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The integration of creative oral forms and techniques in Fidèle Padwindbé Rouamba's *Pouvoir de plume*

The integration of creative oral forms and techniques in *Pouvoir de plume* (Fidèle Padwindbé Rouamba)

Fidèle Padwindé Rouamba's novel, *Pouvoir de plume* ("Pen power", 2003) summarises the life of a journalist, Goama Tansoba, alias Gilbert Torro. The principal narrator is Jean de Dieu, a friend of the journalist. The journalist recorded the narrative on five cassettes, which the heterodiegetic narrator has reconstituted to form a novel. The novel is also a pertinent analysis of the development problems of democracy in the country and in Africa in general. Particularly striking is the way the author exploits the oral tradition. Thus he makes an effort to use many proverbs drawn from the Moaaga oral tradition. A folktale "Le caïman et l'homme" ("The Caiman and the man") is also included in the narrative. Moreover, in chapter nine, "Le Club" ("The Club"), the author introduces a story to illustrate the jesting alliance between the Bisa and Gourounsi. He therefore exploits, as did the Burkinabè novelists Patrick Ilboudo in *Le procès du muet* ("The trial of the deaf-mute") and Noaga Kollin in *Le retour au village* ("Back to the village"), the virtues of this traditional practice, firmly established in the ethnic culture of Burkina Faso. I shall endeavour to reveal how the novelist Rouamba exploits the oral tradition in his work, in order to see how all the creative oral forms and techniques borrowed from the oral tradition act as catalysts in the production of a novel. **Key words:** Burkinabè novel, oral tradition, proverbs, tales, jesting alliance.

African literature has a distinctive tone that comes from two cultures: on the one hand, the ethnic culture derived from the author's mother tongue and, on the other, Western culture acquired through school textbooks. This dual expression gives rise in many respects to unique features in the way the novel is treated. African society is in fact characterised by an oral tradition in which the authors have been immersed since their earliest years, which allows writing conditions to be noted. I propose, in the context of this article, to examine the relationship maintained by an African, more precisely, a Burkinabè novelist – in this instance Fidèle Rouamba – with oral literature. After surveying Moaaga oral literature, where the author finds his inspiration, I shall describe the oral genres of this literature. Finally, I shall identify the different literary genres Rouamba borrowed from this oral literature.

Rouamba and the oral tradition

My investigation reveals that the following oral genres, mainly from the oral literature of the Moose, have been re-injected into the novel: the proverb and the slogan, the tale and the legend, the song and, finally, the jesting alliance and relationship. Before examining their insertion and exploitation in the novel, it is advisable to survey Moaaga oral literature.

The oral literature of the Moose is rich and varied. There are several oral genres, both short and long forms, such as proverbs and tales. Speech plays an essential role in this whole structure. According to Badini (1990: 658) the Moose believe that speech shares the ontological nature of being, *Neda bè gomde*; they say: "Not to speak is not to exist!"

The Gomde produces thought (*tagsego*). The Gomde belongs to the category of those who have mouths (*sē tar noorè*) as opposed to those who do not have mouths (*bō-mugdu* (pl), *bō-mukku* (s)).

Five organs are responsible for forming speech according to the Moose: the heart (*sūūri*), bile (*yam*), liver (*sāore*), brain (*zu-kalenk-to*) and mouth (*noorè*). The heart – *sūūri* (s), *sūya* (pl) – is considered to be the driving force of the body, the seat of speech, it provides the impetus. Thus, when a man is unable to speak, when he "clams up", it is because his heart is holding him back.

This is the first organ where speech, which is interior, is situated; next it is propelled towards the liver and the bile to be put into form. It is the heart that determines in the first instance the production of speech. The second organ or seat of speech is the liver.

The liver – *sāore* (s), *sāowa* (pl) – seems to be the parent organ playing a major role in the formation of speech, for it is considered to be the seat of knowledge and wisdom. It is not for nothing that, when meat is shared out, it is this morsel (together with the neck) that is given to the elderly, as the latter are the guardians of the children. The neck symbolises the weight of responsibilities. The gallbladder or intelligence (*yam*) is the third organ through which speech passes.

Yam means intelligence in Mooré. After having passed through the liver, which contributes to the choice of words, ideas and the construction of sentences, speech makes its way to the *yam* or gallbladder, which is the seat of reflection.

Next comes the fourth organ, the brain or *zu-kalenk-to* through which speech must pass. The brain helps in appreciating situations before action. It is the seat of reason and controls decisions. This is the place of decision-making or the superego, because social censure intervenes to regulate speech production.

Finally, the last seat of speech is the mouth (*noorè*). It is the place where speech must be disciplined, dressed up, for there are irreparable consequences, as the Moaaga proverb puts it: *Goam ya wa koom a sā daage pa tōê le wuk ye* ("speech is like water, once it has been poured out, it cannot be picked up again"). Therefore the mouth

must exercise great prudence. Speech is materialised through the lungs or *fulfuudu*. Four basic elements are indispensable for the production of good speech: air, earth, water and fire. Oil is also indispensable for good speech: without oil, the impact on the interlocutor is missing, as the Bambara say. For the Moose this is also true, as expressed by this aphorism: *goam gomna ne pagdo, sē mi a wegse* (“words are spoken encased in shells, the one who knows how can crack the shells”).

