DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v26i1.8

Surrealism, Subversion, and Storytelling in Véronique Tadjo's *As the crow flies*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine Tadjo's art of storytelling in *As the crow flies*, focusing on her approach which is partly surrealistic and partly traditional in blending several artistic modes, such as poetry, narration, drama, myth-making, and imagistic symbols. The examination establishes Tadjo's style in the art of storytelling as an innovator who breaks with the traditional relationships between narration and plot; and introduces a fluid and liberating style which has "no frontiers". This approach of postmodernism radicalizes the traditional mode and subverts the craft of storytelling. The paper makes the claim that Tadjo utilizes several principles of surrealism to relate the disconnection and unreality of human stories in which the unconscious is used as a source material to deal with life's ills and traumas.

Keywords: micro-text, surrealism, outer frame, femino-centric, imagistic symbols

Introduction

Véronique Tadjo's novel *As the crow flies* (2001) is an enigmatic novel that innovates and radicalizes the art of storytelling. The novelist sets out to tell a tale in a non-linear progression primarily because she believes, "human lives mingle, people tame one another and part" (Tadjo, Prologue). Consequently, writing a linear and progressive story may be rather unjustified and out of touch with the tumultuous realities of life. Therefore, the artist writes a series of tales which reflect the sterility and vicissitudes of life, full of varying experiences, modes, and voices. It is only from the panoramic view of a bird in flight that the reader can swoop in to focus on the story the artist creates.

What kind of story does Tadjo create then in the novel considering her "aberrant style"? Is it possible to speculate that the artist in *As the crow flies* attempts to relate the

tale of her failed love life? One may want to find out why the artist adopts the stream of consciousness style of a surrealist narrator, imitating the ancient craft of storytelling?

A Sainte-Beuvian[1] study of Tadjo may provide answers to these questions. This paper examines Tadjo's art of storytelling in *As the crow flies*, focusing on her approach which is partly surrealistic and partly traditional in relating the paradoxes and complexities associated with human existence. The artist draws inspiration from the African oral tradition of storytelling (that incorporates several artistic modes like drama, poetry, song, and narration) and blends it with experimental modern forms.

The art of storytelling as a universal human construct is meant to entertain and teach the ethics, and preserve the cultural norms of a particular society. It transcends time and space with the spiritual and ceremonial function of linking the teller (narrator/ addresser) and the listener (the narratee / addressed), such that during the art of telling the narrator may enact an aesthetic enterprise which should include a number of artistic elements. The elements, according to Lodge (1992), Doody (1996), Charters and Charters (1997),and Hawthorn (2001), include the essential idea of a narrative structure constructed into coherent plot lines; exposition of the theme (or idea); a development which builds up to the climax; the final denouement; the substantial focus on characters (and characterization); a blend of different narrative voices, with an identified dominant narrator-like voice; and other aesthetic figurations.

Tadjo's artistic creation, under consideration, has been quite problematic for critics to classify its specific form as a novella, a novel, or a short story. Does the artist incorporate all the elements outlined by the afore-mentioned critics? Adjei (2013) attempts to answer the question and provides an interesting insight into Tadjo's fictive work. He is of the view that the "text is revolutionary in its construction and shuffles between the Short Story, Novella, and Novel" (p.99). He asserts: "it is a stylistic choice driven by postmodernism in its bold attempt to subvert existing conventional novelistic forms and makes meaning only when it is consciously located within such a framework" (p.99). In his critical analysis of the text, Adjei adopts a semiotic and postmodernist approach to establish the claim that Tadjo writes in her own subversive way "to literally turn the art and craft of storytelling on its head" and also confirm that the writing and form of the novel [which hitherto had been dominated by men, Azim (1993), and Hawthorn (1991)] has experienced a dramatic change, and will continue to change in the hands of female writers (Adjei, 2013, p.113).

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[1] Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) is a French literary theorist and writer who in his essay, "Positivism and Determinism", advocates that a literary text must be studied by paying close attention to the author's background, education, family relationships, friends, close associates, and general philosophy of life; for a critic can uncover several hidden truths of the author in the literary work.For further details read Chadbourne's (1977), *Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve*.

Adjei's views on Tadjo's art are quite germane; however, his arbitrary selection of some of the characteristic features of postmodernism, coupled with the "dense" language employed in his analysis makes his paper a "writerly text". Perhaps, we can appreciate Adjei's great effort and style since Tadjo's fictive work is written in an "aberrant" form and style, and lends itself to several interpretations.

Another critical work on Tadjo's novel is D'Almeida's (1994) article titled, "Véronique Tadjo: Toward a loftier ideal" in *Francophone African women writers: Destroying the emptiness of silence*. The work examines selected Francophone women's writing from different backgrounds, different countries, belonging to different social classes and using different literary styles to produce a corpus of literature which is in a state of constant change, especially the form of the novel. D'Almeida provides a comprehensive reading of the subject-matter in *As the crow flies,* highlighting the structure and themes from a purely feminist perspective; putatively written to empower women to discuss their own lives, critically re-examine society, and offer meaningful alternatives. She believes that when "the story of women is told, the silence, and its emptiness, may be destroyed" (D'Almeida, 1994, p.177).

