



REVIEW ARTICLE

WRITING BODY IN AMOS TUTUOLA'S THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD

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ABSTRACT

In human societies, body plays a social role which authenticates its existence and gives it a true meaning. As such, body reveals as a cultural element which enables a social group to identify itself. Amos Tutuola represents body in his writing to highlight the intrinsic relationship between the visible world and the invisible one. In this view, the body of the main character, the wino, follows the way which society imposes it. Here, the impulses of the body force the protagonist to cross the insurmountable boundary which separates the two worlds. In African collective consciousness, a living cannot go to the world of the dead. Likewise, a dead cannot come back to normal life. Human body is then a receptacle for the soul in Tutuola's imaginary universe.

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INTRODUCTION

*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*¹(1952) is novel written by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola. It relates the story of an unnamed man who is addicted to palm wine. Palm wine is a local drink made from the fermented sap of the palm tree. It is used in ceremonies all over West Africa. The father of the protagonist engages a tapster for him. This man taps the palm trees for sap and then prepares the wine. When the tapster dies, the Drinkard could no longer live on palm wine. To cope with this difficult situation, he sets out for the Dead's Town to convince his tapster to return to normal life. On his way, he is forced to overcome several tests before meeting his dead tapster. When they meet, the tapster says he cannot come back to real life. He then gives a magic egg to his former employer which is supposed to provide him with whatever he needs on his return home. Amos Tutuola depicts body to highlight the relationship between the visible world and the invisible one. The problematic of body is regarded as the core issue of the book. In this view, the main character is depicted as a carnal being whose prime concern is the satisfaction of his first needs: drinking, sleeping and eating. For this neurotic character, the maintenance of his body is before everything. In so doing, he ignores that "the body we live in, has never been our own. We are penetrated by the society which traverses us from side to

side. This body is not my body, it is a social image" (Descamps, 1989, p.3). The predominance of body in Tutuola's work raises several questions: what is body? To what extent does body belong to its carrier? How can we turn body into a signified and a signifier? In today's globalized and globalizing society, body attests our existence in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). It enables man to understand his existence and the presence of his alter ego. In other words, "the social action"(Rocher, 1968, p.45) of every human being aims at dramatizing body. According to Okri Pascal, "body reveals itself as a character whose speech must be understood in terms of written form, meant to decipher a message in order to produce a meaning" (2016, p.48). As such, body is a significant character and is revealed in various forms in Tutuola's literary output. In this respect, sociological criticism and psycho-criticism will be used to analyze body in society and split body.

Body in Society

This first part deals with "corpography and corpology" (Okri Pascal, 2016) in Tutuola's novel. The aim is to analyze living body as a carnal body and social marker.

Carnal Body

On the very opening page of his book, Tutuola depicts a carnal being in an imaginary Yoruba universe. Bertholot refers to carnal being as a "body that eats, drinks and suffers" (1997, p.9). It is a paper being made of a body and a spirit. It is also "a character portrays as the plot's driver. (...) He finds himself

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¹- The novel is a writing of abnormality. As such, the author creates his words or English to depict African realities. For drinkard, dead town, whole people...

encircle tightly in the novel, in a system of dependence" (Mitterrand, 1980, pp.60-61). The narrator introduces this character to the reader as a social failure. He does not work but he uses his wealth to impose himself to his community. In the mind of the protagonist or the Drinkard, the flesh is beyond everything. The physical health of the body is then his major concern. As revealed in this passage, the life of the Drinkard has no meaning without palm wine:

I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. [...] My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drinkard. I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning. By that time I could not drink ordinary water except palm-wine. But when my father noticed that I could not do any work more than to drink, he engaged an expert palm-wine tapster for me, he had no other work more than to tap palm-wine every day. (p.7) Here, the desire of the main character is centered on the satisfaction of his first needs. He becomes an addict of palm wine since his childhood. Tutuola uses the Drinkard as a pretext to describe the body of the carnal being. This "problematic character" lives on local beer known as palm wine. The text reveals that he drinks palm wine from sun rise to sun set: "I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning" (p.7). He is then a true wino whose life is based on the drinking of palm wine. In the narrative, palm wine is described as a remedy which helps the Drinkard to keep his mental and physical balance. Metaphorically, palm wine is seen as the petrol which enables the hero's constitution to work in a proper way. The alienation of the protagonist is at its highest point. As such, his body does not go along with ordinary water: "By that time I could not drink ordinary water except palm-wine" (p.7). He is happy because his delighted body finds its "raison d'être" in alcohol. Through the overuse of palm wine, the body of the Drinkard appears as a handsome body in quest of plenitude.

