . La Patrie est sauvée.* (34)
>
> [A revolutionary committee has seized power. The military committee of the counter-revolution is headed by Corporal Nnikon Nniku, a veteran of the Indochinese and Algerian wars. As a civilian, he was a latrine cleaner at the General Hospital where, thanks to his actions, many of our people escaped death by asphyxiation from the ammonia gas of shit. . . . Rejoice. . . The homeland is saved.]

Instead of a hero of merit whose past actions and experience have earned him the right and wisdom to govern a country, we find that his civilian experience is that of latrine cleaner, a profession which, the press is later assured, he was allowed to perfect in the army. The ironic incompatibility lies in the assumption that this is a valid, praiseworthy action when in fact the idea of a heroic latrine cleaner is inherently anti-heroic. The added injunction to "rejoice" and the claim that the country has been saved, when juxtaposed to his heroic deeds in fighting the

fumes of ammonia only underscores the ludicrousness of the new leader's capacity for governing.

As Nnikon Nniku's vanity and thirst for absolutism consume him, his desire to create an unforgettable public image becomes imperative. Not surprisingly, it becomes more derisive as well. In addition to ordering his ministers to poke an eye out if they aspire to maintain their government positions, he also wants to give himself *"le spectacle de gueules ébahies"* (58) [the sight of jaws gaping in astonishment]. This, he believes, will confirm the quantity of intelligence he has in the eyes of the world: *". . . J'ai douze mètres d'intelligence de plus que les autres chefs d'Etat"* (58) [I have twelve meters more intelligence than the other heads of state]. He demonstrates his intelligence by bathing publicly in slug slime, for his personal sorcerer has deceptively assured him: *"On n'écrase pas la limace parce qu'elle a bavé sur le chemin. . . . Cette vertu-là sera sur toi"* (59) [One does not step on the slug because it has slobbered on the path. . . . This virtue will be yours]. This delightful parallel, using the mechanism of proverb, elicits a smile of contempt from the audience by equating Nnikon Nniku's intelligence with the intelligence and attributes of a slug. The deflationary device also works under the surface to match the uselessness and repugnancy of a slug with that of the military dictator. Moreover, the meaning of the proverb is extended through association of the verb *"baver"* [to drool, slobber] with its noun form *"bavure,"* [smudge, flaw] used euphemistically to express unfortunate political or administrative mistakes. Consequently, it is within the realm of the natural that a slug should leave a trail of mucous, and that a dictator should make a mess of things. The sorcerer's prediction also functions to establish conditions for dramatic irony, for the denouement will indeed find the dictator-slug squashed on the roadside.

Writers of satire may believe that people are either unaware of the truth or purposely ignore the pernicious aspects of the object in question. It is my belief that Tchicaya sees the public as "anesthetized by . . . resignation" (Highet 19) or hopelessness and, ultimately, frustrated by suppressed rage. To break this resignation and despair, the satirist has recourse to numerous techniques designed to startle the reader or audience into responding with cathartic indignation, disgust or derision. Some of the more commonplace devices of shock therapy are the use of obscenity, slang, scatology and aberrant or repulsive acts. In ***Destin***, one has only to examine the homophonic nature of the President's name, the newspaper headlines following the coup: *"JE COMBRATTRAI LA MERDE PAR LA MERDE"* (37) [I will fight shit with shit], or the implications of his decree that all soldiers wear grenades by way of testicles to respond with derision. The use of colloquialisms and obscene, sexually-oriented language is perhaps the most obvious technique employed in the service of provoking the

audience. Just as his spokespersons Lheki and his girlfriend Nniyra play at offending those around them with their evocative gestures and obscenities, so the author tries to tease the spectator:

> *Lheki (la repoussant [Nniyra] avec un mépris joué): Merde, fais pas chier. . . Elle pense qu'à baiser . . . comme son connard de beau-frère, avec sa politique à la gomme, il nous baise tout le temps et nous on est là à lui donner notre cul.* (26)
>
> (pushing Nniyra away with feigned contempt): Shit, don't be a pain in the ass. . . . All she thinks about is fucking like her idiot brother-in-law with his pathetic policies. He fucks us all the time and we are there to offer him our asses.]

Perverse acts and obscene language and gestures are meant not to titillate the audience but to bait them. Nniyra, rubbing herself against Lheki, talking of erections and having sex on the cadaver of the barman is hardly pornographic, but rather facetiously disturbing. Together with the startling irreverence of the two young people regarding their duty to patriotism: *". . . on va faire l'amour sur le sang, le sang de la Patrie"* (33) [We are going to make love on blood, the blood of the Nation], their obscenities are likely to provoke rather than titillate.