While D'Almeida's advocacy reflects views expressed by many female writers and critics, misgivings on these views question the literariness of employing only a "femino-centric perspective" to judge the worth of a literary work. Tadjo's style and mode of discourse in *As the crow flies*, without denying the femino-centric approach, portrays the complexities and paradoxes associated with our common humanity, through borrowings from folklore. Commenting on the inspiration behind her written and visual works, Tadjo states: "I follow the African tradition of storytelling which gives me a greater freedom of interpretation of our myths and legends" ("Biography", 2013). For Tadjo, therefore, the art of storytelling is a fluid one emerging from the African tradition which defies a particular setting, rejects chronology in narration of plot, and neglects the development of multiplicity of characters in different situations. The artist takes advantage of this fluidity and introduces a liberating style rooted in surrealism.

Theoretical Background

Surrealism, as an artistic and literary movement, explores and celebrates the realm of dreams and the unconscious mind through the creation of visual art, poetry, and new artistic forms and techniques. It traces its origins to the early twentieth century, specifically during the First World War, in Paris where a group of writers and painters had a series of encounters to define their commitment to a way of life in which the state of the mind of the artist is very critical in creating and delineating meaning from a work of art. Shattuck (1967) provides an elaborate background of the movement's activities. He lists André Breton, Jacques Vanche, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Hans Arp as the pioneers. Surrealismas a cult of the irrational

was popularized by André Breton in 1924 with the publication of "Manifesto on Surrealism". It is based on the perception of a reality beyond the sensible universe. In the words of Breton, surrealism is the "psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express… the actual functioning of thought" (Shattuck, 1967, p.26). Heconceives of surrealist reality as the seventh face of the dice and the "extreme degree of immediate absurdity" which gives way to everything admissible and legitimate in the world (Shattuck, 1967, p.26). It is the world of dream, chance, distorted time, and the fantastic region of the marvelous in which traditional forms of perception are superseded by a new perspective whose logic is the illogicality of paranoia, infantile perception, mysticism, hypnotism, and the general world of the irrational. Sackey (1997) is of the view that "surrealism is the power of the imagination to create fantasy out of reality by using the pure primitive virgin state of the eye to recover the innocence of the savage and primeval state," thus provoking the reader to delineate his/her own interpretation of the work (p. 150). In this way, surrealism shares common affinities with several theories of the reader-response theories.

In most surrealist artistic creations (poetry, prose, painting, etc.), the state of the mind of the artist is very important and the primary aim is to locate the point where art and reality merge to achieve truth and realism in life; and this is where Tadjo's art finds relevance in the discourse. The artist explores certain specific images which include *birds* (such as the crow and the eagle); *stones* (luminous such as agate); *labyrinth* (with light at the end and also a tunnel with an exit); *water imagery* (often luminous in a form of the sea, and rivers); *vertigo* (as in a dizzy confused state of mind or ecstasy); and *blood* as a symbol of simultaneous violence and desire.

Tadjo utilizes several principles of the eleven basic elements of surrealism in *As the crow flies.* The eleven basic elements are: love, the symbols of alchemy, chthonian character of the universe, the quest for freedom, element of surprise, the cult of sensation, dream and nightmare, the cult of the present, the divine notion of chance, the creative power of language, and the eternal return. In this paper, we focus on three, viz: love, chthonian character of the universe, dream and nightmare. For Tadjo (and most surrealists), love is seen as a fulfillment and unification with nature; it portrays the sacred character of the sensual with its atmosphere of "the one and only" where one is expected to love always for the first time with the innocence of the "femme-enfant" ("woman-child"). This explains the artist's choice of telling a story about a failed love relation and her advocacy in loving "to the ends of the earth." Linked to this element of love, Tadjo explores the chthonian character of the universe and human's function in it; this involves the savage state of the eye where the eye perceives (all things in life) in its pure virgin state similar to the Senghorian sensibilities as a negritude poet. In the novel, the author-narrator explores these ideas in the several vignettes where she "dream[s] of my country, which obsesses [her] all the time. I carry it with me all day. At night, it lies next to me,

making love with me" (p.72). Dream and nightmare are part of the vision of surrealism which Tadjo explores in the text. She employs them to portray the sense of pain and darkness associated with violence and depression resulting from the failed love-relationship. The consequent option is the ecstasy and ascension of sublime dreams in humans to perceive reality beyond the irrational physical universe. In a way, Tadjo's surrealism applies some basic tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis.

To understand Tadjo's art, readers need to adjust and readjust their "receptive antenna" to cope with the varying voices of the surrealistic narrative posture of the author-narrator whose critical views on issues that affect African women are evidently manifest in the text. The narrator frequently alternates from the second person (You*)*, to the first person (I) and to the third persons (he/she); sometimes the narrator complicates the relation between the addresser and the addressee with the constant shift from the recurrent use of the second person (*You*) to the first person (*I*), and when the omniscient narrator is introduced the reader is puzzled about the specific setting, the characters in question, and the chronology of the narration.

Tadjo's surrealism and fluidity in style give her the opportunity like a bird in flight to relate the disconnection and unreality of human stories which the novelist uses as the subject of her socio-political criticism of society's evils. The novelist, however, like many African literary artists, (Armah in *Two thousand seasons*, Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah*, Awoonor in *This earth, my brother…*), provides an avenue for social change rooted in personal introspection and a return to the mores and foundations of traditional African belief systems and practices.