The Drinkard's refusal to work like the young men of his age can be seen as a questioning of patriarchal aristocracy. Beyond this questioning, one can see the symptoms of family crisis. In the plot, the Drinkard is the first son of a rich farmer who has eight children. Regarding his position of the first son, he should be a social reference for his younger brothers. Unfortunately, he is turned out to be a bad example for his family and his community as a whole. Here, Tutuola uses the laziness and alcoholism of the first son to tackle the rampant issue of heritage in a fragile African society. The dependence of the hero on his body symbolizes his dependence on his community. For this "problematic hero, any contact of experience with the external reality could constitute a serious threat against his true or false identity" (Anozie, 1970, p.43). Despite his deviationist behavior, the Drinkard feels at ease in his body. He is happy to stand aloof from his community. In the narrative, the Drinkard is also the embodiment of welfare and happy life. His body that smells alcohol is happy to enjoy life. He does not care about the future. Tutuola portrays the body of his protagonist as a happy body. As such, he focuses on the protection and welfare of his body. In so doing, he forgets that he is made of a body and a spirit. His body is then nothing but a carnal envelop. The "problematic character" embodies values which are opposed to the ones accepted and shared by the members of the community. Despite this deviance, he is highly regarded by his kinsmen. In

this perspective, body as cultural and social marker needs to be scrutinized.

Body as Cultural and Social Marker

At this step of our analysis, body must be read as a product of society. As revealed in the narrative, society makes body and body too makes society. In all human societies, body plays a social role which highlights its existence and gives it a true meaning. Body is then a cultural element which permits a social class to identify. It is also a vector of social cohesion and a powerful means to perpetuate customs and traditions. As such, body is a symbol the reader needs to decipher in order to produce a meaning. In Merleau-Ponty's view "our body is this strange object that uses its own parts as a true representation of the world, and through it one can understand this world and the essence of life" (1945, p.271). When the flesh is shaped in such a way, it shows itself both as an appropriate place of the elaboration of every representation and characterization. The Drinkard of Tutuola's text does not need to work to enjoy the sweetness of life. His father is a significant ally who helps him to reach his goal. In the plot, his father could have punished him for his addiction to alcohol. Unfortunately, he encourages him and offers him a very big farm of palm trees:

So my father gave me a palm-tree farm which was nine miles square and it contained 500, 000 palm-trees, and this palm-wine tapster was tapping one hundred and fifty legs of palm-wine every morning, but before 2 o'clock p.m, I would have drunk all of it; after that he would go and tap another 75 kegs in the evening which I would be drinking till morning. So my friends were uncountable by that time and they were drinking palm-wine with me from morning till a late hour in the night. (p.7) In this passage, one notices that the Drinkard's father and his friends play a significant role in the evolution of the plot. Like the fool, the Drinkard has a social role to play in his community. His absence or his exclusion from his society can therefore bring about social disharmony. The inactivity of the Drinkard can explain the good social position of his family. But he achieves social integration and is also the advocator of African positive values: sharing, brotherhood and union. The great number of young people who share palm wine with him shows that the Drinkard is in harmony with his body and his environment. For Gil, "body is this object through which death befalls on us and, it is ready for many objective treatments and with the same docility" (1985, p. 86). The body of the Drinkard uses the way the community imposes it. In this view, every member of the community helps in the corpulence of the Drinkard. The father of the main character is bound to hire a man who taps palm wine for him every day. In the behavior of the wino, one observes a certain awareness of an inner strife. One also sees a hero who is in quest of an ideal with a chivalrous standing (Anozie, 1970, p.67). The happy body of the Drinkard is turned into a thin and bruised body after the death of his father and his palm wine tapster. The sudden disappearance of his main allies introduces the theme of death, dead body and carnal envelop in the text. Thus, the beautiful body of the palm wine tapster returns to dust in order to foster the renaissance of a new body. The narrator refers to the unorthodox burial of the tapster when he argues:

But what I did first when we saw him dead there, was that I climbed another palm-tree which was near the spot, after that I tapped palm-wine and drank it to my satisfaction before I came back to the spot. Then both my friends who accompanied me

to the farm and I dug a pit under the palm-tree that he fell down as a grave and buried him there, after that we came back to the town. (p. 8) Here, the reaction of the Drinkard before the corpse of his palm wine tapster is compared to the one of a carnal being whose prime concern is the satisfaction of the desires of his body. This can explain why he abandons the corpse of his palm wine tapster under a palm tree and gets drunk. Furthermore, the corpse of the tapster is buried under a palm tree in poor conditions. This burial allows understanding that a dead body is sacred and it cannot be exposed to the general public. Death enables the Drinkard to understand his addiction to alcohol and his dependence on the others. As such, he decides to free himself from laziness. To get his freedom, he starts tapping palm wine for his own use: "I climbed another palm-tree which was near the spot, after that I tapped palm-wine and drank it to my satisfaction" (p.8). The beautiful body of the Drinkard realizes that tapping palm wine is a very difficult task. He vainly tries to hire another tapster: "I started to find out another expert palm-wine tapster, but I could not get me one who could tap the palm-wine to my requirement" (p.9). As revealed, the Drinkard is abandoned by his allies and the communities as a whole. Consequently, he sets out in quest of his dead tapster. This quest leads to the split of body.