The plot of *Pouvoir de plume*

Fidèle Padwindé Rouamba’s novel summarises the life of a journalist, Goama Tansoba, alias Gilbert Torro. The principal narrator is Jean de Dieu, a friend of the journalist. The narrative is recorded on a set of five cassettes, reconstituted to form a novel by the heterodiegetic narrator. The novel is divided into seventeen chapters that correspond to the different stages in the development of the main character, from his birth at Bongo, his native village, his exile with his mother in Boilga, his education, his adolescence, his struggles as a journalist, until his return to the land of his ancestors.

The novel evokes, from the beginning, periods of colonisation in the village of Bongo, with resistance to hard labour to construct the railway. We therefore see how Naba Kandé strikes a bargain with the colonists to preserve his own interests.

The exodus is an important step in the life of the hero Goama, for his mother Ninda is forced to flee with her son to escape from the tyranny of her husband Souwanré. In their wanderings, they go through Lalpooré and arrive at Boilga, the village where Goama Tansoba grows up. It so happens that Gilbert Torro is chosen to go to school because the village people do not want to send their children there. This stroke of fortune leads to his success, for he is selected to continue his studies in Europe, on the Isle of Hope.

In Europe, he finds student life harsh, due to difficult living conditions and the hostility of the environment. Gilbert Torro decides to return to his country to serve it, but his return represents a descent into hell, for he is soon disillusioned, on the one hand by the poor welcome he gets from the Minister, on the other by the politics of discrimination and exclusion practised by the party-State, which make life difficult for him. He survives by giving private lessons and doing odd jobs. He becomes a tourist guide and this is how he meets a French woman, Brigitte Deschamps, with whom he has a relationship and out of which a daughter is born.

In this precarious atmosphere, a friend proposes that he work as a journalist on the newspaper *Autopsy*. Here he experiences difficult days, for his colleagues plot against him and his boss is unfair. Finally he is dismissed. He passes a competitive examination for journalism, does training abroad and begins a career as a journalist for a state newspaper. His determination to do his work well and his critical articles earn him six transfers in ten months. The last straw is his report on a student strike. He

tries to give a professional account of the situation, but finds himself sharply reprimanded by his editor and the editor-in-chief. He no longer understands anything about his profession and takes refuge in revolt. The trade union activities of the *pistolographer* (pistol + grapher = a person who uses his pen like a sword), Torro is no help to him for, as a member of the human rights movement, he is suspected of trying to overthrow the government and is finally arrested, incarcerated and tortured. In prison, he makes friends with the main opponent of the regime, Diallo. An insurrection is brewing in the country because of the ever-increasing arrests and injustices. While in prison, Gilbert, his wife Brigitte and his daughter Natacha exchange letters.

With the aid of some soldiers, Torro and Diallo manage to escape, one dressed as a hawker, the other as a farmer. They get to a neighbouring country where they organise the resistance. The regime of the dictator president finally collapses like a house of cards thanks to a coup d'état. Gilbert's friends seize power and it is he who draws up the declaration of the fall of the government and the political takeover. He declines the offer he receives to occupy the post of Minister of Information and creates a private newspaper.

The novel is a pertinent analysis of the development problems of democracy in the country and in Africa in general. The work ends with the return of Gilbert Torro to the land of his ancestors, to Bongo where his dying father Souwanré Kayaaba is waiting for him, full of remorse.

It can be said that the plot of the novel is overall quite well constructed. But the author's attempt to disguise the topographical details of the narrative, as did Ahmadou Kourouma in *Les soleils des indépendances* ("The suns of independences") often leads him to include lengthy descriptions that are not pertinent to the narrative. Moreover, the details of Torro's childhood are quite often vague. It is not clear for instance whether Gilbert Torro leaves to pursue his studies in Europe after passing the examination at the end of primary school or only after completing the first phase of high school. Moreover, the voluntary confusion of names and places often disrupts the coherence of the narrative for readers unaware of this strategy. The part devoted to the autopsy of development problems reads like a political treatise and would have been more pertinent in the form of dialogue.

All things considered, it can be said that Fidèle Rouamba has written a novel on the practice of democracy in Africa. He shows, through the life and career of a journalist, how democracy is a long quest to be pursued through a tireless march. In this sense the work does shed some useful light. This is why it is interesting to read; it is full of twists and turns, despite the closure of certain doors, deliberately chosen by the author, who nevertheless takes care to place reading keys underneath them.

Typology and taxonomy of Moose oral genres

The features of the oral genres inserted in the novel must be specified. In the Moaaga linguistic taxonomy and typology, the non-narrative genre *yelbuna* (pl), from *yelbûndi*, is a noun phrase composed of the roots *yelle* and *bûndi*; these mean respectively story, something, and the notion of being covered, veiled, bent. They correspond to proverbs, aphorisms, adages and sayings in French or English. These are concise and condensed expressions based on observations of everyday life always combined with prescriptive content: a moral lesson, a rule of social conduct and even principles of spiritual life.

The second non-narrative genre, the *zab-yuure*, is a noun phrase composed from *zab* the root of *zabre*, meaning “war”, “quarrel”, “dispute”, “battle”, and from *yuure* (“first name”); the whole phrase meaning slogan or *nom de guerre* because, in the past, it was declaimed by the griot in times of war to galvanise the courage and bravery of the combatants, and even to increase their strength tenfold. It expresses in a concise way, like a maxim, a programme for life, moral behaviour to be observed in all circumstances, and more specifically in moments of great hardship experienced by the individual.

Solem kuesee refers to the non-narrative genre composed from *solem*, root of *solemde* (s) *soalma* (pl) and *kuesee* (pl) *kueega* (s). *Solemde* is a nominal constituent formed from the root *solem*, and from a suffix of the class that takes *de* in the singular and *a* in the plural. It corresponds to the short tale, to the riddle in French or English.

