

Titles And Subtitles as Foregrounding Techniques in Alain Mabanckou's *Lumière De Pointe-Noire* and *le Sanglot de L'homme Noir*

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Abstract

Titles and subtitles are the names of a work of art and a section of a literary composition identified amongst others as a paratextual element which contributes to the overall thematic, stylistic implication and aesthetics of a work of art. Mabanckou's selected novels in this study have undergone various levels of scrutiny by critics thematically, culturally, and stylistically with respect to aesthetics. However, less attention has been paid to the use of titles and subtitles with their overall effects on meaning projection. Hence, this study investigates the role, nature and functions of titles and sub-titles in Mabanckou's *Le sanglot de l'homme noir (Sanglot)* and *Lumière de Pointe-Noire (Lumière)*. Close reading is adopted as methodology and means of data collection along with positioning and foregrounding theories as data are subjected to linguistic analysis. The study reveals that subtitles in *Sanglot* are intertextual, parodied, and a partial reproduction of previous literary works and thematic engagements which culminate in the text's titles. On the other hand, subtitles in *Lumière* metaphorically give a comprehensive summary of the writer's position on critical thematic issues. The application of the theory of foregrounding highlights the significance of titles whereas positioning theory designates the functions of the linguistic constituent of titles. The study concludes by submitting that titles are highly significant in meaning projection with metaphoric titles acting as a strong positioning tool for authors in the projection and summation of thematic concerns in giving readers a preview of writers' intentions and thematic concerns in contemporary committed literature.

Keywords: Titles, Subtitles, Foregrounding, Positioning, Alain Mabanckou

Introduction

Titles are paratextual elements in literature. A title is the name of a work of art or literary composition. The title of a text has been identified amongst others as a paratextual section of the text which contributes to the overall thematic and stylistic implication of a work of Art (Ekun, 2019). The importance of the title in literary discourse also underscores the fact that titles help in identifying the genre and style to which a work belongs. This includes autobiography, romance, history etc. Mukherjee (2014) believes that the title of a work of art is unarguably the most important element in the composition of a text as it informs and encourage readers to read the text and in carrying out database indexing. Amor (2017), while introducing the title as a nominal element and an important component of a work of art, opines that the title is an element of a text like sub-titles, intertext, name of the editor, preface, notes, illustrations, table of contents and post face.

The central message of the text is also captured through the aid of the title. It can also serve as a nominal element in identifying the main characters in a text. To this effect, Genette & Crampé (1988) think that the title of an artwork is one of the most controversial to define as it takes different forms concerning the writers' choice of naming a work of art, namely: simple and

compound forms. The duo define title as a series of linguistic signs which designate and indicate the general content of a text that appeals to the public aimed at, which normally appears at the head of a text. Thus, the title serves as a tool to improve communication and enhance understanding while removing ambiguity before the readers of a text as it guides the reader towards understanding the text he/she is confronted with. This conforms with the submission of Salehi & Fumani (2013) who explain that the title is the first thing that catches the reader's attention, serves as bait to get people to read the story and evokes an image at the same time. (see Maledo and Emama, 2020)

The function of titles in literary works has evolved over the century. Bobadilla-Pérez cited in Otegbale (2019) believes that titles of works have evolved from nominal titles to thematic or symbolic titles. This is because the nominal title is limited in portraying the writer's underlined intent like the thematic title. The thematic title underlines and bears the subject matter of the text and has informative, aesthetic and vocative value. The selected texts of Mabanckou investigated in this study fall within the category of modern thematic or symbolic titles as each title seduces the reader to carry out the reading of the texts based on the thematic and symbolic nature. This is made possible by the tripartite function in their presentation which includes aesthetics, informative and vocative. Thus, the study will reveal how the language used in the creation of titles and subtitles aids in adding aesthetics to the texts while informing readers at the same time owing to the vocative functions of the language of the texts.