The sexual thematics of the play are thus introduced even before Nnikon Nniku's coup. As illustrated in the simile *"comme son connard de beau-frère avec . . . "* they are immediately linked to politics and an unresisted exploitation. While Nniyra's brother-in-law will soon be ousted by corporal Nnikon Nniku, the connection between sex, power and vice will only intensify. Indeed, sex, vice, power, and exploitation become a variation on a single theme. The radio commentator describing the ritual enthroning ceremony says it best: *"Mais ne baise pas qui veut, comme ne gouverne pas qui veut. Pour gouverner, il faut des reins solides et beaucoup de vices dans la peau"* (72) [Everyone who wants to fuck cannot, like all who want to govern cannot. To govern you need a strong back and lots of vice under the skin].

Tchicaya's use of sex as a technique of attack, while both provocative and deflationary is also a manifestation of the gratuitous. Nnikon Nniku's sexual aggression is but another display of oppression for the sake of self-satisfaction and power. Indeed, the sub-text of the theme of sex reads like a poetic evocation of rape. The military governing body not only pillages the country of its resources, human and otherwise, but violates the people's basic human rights. The people, like victims of rape, are left to live a life which has been stripped of its dignity: *"Il y a une certaine Afrique qui est en train de crever non*

pas seulement de faim, mais aussi de l'âme" [There is a certain Africa which is dying not only of hunger but in spirit], stated Tchicaya in 1986 (Bekri 58). Indeed, central to the climate of the play is the theme of the death of life. When the phantom jailor says of the child-prisoner: *"La mort n'est qu'un petit deluge sur ce corps"* (43) [Death is but a small injury to this body], he is, in fact, describing the wounds of the spirit, a type of living death. Moreover, the people's nation is called Mutulufwa, and as Emmanuel Yewah has explained: "In Lingala and related languages, Mutulufwa means 'a dead person'. . . . Mutulufwa is therefore a country of the dead, or a country in which the people have been 'made dead' by the activities of their leaders" (78). It is this rape and subsequent death of the spirit that furnishes such a poignant commentary on life under the suffocating boot of militarism.

The fine blending of the devices of satire with Tchicaya's lyric eloquence is what makes ***Destin*** so unique and forceful. Indeed, it is the texture of the play that sets it apart from a mere satirical portrait of the African dictator. This texture is achieved through the weaving of satire's ironies, absurdities and imaginative exaggerations with passages that delve deep into the poetic reality of Congolese political experience. Along with reactions evoked by satire, it is the variation in texture that provides the roller coaster of emotional responses elicited by the play.

Some of the features of this texture are found in the play's alternations in voice and tonality. Lheki and Nniyra, for instance, oscillate between the most obscene, colloquial language and some of the most elevated dialogue in the text:

> *Nniyra: Il faut sauver la vie. . . . Sauve mon corps. . . . Sauve mes bras. Je ne veux pas que* ***leur rage me*** *dessèche.*
>
> *Lheki (enlaçant sa compagne, avec douceur): Non, non. Calme-toi. (Un silence.) C'est notre sang en danger de mort qui réagit ainsi. Il donne plus de sel. Notre sang en danger interdit d'être de bêtes de somme. Nous découvrons la densité de no corps, de nos vies, de nos âmes. Nous découvrons le refus de mourir égorgés par la bête puante.*
>
> [Nniyra: We have to save life. . . . Save my body. . . . Save my arms. I don't want *their rage* to desiccate me.
>
> Lheki (gently embracing his companion): No, no. Calm down. It's our blood in peril of death which is reacting like this. It produces more salt. Our blood in peril forbids us from being beasts of burden. We are discovering the density

of our bodies, our lives, our souls. We are discovering the refusal to die slaughtered by the putrid beast.]

Such dialogues serve to temper the amusement of satire, turning the fabric of the play inside out to reveal the understiching of existence in this ruthless world. For the young couple, the spiritual void generated by their no win situation, (*"Ris: tu es suspect. Ne ris pas: tu es suspect"* (54) [Laugh, you are suspect. Don't laugh, you are suspect] kindles the fight or flight mechanism; and flight is not possible. The increased salt in their blood is a symbol of the substance that both preserves and fights the crippling effects of contamination or paralysis.[4] It fuels the instinct to refuse. Together with Lheki's insistence on their alliance (*"notre," "nous," "nos"*), it is this salt that feeds self-dignity, redresses life and solicits the refusal to lie down before a manipulated destiny.