Split Body

At this step, split body must be read as a transformed body. It is a body which the writer submits to a series of manipulation, transformation and interpretation. This study of the split body will be inspected in two main points: the adulterated body and the incarnated or renewed body.

Adulterated Body

The Drinkard becomes a courageous character who takes initiatives in improving his social status. The shortage of palm wine engendered by the tapster's death compels the protagonist to understand the meaning of life. In this respect, he decides to travel in the invisible world to ask his dead tapster to come back to normal life. As the narrator puts it:

When I saw that there was no palm-wine for again, and nobody could tap it for me [...]. I said that I would find out where my palm-wine tapster who had died was. One fine morning, I took all my native juju and also my father's juju with me and I left my father home-town to find out whereabouts was my tapster who had died. [...] I was travelling from bushes to bushes and from forests to forests and sleeping inside it for many days and months, I was sleeping on the branches of trees, because spirits etc, were just like partners. (p.9) Here, Tutuola's hero comes across different obstacles on his way of adventure. As seen in the narrative, his objective is to bring his dead tapster back home. But this journey in the unknown is meant to force the protagonist to a self-questioning. Larson regards this inner journey as an "ontological gulf" (1974, p.130). It is the relationship between the hero and his environment. It turns out that the route of adventure is made of obstacles. The Drinkard travels alone in the forest many months before he finds normal people's living place. His happy body which is not used to suffering perceives adventure as a kind of hell. The different obstacles he overcomes on his way constitute a sort of "rite de passage". Through these ordeals, the Drinkard symbolically gets rid of his carnal envelop for a free access to the world of the dead. His brilliant success to the different tests reveals a ritual passage as he can see the dead people and talk to them.

He is even astonished to see the dead people exchanging or borrowing different parts of their body like clothes. In the underneath paragraph, the narrator depicts the metamorphosis of a handsome man who draws the attention of all the market women and finally becomes a skull:

When he reached where he hired the left foot, he pulled it out, he gave it to the owner and paid him, and they kept going; when they reached the place where he hired the right foot, he pulled it out and gave it to the owner and paid for the rentage. Now both feet had returned to the owners, so he began to crawl along on the ground [...]. When they went furthermore, then they reached where he hired the belly, ribs, chest etc., then he pulled them out and gave them to the owner and paid for the rentage. Now to this gentleman or terrible creature remained only the head and both arms with neck, by that time he could not crawl as before but only went jumping on as a bull-frog [...]. Now the complete gentleman in the market reduced to a "SKULL". (pp.20-21) In the text, as a skull, this gentleman borrows different parts of his body from other "spirit-men" to attract the most beautiful lady of the market. When he reaches his objective, he returns home. On his way, he gives back to each part he borrowed or rented to its owner. In this invisible world, human body is commonly shared. The beautiful and attracting body of the man becomes a split or detachable body. Leclair uses the "notion of castration" (1971, p.46) to refer to the suffering one inflicts on his own body. This transformation of the attractive body into a split body allows to understand that beauty is illusive. Through this representation, Tutuola invites the reader to transcend the physical aspect of everything to consider its figurative meaning. He who refuses to go beyond physical appearance will be disillusioned like the beautiful easy-going lady of the market. She has blindly accepted to follow an unknown gentleman and finally completes her love story in despair: "When the lady saw that she remained with only Skull, she began to say that her father had been telling her to marry a man, but she did not listen to or believe him" (p. 21). In this view, the beautiful body can be a source of perdition and depersonalization. In Tutuola's text, the world of the spirits is seen as a mysterious universe where skulls, bones, fingers, "half-bodied babies (p.34) and other parts of man's body are active characters as the narrator accounts:

I changed myself to a man as before, then I talked to the lady but she could not answer me at all, she only showed that she was in a serious condition. The Skull who was guarding her with a whistle fell asleep at that time. To my surprise, when I helped the lady to stand up from the frog on which she sat, the cowrie that was tied on her neck made a curious noise at once, and when the Skull who was watching her heard the noise, he woke up and blew the whistle to the rest [...]. But before they could do that, I had changed myself into air, they could not trace me out again, but I was looking at them. (pp.26-27) In the above passage, the Drinkard retakes his human condition to exchange words with the lady who is being held hostage by skulls. Here, the universe of the skulls is organized in such a way that it accepted by all of them. The protagonist realizes that the world of the living and the one of the dead are intrinsically linked. As such, the dead use some elements of the visible world like whistle and cowries to keep social order. The Drinkard tries to save the hostage of Skulls against their will. When he realizes that his life is in jeopardy, he changes himself into wind and runs away: "I had changed myself into air, they could not trace me out again, but I was looking at

them" (p. 27). The cowries the dead tie to the neck of their captives prevent them from speaking. It is then man's body as a whole which undergoes transformation. The Drinkard has transformed and re-transformed before he encounters his dead tapster. He first changes himself into different elements of the cosmos: air, water, fire and then bird: "I changed myself to a very small bird which I could describe as a "sparrow" (p.28). "So I became a big bird like an aeroplane and flew away with my wife" (p.40). The hero also turns into a spirit in order to enter inside a tree: "When we entered inside the white tree, there we found ourselves inside a big house which was in the centre of a big and beautiful town" (p.67). These different metamorphoses of the protagonist can be considered as a form of renaissance or beginning of a more interesting and promising life. The lazy Drinkard becomes a conscious and courageous man who starts fighting for the betterment of his living conditions. In this process shows him as an incarnated or beatified body (character).

Incarnated or Beatified Body

After travelling throughout the world of the dead, the hero finally meets his palm wine taster. The narrator talks about the arrival of the Drinkard in the town of his palm wine tapster when he asserts:

When it was 8 o'clock in the morning, then we entered the town and asked for my palm-wine tapster whom I was looking for from my town when he died, but the deads asked for his name and I told him that he was called "BAITY" before he died. [...] When he heard that from me, he told us to go to my town where there were only alives living, he said that it was forbidden for alives to come to the Dead's Town. [...] The whole of them that stood on that place grew annoyed at the same time to see us walking forward or with our face, because they were not walking forward there at all, but this we did not know. (p.96) Here, the impulses of the body impel the Drinkard to go beyond the boundary which separates the world of the living and the one of the dead. In African collective consciousness, a living cannot go to the world of the dead. Likewise a dead can never come back to life. This is the reason why in the narrative the dead are amazed to see a human being in their world. The presence of the hero is perceived as a violation of the law of nature. In effect, Tutuola uses the wandering of the protagonist's body to address the issue of life after death. According to him, death is a continuation of life. The existence of similarities between the two worlds is a good illustration of this continuation. However, the contrast between these two worlds is by seen the way of walking. Human beings have feet and walk forward. The dead and their pets have no feet and walk backward: "Everything that they were doing there was incorrect to alives and everything that all alives were doing was incorrect to deads too" (p.100). The behavior and the life style of the dead are different from those of the living. As such, the protagonist notices that there is no return between the two worlds. He therefore understands that his tapster will never come back to the world of the living: "I myself knew already that dead could not live with alives, because I had watched their doing and they did not correspond with ours at all" (p.101). The dead embodied by the tapster welcomes the hero as a friend and offers him food and drinking. The Drinkard spends a night with his tapster and returns home. The tapster then gives him a magic egg as a reward. On his return, he becomes a wealthy man of his community because the magic egg provides him whatever he needs:

He gave me an « EGG ». He told me to keep it as safety as gold and said that if I reached my town, I should keep it inside my box and said that the use of the egg was to give me anything that I wanted in the world and if I wanted to use it, I must put it in a big bowl of water, then I would mention the name of anything that I wanted. (p. 101) In the aforesaid excerpt, the egg is the symbol of the success of the hero's quest. It will enable him to enter triumphantly in the history of his community. In this respect, when he reaches home, he uses the magic egg to save his community from a terrible starvation: "Before reaching my town, there a great famine and it killed millions of the old people and uncountable adults and children" (p. 118). The wandering body finally becomes a blessed or saving body.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Tutuola writes body to assert his freedom of speech and his cultural identity. In the text, the sentence structure is violated; repetition and calligraphic writing are turned into a new writing technique. Consequently, Tutuola can be regarded as a non-conformist writer who promotes "subversive creation" (Chancé, 2009, p.68). This writing of rupture and decentering comes into force after the political independences which go along with fragmented writing (Tchassim, 2016, p.10). The stake of writing body is then to heal African society from a social cancer. Tutuola uses the representation of the body to castigate the evils of African ruling system. He also promotes African values: courage, determination, sharing and brotherhood. The change of the Drinkard into a "liberator-hero" at the end of the book shows that every man has a specific mission to accomplish in his society.

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