Along with close reading adopted as a methodology in this study, the theory of foregrounding and the theory of positioning also come in handy in the interpretation of the text for meaning projection. The theory of foregrounding was developed in the middle of the 20th century from the Prague School by Irina Vladimirovna Arnold, a scholar in St. Petersburg (Meniailo, 2020). The theory of foregrounding as applied to literary text is an approach that has proven to be valuable. Questions relating to the literary motif, and how they come to be and have perceptual prominence in texts are answered through the theory of foregrounding in close reading of texts (Lottrup, & Jensen, 2018). Arnold (2016), opines that the theory of foregrounding helps in putting a spotlight on significant shades of meaning by drawing readers' attention to certain parts of the text integral to the interpretation of the whole text for proper comprehension of the writer's message and intention. On the other hand, the theory of positioning is multidisciplinary and deals with the attribution of functions, rights and duties to

characters by the narrator when applied to texts. Positioning theory aims to understand the negotiation process of rights and duties attributed to characters in discourse (Harré, 2012).

Title and subtitles as intertextuality and parody in *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*

Titling as intertextuality and parody are richly deployed in the creation of Mabanckou's *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*. The analysis of title and the sub-titles in the text aid in meaning recovery by interpreting the writer's message following their overlapping nature. This is evident from "Le sanglot de l'homme noir" at the beginning of the text to its culmination in "Les soleils des indépendances" summarised in the table below. The subtitles are a summation of the different realities that cause grief to contemporary Africans

S/N	French titles parodied by Mabanckou	English translations by Dominic Thomas	Original Parodied titles and authors
1	Le sanglot de l'homme noir	The Black Man's Tears	The tears of the White Man (Pascal Bruckner)
2	Un nègre à Paris	A Negro in Paris	Un nègre à Paris (Benard Dadié)
3	L'esprit des Lois	The spirit of the Law	De L'esprit des lois (Montesquieu)
4	Les identités Meurtrières	Murderous identity	Les identités Meurtrières (Amin Maalouf)
5	Chemin d'Europe	Road to Europe	Chemin d'Europe (Ferdinand Oyono)
6	Le devoir de violence	Bound to Violence	Le devoir de violence (Yambo Ouologuem)

From the table above, it is evident that the subtitles in the text are derived from earlier literary works of writers from different continents. The choice of the titles parodied in the text brings to the fore in line with Arnold's theory of foregrounding the reality of contemporary Africans as positioning aid in attributing roles to Africans in different situations. In 'Le sanglot de l'homme noir', translated as 'The Black Man's Tears', the writer foregrounds through an epistolary document the struggles of the African man born in France. Like the white man in 'The tears of the white man' who loathes himself because of guilt associated with the history of slave trade and colonialism, the black man's tears come from the experience suffered during these periods. Identical feelings of shame and culpability among Africans and Europeans are brought to the fore. Africans are depicted with reference to racial consciousness as a group to be pitied with the belief that their salvation is found in commiseration and humanitarian aid. As the overall title of the text, it also acts as the melting pot of the African man's experience captured in the subtitles.

The parodied title from Bénéard Dadié in item (ii), takes a look at a particular belief of Africans, opportunities for better jobs and living conditions in France. In *un nègre à Paris*, contrary to the original presentation of a young African struggling between tradition and modernity, Mabanckou portrays an African, security personnel who narrates his ordeal in a bid to portray the current divide in society as he accuses the whites of being partial in the provision of opportunities to the citizens, especially to people of colour and Africans. The exclamatory remark “Un nègre ne peut JAMAIS être un vrai prof dans une grande université de ce pays ! (p.21) [A Black person can NEVER be a real prof in a big University in this country!] suggests with the principles of the theory of positioning, the assignment of least dignified opportunities to Africans in France is foregrounded with the capitalisation of NEVER. Thus, contrary to the original message of Dadié, the writer parodied the geographical connotation of the parodied text in creating a different storyline to emphasise the underemployment of blacks in France.