Structure, Voice, and Point of view of the Narrator

The narrator's function and role in *As the crow flies* are circumscribed by the novelist's twin purposes of espousing the concept of genuine and unrestrained love on the one hand, and the moral imperative of overcoming one's weaknesses through an allegorical metamorphosis of death (or decomposition) and resurrection on the other. Both are embedded in the narrative discourse of the several stories that form the corpus of the novel (each story or a combination of others in the corpus is referred to as a micro-text). The author-narrator evokes a modern moonlight scenery in the Prologue of the novel (which blends poetry and prose and is studded with series of metaphors), to captivate the attention of the reader who is invited through the recurrent use of the second person (You) to actively participate in the art of the storytelling.

In the first part of the Prologue, there is a piece of poetry which evokes love. The narrator employs the subjunctive ***if clause*** to court the reader's support to exhibit true and sincere love. Conveyed in the second person narrative voice (You), the reader is admonished "to love… to the ends of the earth." This advocacy denotatively conveys a resolute resolve to be genuinely committed to the act and process of loving "ad infinitum."

The author-narrator portrays variations of this advocacy in the third person narrative voice in several vignettes in the micro-text, with the intent that: "love is a story that we never stop telling" (p.59).

The second part of the Prologue is written in prose. The author-narrator declares her intention to tell a non-linear misty story in conformity with the tumultuous reality of life. The first person (I) coupled with the second person (You)links both the narratee and the narrator in a complex relationship of manifesting real love portrayed through the connotative imagery of dying to oneself and a metaphorical resurrection of the human race from the ashes of "the ills erected as royal edifices" in life. The author-narrator alternates her role and complicates the relation between the addresser (I-Narrator) and the addressee (You-Narratee) through the constant shift of the use of the second person (You) to the first person (I) and then to the second person. D'Almeida (1994) suggests that this technique of pronominal interpenetration indicates how there can be in Tadjo's micro text a double addressee; the narrator, though addressing the reader seems to be addressing herself at the same time (p.156).

In carrying out the novelist's twin purposes, the narrator structures the micro-narratives in *As the crow flies* along a particular pattern of employing the third person omniscient voice anytime the love story is explored with a unique picturesque description, and of blending and complicating the voices anytime the theme of decomposition and resurrection is explored. Tadjo's style provides a liberating environment (within the economy of the narration) in which the narrator has no special sense of providing setting, developing character(s) and plot, and even creating a central protagonist. The reader sometimes has difficulty in anaphorically and cataphorically linking the masculine and feminine gender pronouns (He, Him, She and Her) to their respective noun subjects. Sometimes the reader is even at a loss as to whether the recurrent use of the masculine pronouns (He or Him) has generic connotations or conveys a limited referent to the male gender which evidently has been the subject of the artist's femino-centric attack, a subject which will be explored later.

Despite these complications in the narrative voices and alternation of the role of the narrator, there emerges a pattern in Tadjo's art which is woven around the structure of the entire novel. The theme of sincere love is introduced in the first part of the Prologue and the narrator, employing the third person voice, places it at the very center of the novel (where a realistic-imaginary tale is told of a love between a sick dying woman and a man). The second theme of decomposition and resurrection is introduced at the end of the Prologue and featured in the final vignette (at the end of the novel). Here the narrator alternates the narrative voices in the short discourse between "He," "You" and "I," urging humanity to "rot with time" and later "flourish like a hibiscus in full bloom." The linkage from the beginning through the middle (center) to the end provides a linear progression and an outer frame in which Tadjo's narrator tells her story. Within the outer frame, the

narrator weaves the details of the main story (of the genuine love, and the decomposition with a resultant glorious resurrection) with different narrative threads and voices which finally produce a holistic picture of humans. Series of unconnected tales (told in the first person, second person, the third person, or a blend of either two or three persons directly addressed to the reader) form the corpus of the inner story which ultimately portrays the novelist's twin purposes outlined in the outer frame.

The narrator in the poetic-prosaic Prologue states:

> If you want to love
> Do so
> To the ends of the earth
> With no shortcuts
> Do so
> As the crow flies.

As typical with some poems, the narrator disregards punctuation marks which could have rendered the effect of the message less poignant. Tadjo's message is straight-forward in the Prologue and she illustrates this at the near center pages of the micro-text. She creates a short story which stresses the very essence of loving to the ends of the earth. The story begins realistically with a sick dying woman, writhing and battling with pain towards death and a resolute resolve of a man who shares in the woman's pain. Though the story ends as a myth, the focalization of the narrator in the vignette is on the man (He) whose intensity to love and do all in his power--scream (possibly louder than women to pierce walls); pray; carry the woman in his arms and declare: "I will go with you to death… I want to love you till the end of your suffering"; travel thousands of miles on foot crossing streams, large rivers, swarms, lakes until they arrive at the sea, then to a white mountain; finally arriving at the end of the world, the desert. It is at this point that the man makes love to the dying woman whose wish to die has been rejected by the man in earlier encounters.

Though the love story appears mythological, the allusion to Orpheus and Eurydice gives credit to the central issue of loving to the end of the earth (even in death); and the author-narrator seems to suggest that in love, reality and imagination (or myth) can merge to establish genuine love in human affairs, which are fraught with contradictions, pain, suffering, torn and mutilated lives, partings and separations, cheatings, deceitfulness, selfishness, ungratefulness and the general malaise associated with the human condition. This possibly explains the narrator's constant alternation and complication in the narrative voices that run through the novel.