Another voice that figures prominently in the first two Plans is that of the "chant pause" or chorus. Like some of the protagonists' dialogues, a number of these passages act as counterpoints to satiric ridicule:

La nuit souillée se lave au sang
L'innocent a le sang qu'il faut
Il faut ce qu'il faut l'ami
La nuit souillée se lave au sang

L'hystérie du sang
L'appel bestial du sang fratricide
Est ce qu'il faut pour unir un peuple
Qui sort de la nuit souillée
La tête froide qui fasse entendre raison
Vient la nuit des grands couteaux
Ils font la guerre à leurs pères et mères
Et à leur ombre exsangue déjà. (24-25)

[The sullied night is washed in blood
The innocent have the blood required
You've got to do things properly friend
The sullied night is washed in blood

The hysteria of blood
The bestial call of fratricidal blood
Is what is needed to unify a nation
Emerging from the sullied night
The cool head of reason
Come the night of the big knives is

They wage war on their mothers and fathers
And on their already anaemic shadow]

This "chant" describes the civil strife caused by the legacy of colonialism and the tribalism which has drained the population of its essence. Like many other "chants" and passages, it does contain ironic features but they are hardly satiric. Rather, it is designed to tie the play to an intra- and extra-textual poetic reality simultaneously, intensifying one pole of the audience's emotions by extending the threat posed by the object of satire.

Destin appeals to both the senses of reason and of emotion. While the vanity, vice, megalomania and other forms of self-absorbency lend themselves well to the deforming mirrors of satire, the varied texture of the play also evokes a barrage of sensations that are designed to support the satirist's socio-political intentions and aesthetic goals. From my world view, it is impossible to read this play without smiling (derisively), feeling contempt, anger, sadness, and a sense of malaise, often simultaneously. The derision, for instance, elicited by the dialogue in which Nnikon Nniku boasts to the press of his glorious past as a latrine cleaner, is contrasted by a sensation of disquietitudes as he does so while sitting on a giant skeleton-shaped throne, the cranium of which appears to be a crown. Fire spits out from the eye sockets and creates a halo around Nnikon Nniku's head. He is the symbol of death as he sits on *"les os des ancêstres"* (35) [the bones of the ancestors], ancestors, one could say, whose bodies are hardly cold yet. The contrasting effects provided by the reductionist dialogue this macabre imagery not only promote a tension in emotional responses but, again, point to Tchicaya's ability to make us feel two sides of the coin at one time.

The malaise experienced in confronting Nnikon Nniku's treachery and malice is one that arises from satire's relationship to reality. It is not the antics of a specific extratextual leader or leaders that necessarily provoke the desired responses of scorn and apprehension but the antics of a dictator whose resemblance to the real is at times frighteningly realistic. As absurd as it might be to kill someone secretly so as to be able to punish someone else for the thrill of it, the idea is not so distant from crimes perpetrated by tyrants and evildoers in political reality. It is thus not the actual act in the play which engenders uneasiness, but the recognition of similar acts that occur in extratextual reality. It is the realization that play and life are, indeed, not so very different at all.

Like the sorcerer at the enthroning ceremony who is going to *"exorciser l'atmosphère par des incantations vociférées"* (71) [exorcize the atmosphere through incantations of rage], the play itself expresses the author's anger and functions to censure the political oppression and

usurpation promoted by Africa's neocolonial despots. It is an arm of revolt, a means of refusal, and product of the salt in Tchicaya's own blood. Through satire, the poet-satirist, symbolized in the play by the phantom jailor, succeeds in appropriating the soldier's and dictator's uniforms, guns and medals, stockpiling them in the central prison and leaving the wearers naked and ridiculous. Tchicaya's satirical portrayal indeed proves that, as the jailor ironically says near the end: *"l'habit fait le moine"* (96) [Clothes make the man].

But stripping the tyrant naked is not the final nor the most premeditated of Tchicaya's goals. For Nnikon Nniku is not an isolated being outside of the realm of the repeatable. Without his uniform, he is but another latrine cleaner and just one of the *"bêtes puantes"* [putrid beasts] about which Nniyra and Lheki speak. This *"bête"* is, on the one hand, the profit-seeker, the betrayer, the vampire of society whose rancor and quest for immediate self-gratification know no bounds. On the other hand, the *bête* is also invisible, intangible, or, as Northrop Frye has stated, "a spirit within that society" (47). That spirit is one that has perverted the notion of human dignity and self respect and whose hatred and egocentrism have promoted and propagated coup after coup; the *"hystérie du sang fratircide."* One of Tchicaya's objectives, then, is to expose the disguise and the lair of the "bête puante," for as Nniyra asks:

> *Mais pourquoi les autres ne font-ils rien contre?*
> Lheki: *Ils ne savent pas d'où viennent les coup qu'ils reçoivent. Ils se disent: c'est le destin.* (56)
>
> [Why don't the others do anything to fight it?
> Lheki: They don't know where the blows they are receiving are coming from. They tell themselves it's fate.]