Soalm wogdo refers to the narrative genre; it is a qualifying syntagm of the same type as *soalm kuesee*. *Soalm wogdo* mean literally “long tales”. The *soalm wogdo* are fabulous tales, cosmological, ethical and social legends, fables, and *chantefables*, spoken fables interspersed with sung verses. In fact they are imaginary narratives whose aim is to entertain, remaining rooted in the bestiary with *M’ba soamba* (the trickster hare in English tales), who clashes with his antagonist *M’ba katre*, the hyena. The tales also present *M’ba kuri* the tortoise, *M’ba kaongo* the guinea-fowl, *M’ba Bonyënga* or *M’ba weoogo Naba* the lion, *M’ba wobgo* the elephant and others. The *Soalm wogdo* or tales do not spare cathartic laughter, besides the fact that they serve as vehicles for vital lessons, such as the ethics, philosophy and worldview of the society of the Moose.

The *kibare* or novella (narrative genre) – the word is of Arabic origin and means “serious narrative”, as opposed to fables – is a very enigmatic kind of tale that poses important questions, giving rise to reflection, analysis and meditation, in order to draw lessons of wisdom from it. It is the type of narrative that appeals to adults and in particular the elderly. The *kibare* is to adults what the *soalm kueega* is to little children; refined and having a certain realism akin to social reality, developing a higher philosophy of human existence; with two poles: fiction and reality.

The *yiilè* or song is the last narrative genre. It is not easy to define, for it also means an animal horn. Indeed, it is known that the Moose easily transform the horn of a

bull or certain wild animals into musical wind instruments to accompany their songs or to transmit messages as hunters did in the past. The strength of the song as a veritable weapon of defence, in certain cases, tends to make the connection between what the horn means for the animal and what the song represents for man (Kabore 1993: 92).

Analysis of oral aspects in the novel

In his novel *Rouamba* inserts proverbs, a few tales and some instances of jesting alliances and relationships. In this section these oral genres will be identified in the novel.

Proverbs and slogans

The author endeavours to use many proverbs drawn from the Moaaga oral tradition. The slogan of Yandé, the animist priest – “The warrior prefers death to shame” – sums up a philosophy of life (19). This slogan comes in fact from the Moaaga proverb *kuum são yãnde* (“Better death than shame”). Another proverb that Yandé quotes to Goama Tansoba’s mother indicates the importance given to the study of proverbs in the novel: “Woman, there are no troubles on truth’s doorstep. The latter, it is said, makes the eyes red without however putting them out” (26).¹ This proverb means that the solution for the safety of Goama’s mother is flight to another country to escape her husband’s tyranny.

The exodus of Goama Tansoba and his mother lead them to another inferno; the following proverb describes this situation: “They had fled from the rope, as the proverb puts it, only to find themselves at the foot of a fibre plant” (35).² This saying comes from the Moaaga proverb *zoé bĩndu té kēn yēdga* and implies that they have scarcely found a warm welcome in the village of exile; this makes them regret their departure from their native village, Bongo. Another proverb expresses the paradox of human life: Man is made thus; until he has experienced the reverses of fortune, he cannot understand the proverb that says, “One never throws stones at one’s fatherland, only clods of earth” (36).³ This comes from the Moaaga proverb *ba yĩir ka lobgd ne kuqr ye lobgda ne tãndagre*.

Another proverb reveals Goama’s discernment when he realises that Tanga his tutor will never replace his real father: “The guinea-fowl said that if he follows the mother hen it is not through thoughtlessness, but really and truly for reasons of convenience and strategy. Otherwise he knows he is from another bloodline” (39).⁴ Subsequently, a proverb expresses the superiority of the one who gives: “The hand that receives is always lower than the donor’s hand” (45).⁵ This proverb conveys the fact that the Africans, on the Isle of Hope where Goama was studying, were invited to a give-and-take meeting, but in fact their opinion was not taken into account, they were even bullied.

The nation's recovery is symbolised by this proverb "The child is father of the man" (54).⁶ Working for the newspaper *Autopsy*, faced with hatred and punches below the belt, Gilbert Torro learns the adage: "Man is a wolf to man" (75).⁷ In the face of the injustice of his editor on the newspaper *Autopsy*, Torro remembers this proverb recommending prudence: "Let us always be slow to anger. It has ever been a bad counsellor" (86).⁸ Gilbert reflects on the degeneration of his adversaries with these words of his grandfather: "You must know how to dismiss in time the woman who is dreaming of abandoning you next year" (90).⁹ In other words, you must know when to withdraw from certain matters before they desert you or cause you harm and humiliation.

The bond with the land is expressed by this proverb that also ends the amusing story that Torro tells about his jesting partners: "If the little mouse abandons the path of his fathers, the thorns of couch grass will put his eyes out" (99).¹⁰ The prisoners who could not resist the pleasures of the flesh during the cockfight with their partners committed suicide, thus confirming the adage that "Shame kills faster than illness" (119).¹¹