Tadjo's surrealism in the text manifests itself in a way that meaning is not discovered in the normal way from the inside and flow from the plot, as happens in normal stories, where narration is a function of the plot. But here, meaning is discoverable within the general framework of the author-narrator's thematology set out in the Prologue and filled in with several tales, which have their own related contents and plots. Indeed, the novel is a clear departure from the traditional relationship between narration and plot, evidenced in the triple manifestation of the narrative point of view which underlines the verbal reality of the micro-text.

Booth (1961) asserts that there is a tripartite focalization in the narrative point of view in stories; and this manifests in Tadjo's art. There is (i) the omniscient narrator who relates the story of the failed love relationship between " an unnamed magnificent man with hands that smiled at anyone" and an unnamed woman whose story of pain and frustration introduces (ii) the "I"-narrator who alternates and complicates her role with varying voices of either the first, second and/or the third persons to relate series of stories which critique the arts, socio-political issues, current news items and other surrealistic images which connotatively become part of the love advocacy; and (iii) the implied author whose telling portrays a female narrator with critical views on all the issues associated with women's love, sensuality, and the sexuality in the text. In this way, the artist achieves some kind of unity, in terms of coherence of thought.

Style of Narrator

As indicated earlier, Tadjo's surrealism which depicts meaning in the text is discoverable from the outer frame. The images portrayed on the cover of the text (illustrated by the author herself) are presented in child-like drawings to foreground meaning in the micro-text. Four images appear on the cover page, colorfully done in primary colors of red, yellow, bluish-violet, blue, orange, and brown. The first image is a portrait of a *human with both arms and legs stretched out*, calling the reader's attention to it. The portrait represents our common humanity, forcefully conveyed by the color bluish-violet which does not conform to the real complexion of humans. It is a deliberate choice that engenders many connotations. Bluish-violet in the real world symbolizes chastity and loyalty recalling the primal virginity of human nature with all its innocence and purity. The image can be viewed both from the facial and back perspective with either making sense of our common humanity. However, the right (or left) hand and right (or left) leg of the portrait presents a distended picture of humans; it appears slightly bigger (or smaller) depending upon the lens through which the reader views the image – either from the back or front. The distended or slightly big (or small) part of the human portrays deception, insincerity, and lack of commitment on the part of humans towards one another. This explains why human existence is fraught with contradictions and paradoxes.

The omniscient narrator's telling of the failed love-life in the illicit love affair between the unnamed "magnificent man" and an anonymous woman resonates through the micro-text with a deception clothed in metaphorical images. The narrator fills the story with images which portray the surrealistic patterns in the text in order to underscore the unfaithfulness in love affairs. The portrayal crosses human life diagonally with a putative force of violence that poisons human existence and finally ends on an ambivalent note of either rotting with time or flourishing like a hibiscus in full bloom. The description of the magnificent man is done in a language that portrays the deception. He has "hands that smiled at anyone", "long fingers", "his gestures evoked poetry, the tone of his voice has a rhythmic lilt; his looks are quite unusual and a unique way of carrying himself and his whole force lay in his neck" (p.1). Such a character is expected to have the attributes of a "rich man" but the author-narrator surrealistically portrays these traits to foreshadow deception. Tadjo suggests that appearances are deceptive, as Shakespeare opines in *Macbeth* that there is no art to find the mind's construction in the face. In reality, human "lives mingle, people tame one another and part" (Prologue). It is this aspect of the 21st century humanity that the author-narrator focuses on in the micro-text as she relates tales of disappointments, pain, sufferings, and a connotative death of the human race. Humans, she posits, "must be living in a squalid century, …a century that is ill at ease, sterile, hangs its head in shame (and) time moves anti-clockwise and somersaults backwards" (pp.21-31).

In the novel, the author-narrator tells us about the magnificent man "who was rich, rich in his life. Rich in his family", suggesting the chaste and loyal traits expected in all humans. However, we are told that "His whole force lay in his neck" (p.1). The portrait on the cover page presents this picture (of the neck) which connotatively suggests the image of a serpent refracted metaphorically to mean deception. This explains why the love relation between the unnamed woman and the faceless "magnificent man" fails. There are repeated images of "long fingers", "neck", "shoulders", "streams", "rivers", "swamps", "lakes", "the sea", and the periodic shedding of the exo-skeleton of the serpent to depict the deception in love and the failed musty story of human relationships. Though the images of the "rivers, streams, lakes, sea" are universally seen as purifying or cleansing agents, the author-narrator surrealistically uses them to denote suffocation, an immense placenta, a liquid prison, deception, and the unreal. In chapter 14(XLIX), the author-narrator tells a story of an unfaithful married woman who plays infidelity at the beach with another man after an invigorating bath in the sea. On that particular day, the author-narrator recalls:

> How the **sun** shines as never before: The **sea** delivers her as if she were being born in the middle of the day. She is happy with this love that takes her

> breath away. Soon the **sky** will have swept away the glistening, mirror droplet. (p.67, Bold prints added)

The elemental forces of the **sun**, the **sea**, and the **sky** have co-joined to deceive humanity about the fleeting passions normally associated with human bonds of love, sincerity, and affection. What really is manifest in life are the meaninglessness of love and the incomprehensibility of humans in attempting to find answers to the paradoxes of human existence.