Tchicaya's underlying concern is to sensitize people to the spirit of betrayal and destruction, and to draw attention to their own responsibility for having nourished the *"bête puante."* Moreover, misdirected blame is just another myth proffered by the *"bête"* and in need of exposure.[5] Fate itself may not be controllable, but to yield to a contrived destiny is to accept the prison of oppression.

Tchicaya dedicated Destin to *"'la jeunesse congolaise' avec l'espoir de la voir partager avec moi la sainte horreur que j'ai des petits caporaux faiseurs de coups d'Etat"* (Bekri 58) ['the youth of the Congo' with the hope of seeing them share with me the holy horror I have of little corporals who conduct coups d'etat.] It is this *"sainte horreur"* which stands at the base of his bitterly satirical attack. Through the deflationary mechanisms of satire and irony, he succeeds in

demystifying the foundation of the military dictator's power and in uniting the audience against a common enemy. Yet, it is also undeniable that the manipulated, surreal, happy ending that sees the country freed of its tyrants, Lheki and Nniyra reunited heroes, and the people united conquerors of their own freedom is an ironic device whose target is none other than the audience. The mimetic relationship of satire to reality may have demonstrated that fictive tyrants do not differ much from the real thing, but in fact, reality cannot be manipulated in the way that play can. While Lheki and Nniyra represent symbols of hope in the play, and as such cannot die, the African audience must realize that there will be no facile awakening from the nightmare of oppression in the real world. The *"bête puante"* is still among them.

It is thus that the imperative written on the prison wall at the opening of the play: *"DELIE TA LANGUE OU LIE TON CORPS A LA SOUFFRANCE"* [Loosen your tongue or resign yourself to suffering] is addressed to both the prisoners in the play and the spectators of the intertext. Retroactively, it asks the audience to reconsider its meaning from a different perspective by reading its ironic sub-text. Indeed, it is an appeal to refuse and a call to action. For acts of speech are a means to arrest the silence and to exercise censure. *"Votre silence, c'est pas la prison, peut-être!"* [Your silence is perhaps not prison!] says Nniyra to onlookers at the roadside bar. To loosen one's tongue is to act against the *"bêtes puantes"* who are enslaving the country, killing its people and promulgating social and political corruption of every kind. The play itself is thus an arm against oppression as well as a call to recognize that, in whatever small part, the spectators' destiny lies in their own hands. Tchicaya does not suggest that the medium of speech or any other form of discourse will assure a just government or an end to tyranny, but the salt of refusal, together with the cement of unity, may well act as a foil against the death of the spirit, resuscitating life and a sense of dignity. As Lheki says, turning to the audience: *"Ben quoi, on résiste comme on peut"* (48) [Hey, you resist however you can].

NOTES

[1]See, for example, Sylvain Bemba's ***L'Homme qui tua le crocodile*** and ***Un Foutu Monde pour un blachisseur trop honnete***; Maxime N'Débéka's ***Le Président***; Sony Lab'Ou Tansi's ***Je soussigné cardiaque and La Parenthèse de sang.***

[2]Moreover, little has been done in the area of satire and francophone African literatures. In Bernard K'Anene Jukpor's 1982 dissertation, *"Etude sur la satire dans le théâtre ouest-africaine francophone"* (University of Toronto), he states that no full length work on satire had been done up to that point. This still holds true in 1992.

[3]Tiefenbrun would argue, and I tend to agree, that this confession is in fact ironic because we do not expect to hear such straightforward and lucid truth from the mouth of the victim himself. See the chapter on "Signs of Irony in La Fontaine's Fables" (143-61), in ***Signs of the Hidden.***

[4]See Godard (138-143) for a discussion of the symbolism of salt in Tchicaya's poetry.

[5]Tchicaya was indeed bothered by such common misplaced blame, by *"le discours béat . . . qui veut que nous n'ayons aucune part de responsabilité dans toutes ces catastrophes qui sont cause de tant d'indigences"* (Bekri 58).

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