L'esprit des lois of Montesquieu and *Les identités Meurtrières* of Amin Maalouf reiterate the struggle of Africans with respect to their identities in the diaspora. *L'esprit des lois*, underlines the dichotomy in the application of judicial provisions captured in the text thus “mais chacun sait que les lois sont une chose et que la réalité est une autre chose” (p.31) [but we all know that laws are one thing and reality quite another]. This is further underlined in the narrator's explanation in the excerpt below:

Les africains eux-mêmes ont souvent imaginés la France comme un pays des Blancs. Tout comme, pour certains français, parler de la France, c'est parler d'un pays peuplé de Blancs...ici de telle pratiques sont anticonstitutionnelles, mais c'est précisément cette « anticonstitutionnalité » qui masque les injustices. Sous prétextes d'assurer une prétendue égalité collective, plusieurs français sont écartés du jeu de la démocratie. *Sanglot*, p.33

Africans themselves often conceive of France as a White country. Much in the same way that some French people, to talk of France is to evoke a country made up of White people..., these kinds of practices are considered unconstitutional, and it is precisely this "unconstitutionality" that conceals injustices. Under the pretext of allegedly collective equality, larger segments of the French population find themselves side-lined from democracy.

The submission of the narrator positions the democratic process in France as one that promotes inequality among its citizens, especially those of African descent. The reason for the inequality is captured in the conception of France as a White country by Africans and seen as a

country densely populated by Whites. Thus, the law, which is the constitution, is positioned by the writer as unrealistic following the exclusion of a large population from the democratic process and exercise of their civic rights.

Amin Maalouf *Les identités Meurtrières* pushes the discussion on the plight of Africans further concerning the struggle for a sense of belonging in the diaspora. Reference to Amin's text attracts the reader to the main thematic concerns of identity and underlined the narrator's position captured thus: "Mais ma notion de *l'identité* dépasse de très loins les notions de *territoire* et de *sang*" (p.44) [my understanding of identity goes far beyond notions of territory and blood]. Regarding blood and territory in the submission of the narrator, a sense of belonging is attributed to other notions such as history, language, and experiences. Thus, identity and sense of belonging are foregrounded and positioned as relative depending on the history and experience of a person.

The parody of 'Chemin d'Europe' mimic the reality of migration which has been visited by writers over decades since the inception of African written literature of French expression as the narrator submits: « Europe était en effet une idée, une croyance, une conviction. Chacun pouvait inventer ce continent à sa manière » (p.53) [Europe was, in fact, an idea, a belief, a conviction. Everyone was free to invent it as they deem fit]. This assertion in line with the first order of positioning depicts Europe as an abstract entity which lacks coherence in the perception of young people as everyone could come up with his or her idea. The narrator affirms his position as he explains: "chaque enfant du continent noir dessine au fond de lui cette terre lointaine où tombe la neige. Une terre d'abondance et de bonheur..." » p.57 [each child from the African continent draws this far away land where snow falls. A land of opportunity and happiness...]. Thus whereas the parodied title draws the reader's attention to this section of the text in line with the principles of the theory of foregrounding, positioning reveals the mindset of Africans and their perception of Europe as a paradise where everyone's dream can be actualised. This is lucidly explained in the narrator's declares « Le chemin d'Europe donne l'impression au jeune Africain que par l'aventure, il débouchera dans une clairière où sa misère prendra fin comme un de baguette ... » p.58 [The road to Europe leaves young Africans with the impression that the adventure will end in a clearing from which misery will have finally disappeared thanks to a magic wave of the hand].

Ouologuem's 'Le devoir de violence' parodied in the text foregrounds the complicity of Africans in the history of slave trade and is captured thus: «Pourtant, il serait inexact d'affirmer

que le Blanc capturerait tout seul le Noir pour le réduire en esclavage. La part de responsabilité des noirs dans la traite négrière reste un tabou parmi les Africains qui refusent d'ordinaire de se regarder dans le miroir » p.84 [Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to say that the Whites alone captured Blacks to reduce them to slavery. The role of Blacks in the slave trade remains a taboo subject to this day among Africans who refuse to look at themselves in the mirror]. The complicity of Africans opens a new phase in the critical work and creation of authors. The narrator captures this mobility in thematic concerns and presentation spearheaded by Ouloguem in the excerpt below.