The meaninglessness of human existence is further portrayed in the second image, just beneath the first, on the cover of the book. It is a portrait of *a brown airplane* flying across space to an unknown destination and guided by six brown arrows. The color *brown* normally symbolizes our common humanity; something earthly, mundane, and bodily. The airplane always flies across space – a vast expanse of nothingness, emptiness, and maybe hopelessness; but ironically it also suggests hope and life in a dream-like mythological state, so long as the aircraft is in flight. This suggests something spiritual with the connotative force of re-awakening a dead human relationship. The duality of the images of mundane/spiritual, hopelessness/hope, earthly/spatial, real/unreal is part of the author-narrator's surrealistic posturing, which has been foregrounded in the image of the **airport** in the micro-text. The "airport" itself is a metaphor of the beginning and (or) end of a journey, putatively life's journey; and it is also a place where people of varied cultures, races, colors, creeds, age groupings (of humans) and, even rather strangely, both the living and the dead converge to either bid one another a good-bye or a welcome, of partings (or separations) /unions, sadness/happiness, sorrow/joy, pain/excitement, all exhibited in the love relation between the faceless magnificent man and the nameless woman.

In the micro-text, the author-narrator tells the reader: "They met at the airport. She had travelled a long way and he came to pick her up as planned" (p.1). The joy and excitement that characterize this meeting at the airport is related in twelve short paragraphs and what follows in the micro-text are "sleepless nights" "lonely nights", "the tension", "this floating lie", "torpid nights… right from the start, it was a sordid affair" (p.4/5). The brevity of joy and excitement as contrasted with the long periods of pain and separation co-join in the image of "waiting at an airport" today. However, "there, at the tip of the horizon at another airport, someone is waiting" (p.5).

While humans wait at various airports, the author-narrator connects their destinies by relating varied stories of everyday existence: of pains, sufferings, crimes, atrocities, selfishness, ungratefulness, deceit, dishonesty, abortion, politics, literature, the arts, and all manner of evils associated with our humanity in order to establish the meaninglessness of life. The "airport" and the "aeroplane" therefore become the metaphorical link between all cultures and nations in the world; hence the stories of one

continent (Africa) are not different from those of another (Europe). Let us consider some examples:

> A ghetto. In a large city in the United States of America. Washington D.C… I read in the papers that a man killed his whole family. Cut each one up into small pieces: father, mother and younger sister… . The bus is filthy. The seats are torn. In the street, young men hung about waiting for what?... . In the women's toilet at Harvard University, I figured out the graffiti: My man is a freak, my nigger is hot… . The White House is white. Dozens more drug dealers have been locked up: grass, cocaine, heroin. (pp.7-8)

The portrayal here is not so different from Armah's portrayal of filth, squalor, stench, and putrefaction in *The beautyful ones are not yet born*. The above portrait of life in the USA is similar to some happenings in Africa:

> Muddy, muddy Macory. I see snotty- nosed kids tumbling about streets covered in black mud. I see trousers rolled up, shoes held in hands, wrappers raised to the knee. I see bare feet, dirtied by the battered earth. Taxis are immobilized in the middle of pools of water.… Muddy, muddy Macory. I see the city suffering from its ills. I see the compounds, eating places, bars prostitutes, bad guys. I see a woman making aloco….Her feet are covered in dirt. Smoke stings her eyes ….I see a dog. He is covered in fleas. He rummages in the garbage…. Muddy, muddy Macory. I see the neighbourhood gangs.… I think of Abidjan's gangsters, Boauke's thieves, of the organised gangs of Korhogo (pp. 11-13-73)

The author-narrator confirms that as far as the socio-political evils are concerned in life, "there are no frontiers". She creates a borderless landscape with the portrait of the airplane which flies through the space of the micro-text reeking with the odorous smell of human ills.

Another surrealistic posturing of the author-narrator in the novel is the imagistic symbols associated with the aircraft's respective destinations – "my country" and "the big city of stone". Obviously "my country" refers to Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, specifically where the author grew up) and "the big city of stone" refers to the West (France and America where the author schooled). Europe is repeatedly refracted through the lens of coldness, chill, unfriendliness, disease, loneliness, tastelessness, a place where "words have double meanings and that people walk on cushions of air" (p.61) despite the technological and socio-political advancements, while Africa resonates with a feeling of warmth, love, affection, communalism despite the negative issues of crime, poverty, and minimal socio-political developments. These repeated contrastive images are used by the

author-narrator to foster her dream-world, where reality and myths are absolute truths in life.

As typical of many surrealists and psychoanalysts, Tadjo believes that myths and dreams reveal the psychological fixations and desires that are latent in humans, similar to the airplane in flight. Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud maintain that dreams reveal the psychology of the dreamer and myths reveal the psychology of all humanity. The similarity between the two is the existence of what Jung calls "the collective unconscious" which is a layer of the psyche that all humanity shares (Arlow and Herma, 2009, p.6). The author-narrator draws inspiration from this psychoanalytic discourse to engage the reader about some truths in life. In the novel, constant references to everyday stories of hate, pain, suffering, and disappointment create "unfulfilled desires, the floating lie, a desire, a yearning for fairy tales, legends, myths, stories, never ending tales", which conglomerate in "want[-ing] to escape through [the]pores, flee[-ing] through [the] mouth and return[-ing] to the earth" (p.33) as a means of coping with life's traumas. The idea of escaping from life's troubles and living in a dream mythical world is a common feature of our humanity. This obviously ignites hope, a state where the unreal and the impossible are made real and possible. Several stories in the novel capture this thought. The story of the young girl in Chapter 17 interacting with the Magician to solve life's problems is a good example to cite. The story focalizes on traits of determination, strong desire, and willingness to rise above all odds in life.