When Gilbert Torro is in prison, his torturers hurl this proverb at him by way of sanction: "The lion that has not experienced the dramatic consequences of his roar cannot appreciate the true value of silence" (120).¹² The lament of the people suffering from the dictatorship of the regime is conveyed by this proverb: "The tall grass may hide the partridges, but cannot stifle their cries" (130).¹³ The enemies of the regime increase in number without this being realised, as in the case of this rebel captain. This reversal is expressed by this proverb: "When the donkey decides to unseat its master, it takes care to lower its long ears" (134).¹⁴ The call of blood, that is the return to the fatherland, is embodied in this proverb pronounced by Gilbert Torro: "[...] If the shade refuses to reach the antelope, then it is up to this wild animal to try and reach the shade" (189).¹⁵ The call of his native land is always present in those proverbs that ring true in Gilbert Torro's head: "No matter how far the bird can fly, he always has to return to earth" and further on: "No matter how long the road taken by the wise traveller may be, he always returns to the cradle" (189).¹⁶ The elders resolve Gilbert Torro's request to go back to his father with this advice: "A horse cannot be made to drink when it is not thirsty" (190).¹⁷ However, the inhabitants do not fail to label him ungrateful, saying: "When a man succeeds in curing his neighbour's impotence, the latter tries to sleep with his benefactor's wife" (190).¹⁸ As far as they are concerned, Gilbert should remain with them instead of wanting to go in search of his parent.

The proverbs inserted into the novel occur like so many utterances judiciously integrated into the plot. They do not superimpose themselves on the text, but rather constitute the lifeblood of the fictional plot. When proverbs are taken out of their original situation to be expressed in a situation of usage, they espouse the narrative framework of the novel and in so doing introduce new concepts. It is no longer a

purely traditional utterance but brings about new meaning, or one could say that the utterance enhances the fictional narrative framework with new meaning. Proverbs do not occur as non-contextualised utterances, but rather as aids that become part of the fictional flesh. They contribute to reinforcing the knowledge of endogenous wisdom (Hountondji 1994). This enables oral knowledge and written knowledge to be placed side by side. When one realises that Africa has an abundance of this kind of scarcely acknowledged know-how, it helps to balance the transmission process of human knowledge and experience. Proverbs are thus aids that serve to make the novel indigenous. Consequently proverbs stamp their mark on the work, which means that when a Burkinabè novel is read, it possesses its own characteristics, features that differentiate it from the Western or European novel.

Tales and legends

The author draws on many traditional oral narratives. One example is the origin of the pact that links the inhabitants of Tabou to the famous crocodile pool of their village. The narrative begins like an African folktale, notably by the traditional first sentence:

According to certain worthy people of Tabou, there was once upon a time a hunter who got lost in the bush of Zoundweogo. In his frantic search for a safe pathway that would lead him back to the village, the hunter meanwhile happened as if by magic to meet an old crocodile who, to his great astonishment, asked him to carry him to his lair. Being well-prepared and experienced, the hunter pronounced some magic formulas purported to ward off fate, then did not hesitate to assist the animal who showed him the way to his den. After they had both slaked their thirst, the saurian and the hunter, under the patronage of the most senior member of the order of crocodilians, signed a pact of friendship, in terms of which the man would organise a party every year in honour of the animal race that lived in the sacred pool of Tabou. In return, the clan of the hunter would receive the blessing of the water gods so as to live in love, peace, tolerance, justice, pardon and gratitude, without which virtues the various living species would act, no more no less, like bloodthirsty wolves towards one another [...] (63-64).¹⁹

This legend illustrates well the pact linking the sacred crocodiles and the inhabitants of Tabou. If one examines reality, it is obvious that the story is not unlike the one told about the sacred crocodiles of the Burkinabè village of Sabou, an attractive tourist site 100 kms from Ouagadougou.

The author also introduces comparisons between the fables of La Fontaine and African, or rather Burkinabè, tales. Moreover he assigns the same functions to them:

On certain nights, Gilbert Torro would hold his listeners spellbound by tales drawn from depths of the Coast. Discussions would follow, debates in which the tour

guide would try to establish a parallel between the Aridean tales and certain fables of La Fontaine.²⁰ Indeed the two genres have a point in common in that each of them was a narrative type going back to antiquity, and of course the functions of both were entertainment, teaching and criticism (68).²¹

The situations are often identical despite the difference in the bestiaries that inspire them:

Once Torro took for the sake of comparison the example of the crow and the fox followed by that of the snake and the spider, both being narratives that show how the guile of the latter triumphs over the gullibility of the former. For the record, it must be remembered that in La Fontaine's comedy the crow, carried away by the flattering words of the fox, ends by dropping the piece of cheese he was holding in his beak (68).²²

Goama comments on the plot of the two tales as follows:

As for the Aridean tale, it brings together the two animals concerned in a meeting where the ordeal is played out. Here it is: When Ouafafo, the snake, paid a visit Soulga, the spider, in order to claim what was owing to him, the spider trod discreetly on one of the chickens he was raising in his farmyard, crushed it, and, before the denials of his children, whom he expressly accused of having committed the crime, demanded that the accused undergo there and then the knife test. But, as if by magic, all the sons of the spider were spared by the sharp edge of the pocket-knife that their father handled with a false dexterity. Feeling in no way guilty and not suspecting the evil intentions of his debtor, the reptile insisted on also undergoing the test in question, so as to be cleared of all suspicion. And this is how, seizing this stroke of luck, the spider cut the throat of Ouafafo who, with his eyes closed, had presented his neck to him, thus confirming the maxim according to which every flatterer lives at the expense of the one who listens to him (68-69).²³

These folktales and legends are introduced into the narrative in a coherent way. It must be said that on the one hand the narrative is nourished by folktales that transmit traditional wisdom. What is more, the texts give a certain perception of things in so far as they show, through the comparison of the tales of La Fontaine and those of the Aridean that a certain understanding of nature and things is always gained through observing the facts of nature. La Fontaine's tale shows that one must avoid allowing oneself to be flattered to the extent of losing one's assets. The Aridean tale shows that one must avoid the naivety that only leads to one's ruin. The tales also occur at a point in the plot when their insertion is motivated by the long evening. Indeed, it is at night that tales are told in the village.