Le roman d'Ouloguem signait l'acte de naissance d'une "autre littérature africaine", plus libre et éloignée des thèmes consensuels. C'était également la naissance de l'autocritique... c'était une hardiesse, au moment où tout écrivain africain était censé célébrer aveuglement les civilisations africaines et décrire un continent où tout était calme et pacifique avant l'arrivée des méchants Européens,... *Sanglot*, p.92

Ouloguem's novel announced the birth of a « new African literature », unfettered and removed from consensual themes. It also heralded the emergence of self-critique... This was a daring and bold move at a time when African writers were expected to blindly celebrate African civilisations and portray a continent where everything was calm and peaceful before the arrival of the European villains

The above excerpt from *le sanglot de l'homme noir* is a partial reproduction of Ouloguem's postulation in 1968. The application of the theory of positioning in the first order reveals the insincerity to African leaders in the first quotation as well as the second. Thus, African writers before the arrival of Ouloguem's works are designated as fairy tale writers, biased with the reality of history, especially the slave trade that lasted for centuries. Thus, from the analysed subtitles, the usage of parodied elements from the texts involves primarily, a partial reproduction of the original text which serves the purpose of emphasis and positioning as well as occasional playful inversion or critical transformation of original ideals from the original texts in consonance with the submission of Dentith (2000)

Titles and subtitles as figurative devices in *Lumière de Pointe-Noire*

Titling and sub-titling in *Lumière de Pointe-Noire* serve as metaphoric elements. A metaphor is a figurative device or figure of speech that involves a direct comparison of two different things in which one is stated for the other (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Foregrounding is achieved figuratively through the deployment of metaphor in *Lumière de*

Pointe-Noire. The culmination of the metaphoric usage gives credence to the title of the text, which performs a metaphoric role and function. This figurative usage of language in the texts foregrounds the writer's message in positioning the characters in the selected subtitles analysed in this section. Metaphoric subtitling plays a similar function similar to metaphoric statements in the body of a text. Beyond attracting the reader's attention to the section, it serves as a direct comparison between the entire discourses in the section where they are used. Thus, like metaphor which provides a direct comparison between two things, metaphoric titling provides a platform for direct comparison between the title of the text and the entire discourse. This is the case with the selected sub-titles drawn from *Lumière de Pointe-Noire* in the table below.

S/N	French Excerpt	English Translation
i.	La femme aux miracles	The miraculous woman
ii.	La mort aux trouses	Death on the heels
iii.	Pour une poignée de Dollar	For a handful of dollar
iv.	Les enfants du paradis	The children of the paradise
v.	Adieu ma concubine	Goodbye my concubine

In 'La femme aux miracles', the opening chapter of the text, the value and esteem of a mother are foregrounded with the metaphoric sub-title. The excerpt: "la femme aux miracles s'était alors sacrifiée, prenant sur elle les péchés nées de l'inconscience humaine. Elle empêcha du coup une catastrophe qui aurait entraîné l'extermination de l'espèce humaine » (p.13) [the miraculous woman sacrificed herself, carrying upon herself unconscious sins of humans. She stopped a catastrophe that could have exterminated the human species], as presented in the text, foregrounds the messianic role of the woman. She is believed to have ensured the continuity of the human race. The metaphoric foregrounding of the woman is achieved through the title as the narrator remarks:

Je regarde vers le ciel en me disant que cette vieille bohémienne a peut-être trouvé le repos éternel et a été remplacé par une autre femme un peu plus jeune qu'elle, celle que je connais le plus et qui aurait, elle aussi, accepte un tel sacrifice, cette femme qui m'a mis au monde,... *Sanglot*, p.17

I look toward the sky, telling myself that this old bohemian has perhaps found eternal rest and is now replaced by another woman younger than her, this that I know better and who will accept such sacrifice herself, this woman that brought to the world.

The woman compared directly to the moon is a natural metaphor used to underline the important role of a mother towards her offspring in guiding their paths in the dark like the moon. The sacrifice of the woman is akin to the sacrifice of the narrator's mother as a representative of all mothers who willingly sacrifice their lives for their children. Hence, whereas the metaphoric sub-title depicts the mother as miraculous owing to her sacrifice and the power to give life, the role of a guide is attributed to the woman while designating the mother as selfless and sacrificial.