Desire, dreams, and myth create hope. Perhaps, this is the essence of the third portrait on the cover of the book, *the yellow bird* soaring up high against the blue sky. Yellow symbolizes royalty, hope, a gay or exciting demeanor, brightness, and a "can-do" spirit. It is a cataclysmic yearning in dreams to escape from the harsh realities of life, thus elevating the dreamer onto a plateau of hope. The micro-text foregrounds this in "Desire" with this poem in Chapter 8:

> Who are you?
> You - who knocks (*sic*) at my door
> On those dark moonless nights
> That thrust through my sleep
> In the morning –
> My mind shatters into fragments
> And all I want is to run, run, run
> To the end of the road….
> This being the season of Desire. (p.39)

The "season of desire" takes its roots from "an ebony-warrior from Azania… like a three-way mirror reflecting [the] past, present and future"; defying solace in books, the cinema

and all other forms of pleasure. It arises from within the individual whose resolute resolve in dreams (and most certainly Tadjo's Afrocentric beliefs in mythology) to "make faces at bad oracles, stick out the tongue at skeptics and dismiss the unbelievers"(p.40).The yellow bird, in flight against a blue sky, symbolically is an affirmation of humans' determination to defy all odds in life and view life from the bright spectrum of hope, an optimism that is so prevalent among humans (especially Africans); and also an imagistic desire (symbolized in the bird) to escape from the harsh realities of life, into a dream world, to face them squarely there.

The author-narrator conveys this hope through a surrealistic lens to create a paradoxical image of the optimism associated with "the season of desire" making it appear as a never ending pointless hope, because "life's hours are drawn in arabesques, hyperbole and curves" (p.40). It is like going far away from life's realities in order to confront them on a different plane of existence where mysticism, religion, and spirituality join forces to ignite hope to a troubled world. In the novel, Tadjo provides an example of this surrealistic posturing in Chapter 11. The unnamed disappointed woman yearns for the love and affection of her lover who has been unfaithful to her. Despite the pain and suffering, the woman still yearns and *dreams* of uniting with the man in the hope of reviving love and affection. The reference to the woman encountering a snake (a reptile most feared and detested) and deeply being moved by the beauty of the creature, and her willingness to become a perfect habitat for it as a "wild grass" or a "handful of earth or even a running stream" (p.57) paradoxically alludes to the Biblical imagery of the serpent that created so much pain and suffering for humanity, yet it is the same image that is hoisted to provide hope and healing to humanity during a calamity (Genesis Chapter 3;Exodus Chapter 32 and Numbers Chapter 21 verses 4-10). In the vignette, the snake is glorified as an image of hope to the diseased love relationship. The imagistic snake becomes a symbol of hope, similar to Coleridge's usage in his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" where the sight and intense admiration of the water snakes rekindles hope and brings about restoration to the persona and his colleagues. Tadjo's narrator tells the reader:

> You will understand that there is plenty of hope where I am going. I will have a lot of things to give and a lot to account. I must leave so as to return forever, knowing that nowhere else can the soul exist and nowhere else can encounter be more wonderful or promises greater. (p.57)

Tadjo's surrealism combines several imagistic symbols to ignite hope and create different perspectives or approaches in dealing with the meaninglessness of human existence. In Chapter 16, the narrator tells the story of a young man who was begotten from the fruits of a good love relationship, nurtured in the acceptable ways of humanity and tasked with the mission of rebuilding destroyed cities and telling them of a hope in

"the water that never dries up*"* (p.77). Unfortunately, the young man loses this "water" and allows the "light" to wane, causing him to derail from the path of hope; instead, he creates chaos and confusion on earth. Though the image of the "water" and "light" suggests hope and a glorious future for humanity, the narrator indicates that this ephemeral hope could not be sustained under the best of circumstances in life to produce human virtue; something beyond the *yellow bird* is required to establish the real hope for humanity. This is the significance of the fourth image on the cover of the book: *the reddish-pink-violet-yellow eye*.

The shape of the eye on the cover page is not oval as in normal shapes of human eyes; here it is portrayed in the shape and form of an amoeba, suggesting the different perspectives and varying lenses through which life's issues could be refracted to create meaning. To achieve this, the author-narrator relates ninety-two independent yet related tales of daily existences with a vast array of themes ranging from love to religion. While some of the stories may be from the author's personal life, observations, and reflections on life, news items and legends, some are allegorically constructed. A critique of these stories may incorporate a mix of several philosophical and critical approaches, including surrealism, deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, symbolism, existentialism, poststructuralism, and psycho-analytic literature; bringing into focus a number of theorists, such as Breton, Derrida, Lanser, Mallarmé, Heidegger, Althusser, Camus, and Freud. A reading, therefore, of Tadjo's *As the crow flies* within the domain of post-modernist theories reveals the hidden aesthetic energies of a relatively new novelist who treads the old paths of artists but brings a fresh insight to the craft of artistic representation in storytelling. This is the justification for Tadjo to deviate from the traditional mode of storytelling and engage the reader in several experimental modes which blend a number of interpretive criticisms which is a regular feature of modern criticism.