Jesting alliance and relationship

What is the jesting alliance and relationship? From observation on the ground, it is possible to say that one speaks of a “jesting relationship” when there is a link of *consanguinity* by a marriage contract between two groups or two families, or within one family (e.g. grandfather / grandson). On the other hand, one speaks of a “jesting alliance” when a link (alliance) exists between two groups, two villages, two districts or regions, or two ethnic groups as a result of ancestors having sealed a sacred pact based on friendly relations governed by jesting codes, accompanied by links of non-aggression, mutual assistance, respect and solidarity. There can also be a symbolic blood pact sealing the agreement between two ancestors or two friends who become jesting allies.

Burkina Faso has a mosaic of ethnic groups with diverse traditions. However, it must be stated that this does not prevent these groups from living together on good terms, and this was even the case before colonial penetration. One of the main characteristics of Burkina Faso, wrote André Nyamba (2002: 73-97), is without doubt its pluri-ethnicity. According to linguists, the sixty-one languages of the country correspond to sixty-one cultural groups, all of different builds, who inhabit different geographical areas (Nyamba 2002: 73-97). And yet it must be recognised that almost all the ethnic groups maintain jesting relations with at least one other ethnic group (Sissao 2002: 169-172).

Thus the Moaaga group jests with the San (in the Tougan and Toma regions) and the Samogo (in the Samogohiri and Samorogouan regions). The Moose of Yatenga jest with the Gourmantché. The Gourmantché jest with the Kotokoli (Togo), Yadse (Burkina), Djermas (Niger) and Dagomba (Ghana). The Bobo jest with the Peul, the Sénoufo with the Marka, the Dafing and the Dagara. The Dafing with the Peul, Bobo, Dioula and Bwaba; the Bwaba with the Vigué, Peul and Dafing.

In general, the people of the South West (Siamu, Dagara, Lobi, Gan, Djan, Puguli, Birifor) jest with the people of Comoé and KénéDougou (Turka, Gouin, Karaboro, Sénoufo). In particular, the Gan jest with the Dafing, Gouin, Bobo and Bwaba. The Birifor have as jesting allies the Lobi, Gouin and Dafing. The Lobi jest with the Gouin, Birifor and Dioula, the Toussian with the Jōmi,²⁴ the Gurunsi with the Bisa, the Kassena with the Djerma; the Kô (Winnien) with the Peul, Bisa, Lagana and Djerma; the Dioula with the Lobi. The Peul jest with the Bobo, Yarse, Bambara, Maransé, Dioussambé; the Yana with the Zoosé (from Diabo); the Fulse with the Gurunsi, Bisa and Gourmantché; the Dogon with the Bozo. The Toussian, Turka and Siamu jest with the Gouin; the Sénoufo with the Dafing, Dagari and Lobi; the Bolon with the Dagari. The Samogo of Samogohiri (Djungo) jest with the Moose.

It must be said that the field of expression of the jesting relationship is gradually deserting the oral domain and entering into written literature (Sissao 1995: 732). Indeed, novelists are becoming the echo of this cultural value by inserting it into their narrative plots. It can be found in the following Burkinabe novels: Etienne Sawado-

go's *La défaite du Yargha* ("The defeat of a Yargha man", 1977), Noaga Kollin's *Le retour au village*, Patrick Ilboudo's *Le procès du muet*.

The phenomenon of jesting relationships or *dakiire* plays a role in easing social tensions. Their presence and survival in the novels *La défaite du Yargha* and *Le retour au village* are the perceptible signs of the influence of oral literature on the Burkinabè novel.

Burkinabè novelists are highlighting this cultural feature of Moaaga aesthetics, the *dakiire* or jesting relationship.

In *La défaite du Yargha*, the *dakiire* takes place between the hero Tinga and another inhabitant of Boulsa. In *Le retour au village* the *dakiire* is conducted between Tiga, the wife of Tégwendé and the kola-nut seller Rayeka. Finally, in *Le procès du muet* it is Ram Nogdo and Kouma, the old woman, who are led to the field of the *dakiire* by a long friendship and frequent contact.

It must be emphasised that the *dakiire* or jesting relationship enables the novelist to create a shock effect through the forthrightness of the language, the licentious and filthy vocabulary. The purpose of this is to bring the individuals closer together on more familiar terms. Thus, concerning the *dakiire* in *Le procès du muet* Hyacinthe Sanwidi (1988: 214) writes:

It (*dakiire*) allows him to introduce a comical note into an action that is developing in a dramatic or tragic fashion. The *dakiire* enables him to lighten the atmosphere of the novel, to amuse the reader through his characters. He gets this resource from Black African aesthetics, for it is truly a special kind of jesting. The *dakiire* allows him to interrupt the rhythm of the novel's action, provoking a situation that is purely artificial, but which belongs to African reality.²⁵

Moreover, in chapter nine "The Club", one finds an African cultural characteristic that persists between ethnic groups in Burkina Faso, this being the jesting alliance. The novel introduces the jesting alliance and relationship between the Bisa and Gurunsi. The author exploits, as did the Burkinabè novelists Patrick Ilboudo, the jesting alliance between the Bisa and Gurunsi. He exploits, as did Ilboudo in *Le procès du muet* and Kollin Noaga in *Le retour au village* the virtues of this traditional practice, firmly anchored in the ethnic groups of Burkina Faso. The story is told by a Bisa who wants to mock the Gurunsi in *Pouvoir de plume*:

I met an old Gurunsi who was struggling along on his ramshackle bicycle. I would probably not have noticed this old eater of dogs had it not been for his posture, which to say the least was intriguing for, instead of looking straight in front of him to avoid possible accidents, our drunkard was lifting his face upwards to the sky. When I asked him the reason for this position, he answered that he was neither so mad nor so stupid as to look downwards and risk spilling the *dolo* he had just drunk to the dregs (97-98).²⁶

Here the mockery deals with the drinking habits of the Gurunsi who is called a great drinker of *dolo*.²⁷ We see that the jesting alliance is based on a dietary weakness that serves as an outlet for mockery. Recurring symbols of food and drink can be perceived between these two ethnic groups. The Gurunsi, in particular the Kassena, are reputed to be eaters of *kazanga* and the Bisa eaters of groundnuts and dog heads.²⁸ Moreover, the alliance that links the Samo and Bisa comes, according to oral tradition, from the fight the two brothers are said to have had over the head of a dog.

After this anecdote emphasising the jesting relationship between the Bisa and Gurunsi, the relations between the Samo and Mosse are on the agenda.

“Once upon a time,” a Mossi player announced to the assembled company, “there was a lecherous Samo who, for some or other reason, had beaten his wife. And when night fell, our bruiser fell prey to a terrible erotic urge thinking of his wife whose body, in every respect, never failed to arouse his whole being, all his senses. This Samo, just imagine, began to soliloquise, to remonstrate with his dick in erection. ‘You who are ferreting about like the head of lizard (or like a goat’s tail, it all depends)’, he said; ‘you know very well my wife won’t let me taste the flavour of her honey this time, and for reasons not unbeknown to you. You would therefore do well to curb your ardour [...]’ At these words, his wife, who also had an irrepressible need of sweet and urgent rubbing, remarked to her husband that, in actual fact, the private quarrels between a man and his lady-love should in no way hinder the beneficial and constructive dialogue that could take place between their respective genitals.” All laughed heartily at this sally, every one adding his bit, the somewhat ironic tone of which was aimed at having a sly dig at the Samo who were present (98).²⁹

Here again an alleged weakness is derided in order to poke fun at the Samo. Indeed, the poorly controlled libido of the Samo serves as the catalyst to highlight the hilarity of the situation. Having quarreled, the married couple should have avoided each other, but this is not the case for this husband and wife who have a sexual reconciliation. Later in the novel, reference is made to the game of jesting alliance. It is in fact Gilbert Torro who is under the spotlight because of his native village, alleged to be a hotbed of sorcerers: “That same day it was the turn of Gilbert Torro, who was roundly called a sorcerer and a devourer of souls; he put this attack down to jesting as well, which is why he retorted” (98).³⁰

It must be said that the jesting alliance and relationship still appear as forms of endogenous wisdom that enrich the novel. They enable the introduction of another style different from that of the classical Western novel. The role of this device is to introduce a pause, allowing the reader to take a break and be refreshed. This cultural touch brings about another kind of relationship between the characters and the narrative act. Thus the novel is constructed by using characters who draw inspiration

from their cultural heritage. The utterances introduce something new because of their structure and characteristics. But it must be said that the jesting alliance and relationship are perfectly integrated into the narrative framework and recharge the African novel.

A mixture of genres: poetry

Rouamba inserts a poem into the narrative to show Torro's sorrow in the face of the despair and injustice he has endured. It is a lament of the poetess Nadia Palenfo, entitled "Complainte d'une paria" ("Lament of a pariah"):

I would have liked to make you
My fiancé of every morning
My husband of every evening
My lover for eternity

I would have liked to share with you
The roses of every day
The thorns of every night
The smiles as well as the sighs

But I invite you to come back
From illusions of Exodus without end
From too precipitous departures
From ever sudden returns

Come back then to the way of our forefathers
To the path of our ancestors
Come back and answer the call of my blood

The call of my fountain of tears
Come back and bury in this fecund earth
Like the placenta, seeds of hope
Come back then and shatter with great axe-blows
All the chains of despair.³¹ (90-91)

In fact, as the heterodiegetic narrator says, these lines will perhaps plant in Gilbert, who has suffered so much injustice at the newspaper *Autopsy*, the desire to put an end to his exile on the Coast of Yams and think about returning to his native land. Certainly, this poem is a bucolic reminder of his native land. Thus the lines that evoke the exodus are very explicit: "I invite you to come back/ from illusions of exodus without

end / from too precipitous departures / from sudden returns." The poet appeals for a return to the ancestral land: "come back then to the way of our forefathers / to the path of our ancestors / come back and answer the call of my blood / to the call of my fountain of tears." In spite of the injustices suffered, the poet calls for hope: "come back and bury in this fecund earth / like the placenta, the seeds of hope." A firm invitation is given to break the chain of despair: "come back then and shatter with great axe-blows / all the chains of despair."

Conclusion

In this article I have endeavoured to show the creative techniques of a Burkinabè writer of the new generation (who comes from the 21st century, from the literary competitions of the National Cultural Week), who seems to get his inspiration from the oral tradition. The writer's use of proverbs, tales, jesting alliances and relationships prove that he is deeply immersed in oral culture and that he called on many narrative genres to nourish the plot of his novel. His use of oral material is rather original as it fits perfectly into the narrative framework to serve as a cultural and literary reference. And this indeed proves the continuity of this creative technique, exploited first by Nazi Boni in *Crépuscule des temps anciens* ("Twilight of the olden days", Nazi 1962: 259) and then by the late Patrick Ilboudo, both of whom excelled in this process of renewing the oral tradition. Oral literature is indeed a permanent and essential feature of the creative literary process of Burkinabè authors. This trend is perpetuated and it can thus be claimed that the oral tradition still has a bright future in Burkinabè literary exploitation.