The subtitle, 'La mort aux trousses' is metaphorically used to underline the urgency of escape and the need for survival in the face of danger. The narrator in a bid to capture the jealousy between men because of their romantic affairs with women emphasises the intensity of such conflicts through the depiction of a feud scene where he remarks:

On ne voyait plus d'où partaient les jets de pierres et qui balançait les bouts de bois que Marcel esquivait de justesse. Il avait de longues jambes, courait comme s'il avait la mort aux trousses. En quelques secondes foulées, il avait déjà traversé l'avenue de l'Indépendance et était volatilisé dans les rues Tortueuses du quartier trois-cents.
Sanglot, Pp.70-71

We could not see where the thrown stones came from and who swung the wood that Marcel dodged quickly. He had a long leg and ran like he had death on his heels. Within a few seconds of being pressed upon, he had already crossed the independence avenue and vanished into the winding streets in Trois-cents quarters.

The metaphor "la mort aux trousses" as used in the text, foregrounds the intensity of the character's action of escape to avoid being lapidated. In line with the principles of the theory of foregrounding, attention is drawn to the mode and means of escape instead of the main conflict between the characters through the metaphoric sub-title. Thus, the metaphoric titling at this juncture of the text positions the character as a possible culprit evading the danger of death as though the death was attached to his body.

The sub-title, 'Les enfants du paradis' {the children of the Paradise} is a metaphor depicting the source of true happiness. Though raised by poor parents, the narrator debunked the perception of a colleague who designated African children through the use of the oxymoron "paradis de misère" (p.124) [paradise of misery]. He buttresses his position in the description of his friend through the complex clause "il n'a peut-être pas conscience que les chaînes qu'il porte lui-même dans ce qu'il croit être un confort en Europe ..." p.125 [blinded by the thoughts of the comforts he will enjoy in Europe, he becomes oblivious of the chains he is shackled with]. Also,

contrary to his friend's perception, the narrator describes the children as fulfilled in their world by recalling his childhood experience in the excerpt below.

J'ai mis du temps avant de comprendre qu'ils étaient tout aussi heureux que je l'étais lorsque j'avais leurs âges et que le bonheur était dans le plat qui fumait dans la cuisine, dans l'herbe qui poussait... voire sur l'affiche d'un film indien projeté au cinéma Rex où nous nous alignons dès dix heures du matin pour avoir la chance d'assister à la séance de quinze heures. *Sanglot*, p.125

It took me time to understand that they all were also happy like I was when I was their age and that happiness was in the plate of food they prepared in the kitchen, in the vegetables they cultivated... to watch the Indian film on the notice board projected in Rex cinema where we would arrange ourselves from ten O. clock in the morning to be lucky enough to watch a scene by three O. clock in the afternoon.

From the above excerpt, the contentment of African children in the text is foregrounded through the title "les enfants du parade" and the list of activities that produce real happiness in place of western clothing and material possessions emphasised. This positions the children as individuals that are actively and productively engaged in their daily lives and the livelihood of their families as they help at home with cooking and weeding the farmlands. The children are therefore designated as happy owing to the sense of fulfilment they derive from their daily engagement. This emphasises the narrator's submission that happiness is a function of the state of being of an individual and not material possession. Thus, they all are given the opportunity to construct their own paradise irrespective of their financial state, social status and linguistic background as depicted by the children in *Lumière de Pointe-Noire*.

The use of 'Adieu ma concubine' as a metaphoric title indicates the relationship of Africans in the diaspora with their ancestral home like the narrator in *Lumière de Pointe-Noire*. The narrator's ancestral Congo-Brazzaville is directly compared to a concubine whom a man visits once in a while for a very short time and then returns to his wife, which in the case of the narrator is Europe and America. Having spent twenty-three years in the diaspora and returned through the effort of the French government, the narrator explains his detachment from his African home which cedes place for the diaspora he has embraced as his home. Thus, the use of 'Adieu ma concubine' metaphorically foregrounds the narrator's detachment from his root and his attachment to the diaspora in line with the principles of the theory of foregrounding thereby making him a stranger in his ancestral African continent.