Deconstruction of Love

A recurring theme in most of Tadjo's works is an inquiry into human relationships (or bonding) reflecting on issues such as humankind's inhumanity or insensitivity, lack of forgiveness - as presented in *The shadow of Imana* (2002) and *The song of life and other stories* (1989), and a strong advocacy for men to love "to the ends of the earth," as presented in *Queen Pokou* (2009), and *The kingdom of the blind* (2008). These portrayals obviously betray the author's Afro femino-centric perspective which is clearly presented in *As the crow flies*. Tadjo's position on these issues is a blend of a Marxist temper which rejects the phallocentric subjugation of women in society, and tailored down to the recognition of the fact that hurting or mistreating a woman in love (or relationships) will always result in chaos and the destruction of society's core values. She maintains that when society re-orients its psychology by figuratively "dying to our

old ways" then will emerge from the ashes (or soil) a new breed of humans who will blossom like hibiscus in full glory.

To some extent, Tadjo's theme and style in *As the crow flies* are similar to the works of Raymond Carver (1939-1988) whose stories focus on lost dreams, failed relationships, and/or disillusionment. In his *What we talk about when we talk about love* (1981), Carver uses simple, brief narrative passages woven into seemingly banal dialogues to imply deeper layers of meaning on the concept of love. He argues that what characterizes humanity's understanding of love is a myriad of issues, including bad language and communication infested with drugs and alcoholism. He adds that in marriage, love is best exhibited when it is tortured and nurtured by violent thoughts, acts, and behaviors. Carver concludes that what humanity talks about when we talk about love is a humid silver lining of darkness, stillness, and a hopelessness of inactivity.

Tadjo deconstructs love in human relationships from a different perspective picking issues from her personal life, current happenings in both the electronic and print media, and other varying issues of socio-political interest to society. The different narrative voices of the author-narrator point to the injustices suffered by the feminine gender (in love) at the hands of the patriarchal phallocentric society and a strong advocacy for love which demands forgiveness, hope, and respect for both sexes as a basis to build a new society.

The author-narrator relates several tales about the suffering of women at the hands of men, who are presented as insensitive and the causative agents of the pain and atrocities women suffer. As part of her style in the novel, almost all the women characters are nameless and faceless (except Akissi). They represent the ordinary women in society whose stories, circumstances in life, and actions are not different from Tadjo's fictional world in *As the crow flies*. The significance of Akissi (as an exception) named as a character in the entire novel is the author's interest to present her situation as the core of women's suffering in the gendered discourse of women performing their biological functions as progenitors of life and the terminators of life: pregnancy and abortion. In the case of Akissi, whose pregnancy is "unwanted" and abortion is "illegal", the author tells her story in an economy of dense language to portray the trauma associated with Akissi's experiences. Her rejection by society, the psychological and emotional torture, the deception from the local male nurse, the cold impersonal "masks of stone" worn by the man who performs the abortion, and the dirty stinking environment are all images employed to indict a world in which men inflict pain and suffering on their womenfolk. In another novel, *The kingdom of the blind* (2008), Akissi is named as a strong woman character whose role is similar to Shakespeare's portrayal of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet.* Akissi becomes a metaphorical symbol of the African woman whose story images the plight of bastardized suffering humans at the hands of their fellow humans.

Tadjo presents several horrific examples of these issues that affect women in the novel. Below are a few examples:

i. The death of a pregnant woman in the suffocating part of the city: *the causative agent is the unfaithful architect and the negligent contractor (obviously men)* (p.23).
ii. A cancerous diseased woman dies: *the causative agent is the unfaithful husband who deserts her for another woman and her son who also deserts her* (pp. 61-64).
iii. The female body is constantly an object of desire for the men who violently disrespect it, even in public places like the theater: *the causative agent is refracted through the imagistic symbol of "darkness" and a "moist penis"* (p.69).
iv. The female body is further violated irrespective of age; even female children are defiled. *The story of the man who constantly caresses the school girl in his room* (pp.33-34).
v. Images of betrayed women living in loneliness, frustration, and boredom, who are engaged in meaningless activities; *caused by the deceptiveness and unfaithfulness of men* (pp. 91-95, 97-98).

The author-narrator's femino-centrism which blames men for their insensitivity towards women in love affairs makes a claim that men are as selfish as marauding beasts, similar to what Achebe in *Anthills of the savannah* describes as the "odorous he-goat sensibilities" (p.95). Men are portrayed as violent sex beasts whose encounter with women always results in the latter suffering insomnia and emotional traumas while the former continue in their chauvinism and insensitivity. That is why "there is some grain of truth", the author-narrator suggests, "that you ought not to play with the devil"; for "She dreamt of a white horse with a red underbelly. A panther placed its paw on my shoulder. "Yo", the word that invokes the primal silence" (p.89). The imagistic reference to the *devil, the white horse with a red underbelly* and *the panther* evokes memories of a brute force unleashed against womanhood. Tadjo's advocacy in the text (similar to Aidoo's in *Changes*, Dangarembga's in *Nervous conditions*, Emecheta's in *Second-class citizen*) is resoundingly clear. She encourages women to be assertive, bold, and willing to take control over their lives instead of curling up, licking their wounds, and breaking down. The author-narrator intimates: "I want a sexy woman with a strong and steady voice" (p.59); a woman who will love "to melting point", undress men and give her all with an intent of stinging the soul and cuffing the wrist of men. In one surrealistic vignette, Tadjo tells the story of such a woman: "her eyes were shaped like cowries and her skin was the

color of sand", suggesting the unparalleled traditional African beauty, wisdom, and by extension, the common humanity of all women. However,

> For her, time was not an obstacle because she considered herself to be without gender. She was a creature in between, ambiguous, who could not care less if she wore a skirt or if she had pointed breasts. For her, life flowed in regular tides and she knew how to make the most of it. She just got on with it. For her, love was a notion of second degree, like a fly in the ointment. (p.79)

The author-narrator intimates (by the end of the story) that any successful attempt by men(through betrayal, deception, or subtlety) to derail her from the chosen path of caring less about "wearing a skirt" or having "pointed breasts" (the semiotics of womanhood) will result in an apocalyptic doom, destabilizing society's equilibrium.