It must be said that these creation techniques and strategies inspired by elements of orality enable the production of a narrative that is nourished by the traditional sources of endogenous Burkinabè knowledge. Moreover, these techniques of oral creation make it possible for the novelist to give more weight to the traditional message. Indeed it is a question of reactivating the oral wisdom and placing it at the disposal of the written creation. The novelist employs a subtle mixture of the oral and the written, of oral and written knowledge, to finally tell his story. This borrowing of the traditional oral techniques and strategies of narration, through oral utterances, folktales, proverbs, poetry, the jesting alliance and relationship, enable the Burkinabè novel to be anchored by its traditional roots. It is a case of placing in contiguity oral knowledge and written knowledge, promoting at the same time endogenous wisdom. This recourse to oral utterances is also an acknowledgement by the author that he bears the stigmata of his culture embedded in his creative subconscious.

Translated by Jill Daugherty

Notes

1. All references to the novel refer to Rouamba (2003); only the pages references are used from here onwards. "Femme, point de troubles au seuil de la vérité. Celle-ci, dit-on fait rougir les yeux sans pour autant les crever" (26).
2. "Ils avaient fui la corde, comme dit le proverbe, pour se retrouver au pied d'une plante à fibres" (35).
3. "L'homme est ainsi fait; tant qu'il n'a pas subi les revers de l'aventure, il ne sait pas s'accommoder du proverbe selon lequel on ne lapide jamais sa patrie avec des pierres mais avec des mottes de terre" (36).
4. "Le pintadeau a dit qu'il suit la mère poule, ce n'est point par inconscience mais bel et bien pour des raisons de commodité et de stratégie. Sinon il sait qu'il est d'une autre souche" (39).
5. "La main qui recevait était toujours plus basse que la main donatrice" (45).
6. "L'enfant est le père de l'homme" (54).
7. "L'homme est un loup pour l'homme" (75).
8. "Soyons toujours lents à nous mettre en colère. Elle a été toujours mauvaise conseillère" (86).
9. "Il faut savoir congédier à temps la femme qui rêve de l'abandonner l'année suivante" (90).
10. "Si la petite souris abandonne le sentier de ses pères, les piquants des chiendents lui crèveront les yeux" (99).
11. "La honte tue plus vite que la maladie" (119).
12. "Le lion qui n'a pas subi les conséquences dramatiques du rugissement ne mesure pas à sa juste valeur l'importance du silence" (120).
13. "Les hautes herbes ont beau cacher les perdreaux, elles ne peuvent pas étouffer leurs cris" (130).
14. "Quand l'âne décide de vous terrasser son maître, il prend soin de baisser ses longues oreilles" (134).
15. "Si l'ombre refusait d'atteindre l'antilope, il appartenait à cet animal sauvage à chercher à rejoindre l'ombre" (189).
16. "Aussi haut que l'oiseau puisse voler, il revient forcément sur terre; Aussi longue puisse être la route d'un voyageur sensé, celui-ci retourne toujours au bercail" (189).
17. "On ne force pas un cheval à boire quand il n'a pas soif" (190).
18. "Quand un homme réussit à soigner l'impuissance de son prochain, celui-ci s'évertue à coucher avec la femme de son bienfaiteur" (190).
19. "Aux dires de certains notables de Tabou, il était une fois un chasseur perdu dans la brousse de Zoundwéogo. Dans sa quête effrénée d'une voie salutaire qui le ramènerait au village, le chasseur tomba entre temps comme par enchantement sur un vieux crocodile qui, à son grand étonnement, lui demanda de le transporter jusqu'à son repaire. En homme averti et aguerri, le chasseur prononça des formules magiques censées conjurer le mauvais sort, puis n'hésita pas à porter secours à l'animal qui lui indiqua le chemin à suivre pour trouver son antre. Après s'être désaltérés tous les deux, le saurien et le chasseur, sous les auspices du doyen de l'ordre des crocodiliens, signèrent un pacte d'amitié, pacte aux termes duquel l'homme devait organiser une fête chaque année en l'honneur de la gent animale qui vivait dans la mare sacrée de Tabou. En contrepartie, le clan du chasseur devait recevoir la bénédiction des dieux de l'eau afin de vivre dans l'amour, la paix, la tolérance, la justice, le pardon et la gratitude, vertus sans la possession desquelles les différentes espèces vivantes seraient ni plus ni moins des louves sanguinaires les une pour les autres [...] " (63-64).
20. The fictional setting of the novel.
21. "Certaines nuits, Gilbert Torro tenait son auditoire sous le feu ardent des contes tirés des profondeurs de la Côte. Des discussions s'en suivaient, débats dans lesquels le guide touristique essayait d'établir un parallèle entre les contes aridéens et certaines fables de Lafontaine. En effet, ces deux genres avaient un point commun en ce que chacun d'eux était un type de récit qui remontait à l'Antiquité, et bien sûr en ce qu'il avait pour fonction le divertissement, l'enseignement ou la critique" (68).
22. "Une fois, Torro prit l'exemple du corbeau et du renard puis celui du serpent et de l'araignée aux fins de comparaison, récits dans lesquels il était établi que la ruse des seconds avait finalement triomphé de la naïveté des premiers. Pour mémoire, il convient de rappeler que dans la comédie de Lafontaine, le corbeau qui s'était étourdi en écoutant les propos flatteurs du renard a fini par laisser tomber le fromage qu'il tenait dans son bec" (68).