Outside the subtitles in *Lumière de Pointe-Noire* discussed above, the titles of the text itself are metaphorical in the context of usage owing to the direct comparison between the overall thematic concern of the text and the main character. The texts and the overall thematic projection, depicted by the life of the main characters and the narrator can be compared directly and possibly substituted for each other. In the text, the narrator is considered to be the light of his home town through his literary engagements and popularity. This is demonstrated in the various encounters with family members and fellow countrymen throughout the text. The relationship between the narrator and other characters depicting him as the light of his environment foregrounds a pride of association. Notable examples include his meeting with his half-brother Yaya Gaston who submits: «Je m'appelle Gaston. C'est moi le fameux personnage Yaya Gaston dans le roman *Demain J'aurai Vingt ans* » p.103 [I am Gaston. It's me the famous character in the novel *Tomorrow I'll be Twenty years*]. Grand Poupy made a similar remark while addressing the narrator “je ne sais pas ce que tu commettras après notre rencontre, mais avec toi je m'attends au pire car tu ne m'avais pas rate dans ton romans *Black Bazar* » (p.137) [I do not know what you commit after our meeting, but with you, I do not expect the worst because you did not forget me in your novel *Black Bazar*]. Both characters in the text use internal intertextuality with reference to the work of the author to project him as a light who brings his relatives from obscurity to relevance.

The pride of association with the prominent character of the environment is also foregrounded as the proprietor of the church “Nouvel Jerusalem” exclaims : “L'Américain! Je n'en crois pas mes yeux! Tu as pensé à venir voir le vieux Koblavi!” (p.176) [The American ! I cannot believe my eyes! You thought of coming to visit old Koblavi!]. The positioning of the narrator as the light of his immediate environment is captured in the submission of Koblavi who reveals that:

Je t'ai souvent vu à la télé en train de parler de tes livres, je m'excuse, j'ai honte parce que je ne les ai jamais lus... Un jour, dans une interview, tu as même évoqué le cinéma Rex, tu ne sais pas le plaisir que j'ai alors éprouvé!... *Lumière*, p.176

I often watch you on the television trying to talk about your books, I am sorry, I feel ashamed because I never read them... One day, in an interview, you even spoke of Rex cinema, you don't understand the kind of joy I sensed!...

Koblavi's confession with reference to the narrator's books he never read foregrounds the means by which the narrator projects his home town of Congo Brazzaville in his television

interviews. These characters' references to the books and the television programmes all contribute to positioning the writer as an important figure in line with the attribution of roles, duties and functions. The narrator thus is projected as the light bearer of his immediate community in line with the submission of Koblavi about his interview, where he talks about Rex Cinema. Thus, he is the light that brightens the city of Brazzaville as he introduces it to the world through his books and frequent interviews as he draws the attention of the world to that environment.

Beyond the narrator's publications and interviews, the expectation of family members, acquaintances and fellow countrymen all contribute to substantiating the metaphoric title of the text, "*The Light of Pointe-Noire*" as a metaphor for the narrator. The expectation from the narrator during the land dispute between the family and their neighbour underlines his place from the narrator's explanation that: "Ce mur est dans notre parcelle! ...tout le monde veut exprimer son exasperation face à cette injustice. On attend ma réaction" p.95 [This wall is on our land! everyone wants to express their exasperation against this injustice. Everyone awaits my opinion]. Awaiting his opinion before anyone could act on the land dispute after the death of his mother positions him as the mouthpiece of the family.

Conclusion

The use of titling as a means of strong positioning and deviational mobility technique underlines the relationship between texts and the content of texts. Textual analysis of data drawn from *Lumière de Pointe-Noire* reveals that each sub-title summarises the intention of the writer in different sections of the text as specific messages and values are brought to the fore through them. They depict the world view of the narrator and play a crucial role in the meaning projection of an author's intention as a means of strong positioning and as a foregrounding tool, explicated through the theory of foregrounding and the theory of positioning respectively. From the discourse, each sub-title conveys a comprehensive thematic concern of the writer which culminates in the overall thematic preoccupation of the text. Thus, the title of the text is metaphorical because of the direct comparison of the thematic concern exemplified by the principal character as it creates the possibility of interchanging the character and the title for each other. *Le sanglot de l'homme noir* is parodied in nature as it mimicked *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc* through a partial reproduction of ideas of other writers in the sub-titles which summed up in making the title metaphorical with the divergent experiences that position the African man as someone unfortunate and sorrowful. Thus, titles and subtitles in line with the discovery in this

study are regarded as strong positioning tools that give readers a preview of the writer's intention and thematic concerns in a work of art through their metaphoric and parodied portrayal.

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