23. "Quant au conte aridéen, il met en scène les deux animaux en question dans une séance où devaient se dérouler l'épreuve de l'ordalie. Voici : Tandis que Ouafa le serpent était venu chez Sougla l'araignée pour réclamer son dû, celle-ci marcha discrètement sur un des poussins qu'elle élevait dans sa cour, l'écrasa, et, devant la protestation de ses enfants qu'elle accusa expressément d'avoir commis le forfait, tint à ce que les accusés subissent séance tenante l'épreuve du couteau. Mais, comme par enchantement, tous les fils de l'araignée furent épargnés par le tranchant du canif que leur père maniait avec une dextérité feinte. Ne se sentant nullement coupable et puisqu'il ne devinait pas les sombres intentions de sa débitrice, le reptile exigea qu'on lui fasse subir aussi le test en question, et ce afin d'être lavé de tout soupçon. C'est ainsi que, saisissant cette aubaine, l'araignée trancha la gorge de Ouafa qui, yeux fermés, lui avait tendu le cou, confirmant alors la maxime selon laquelle tout encenseur vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute" (68-69).
24. These people are becoming extinct as a linguistic minority; they also speak Toussian.
25. "Il (dakiire) lui permet d'introduire une note comique dans une action qui se développe sur un mode dramatique ou tragique. Le dakiire lui permet de détendre l'atmosphère du roman, d'amuser le lecteur à travers ses personnages. Il tire cette ressource de l'esthétique négro-africaine, car il s'agit véritablement d'une plaisanterie d'un type particulier. Le dakiire lui permet de casser le rythme de l'action romanesque en provoquant une situation purement artificielle mais qui s'insère bien dans les réalités africaines" (Sanwidi 1988: 214).
26. "j'ai rencontré un vieux gourounsi qui ahanait sur son vélo poussif. Je n'aurais sans doute pas prêté attention à ce pauvre mangeur de chien s'il n'avait pas été dans une posture pour le moins intrigante car, au lieu de regarder droit devant lui pour éviter d'éventuels accidents, notre ivrogne avait la face levée vers le ciel. Quand je l'ai interrogé sur la raison de cette attitude, il m'a répondu en disant qu'il n'était ni fou ni bête pour baisser sa face au risque de verser le dolo qu'il venait de boire jusqu'à la lie" (97-98).
27. *Dolo* is a popular local alcoholic drink, made of sorghum millet. Known as *Pito* in Ghana, it is widespread through West Africa. In Burkina Faso, the Dagari and Samo ethnic groups are reputed to be heavy drinkers of it. Generally brewed by women, it is drunk by both men and women. Because it heavily attracts flies, the bars where it is generally sold are known as "Karate bars", a reference to the constant gestures of chasing flies away [eds.].
28. *Kazanga* refers to a Kassena meal, ironically referred to as Kassena bread [eds.].
29. "Il était une fois lança un joueur Mossi à la cantonade, un Samo lubrique qui, piqué par je ne sais quelle guêpe, avait battu sa femme. Et voilà qu'à la nuit tombée, notre bagarreux fut en proie à une terrible pulsion érotique en pensant à son épouse dont le physique, à tous les égards, mettait à chaque fois tout son organisme, tous ses sens en alerte. Ce Samo-là, figurez-vous, se mit à soliloquer, à faire des remontrances à sa bite en érection. Toi qui es en train de fureter ainsi comme une tête de margouillat (ou comme une queue de bouc, c'est selon), dit-il; tu sais bien que ma femme, ne me permettra pas de goûter cette fois à la saveur de son miel, et ce pour des raisons que tu n'ignores point. Tu ferais donc mieux de freiner tes ardeurs [...] A ces mots, la femme, qui était-elle aussi dans un besoin irrépressible des frottements doux et pressants, fit remarquer à son mari qu'en réalité, les querelles intestines entre un homme et sa dulcinée ne devraient en aucune façon entraver le dialogue bienfaisant et constructif qui pourrait naître entre leurs sexes respectifs. On rit de bon cœur de cette boutade, chacun y allant de son petit commentaire dont la note quelque peu ironique visait à égratigner un tant soit peu les Samo présents dans le groupe" (98).
30. "Cette même journée vint le tour de Gilbert Torro que l'on traita proprement de sorcier, de mangeur d'âmes, il mit cette attaque aussi sur le compte de la plaisanterie, c'est pourquoi il répliqua" (98).
31. J'aurais voulu faire de toi / Mon fiancé de tous les matins / Mon mari de tous les soirs / Mon amant pour l'éternité / J'aurais voulu partager avec toi / Les roses de toutes les journées / Les épines de toutes les nuits / Les sourires aussi bien que les soupirs / Mais je t'invite à revenir / Des illusions de l'Exode sans fin / Des départs trop précipités / Des retours toujours impromptus / Reviens donc sur le chemin des aïeux / Sur le sentier des ancêtres / Reviens répondre à l'appel de mon sang / A l'appel de ma fontaine de larmes / Reviens enfouir dans cette terre féconde / A l'image du placenta, les graines de l'espoir / Reviens donc briser à grands coups de cognées / Toutes les chaînes du désespoir (90-91).

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