Thus, Tadjo's advocacy does not suggest an abdication or a rejection of the traditional and biological roles played by women in love--getting pregnant, dressing in the traditional stereotypical ways of women, lactating motherhood and a glorified home-making. For in the compelling story of the "sexy woman", the narrator in a ghostly image of a dream suspends the woman in love to a "second degree" and foregrounds the imagistic symbol of "time" which should not be used by society as a basis to cow them into submission, or force them to perform their biological functions. Women must be allowed the freedom to choose when they are ready to perform those roles, perhaps they "needed some more time. Plenty of time, years maybe" (p.79).

Tadjo' surreal visions of love between men and women demands "tenderness" and "honey-filled caresses" from (the) men who must learn to show respect, forgiveness, understanding and sacrifices towards women. For her, this is the only panacea to deal with the tensions, pain, and sufferings associated with our common humanity. Indeed, she does not "understand those men who want to tear women up and kick them in the gut with evil words that hurt to the depths of the soul. They ought to be told to stop, held at bay and taught the alphabet from the scratch" (pp. 59-60). As part of her pedagogic role, the author-narrator teaches men in several of the picturesque stories in the novel some lessons on how to treat women and the less vulnerable in society. In one particular example (Chapter 9, XXXI), we read of a man who showed commitment, tenderness, affection, and a resolute resolve to love absolutely till death parts him from the woman. Though the story appears mythical in the text, Tadjo's surrealistic posturing creates reality out of mythology which merges as a binary force to achieve truth and realism in life. "And so it was there, between the earth and the sky that they loved each other so intensely that the sun was eclipsed and a cool wind swept their bodies. In the morning, she lay dead" (p.47). To foreground the tenderness and sincere love, the celestial bodies conjoin with the terrestrial elements to bathe both bodies before death parts the two lovers.

In 87 (Chapter 13 XLVIII), Tadjo tells the story of a young man who after years of neglect and rejection, demonstrates real love and affection towards his dying, cancerous mother. The young man "sees himself holding her hand. He will wipe her brow. Whispers soothing words to her. Listen to her sleep. His mother is dying and he wants to be there" (p.65). The author-narrator's use of simple, short sentences dominantly in this vignette suggests her crisp and pointed truth in the exhibition of grace, tenderness, and "honey-filled caresses" towards a woman in pain. These have a potency of connotatively giving love a new coloration of hope.

Another aspect of love the author-narrator discusses in the text is a metaphorical love for one's country (or continent) portrayed through the surrealistic Senghorian sensibilities of Negritude. Sackey (1997) has provided an instructive essay on the surrealistic features of Leopold Sedar Senghor's art, detailing the variant forms of love and showing how those forms affect humans and our relation to the universe. Tadjo's deconstruction of love in *As the crow flies* captures a binary fusion of an incestuous love for her country, Côte d'Ivoire (especially when the image of a country is perceived as a "mother or father") and by metaphorical extension Africa on the one hand, and a strong commitment to ensure that the arts and socio-political institutions of Africa are preserved intact on the other. The author-narrator avers: "I dream of my country, which obsesses me all the time. I carry it with me all day. At night, it lies next to me, making love with me" (p.73).

Commitment to this love-making process compels Tadjo to severely criticize the socio-politico-economic evils in her society; "the inequalities that breed like geckos under the ruins of slums" (p.73); "those cheques with lots of noughts, those big-bellied bank accounts, and black lacquered Mercedes" (p.74); "the contorted mouths, the thick oozing blood, the gruesome bodies in their final last throes" (p.75); the violence, the oppressive forces of the Monarch, and issues about censorship. The artist's intention is to affirm that true love should naturally motivate one to point out flaws in the relation between the parties involved, with an aim of building a long lasting human bonding.

The narrator relates other stories from other parts of the world to establish that these ills are not confined to African societies. Similarly, love for one's country, the artist suggests, should be viewed from the global perspective of our common humanity, but not a specific continent. In a cryptic surrealistic short story (Chapter 18 LXXX), the author-narrator blends several (though unrelated) news items of horrendous nature to tell stories of mutilated love, and the meaninglessness of love in human affairs. For all these happened

> at the time when many Indians died during the carbide Union incident, a time when I saw burnt corpses stretched out next to each other, their eyes blinded. The crying children had been exposed to toxic gas that had escaped from the

> factory. These images reminded me of the emaciated bodies of the dying in Ethiopia, of the children with distended bellies. Bellies that looked like carnival balloons. A little girl who refused to eat because her body had forgotten how to. Indira Gandhi's corpse in flames. Reagan's re-election. The miners' strike, the hijack by Kuwaiti terrorists and the plane stranded on the runway. Fear inside. The killed hostages. (p.90)

The phrases and clauses employed by the artist to foreground the horrendous images of past violence confirm the fact that they can be re-invented in modern day happenings as evident in almost all the news items telecast via the electronic and print media. These are indications of the commitment of an "artist-lover" who sees her role as a teacher and a guide, possibly similar to Achebe; a sacred duty to direct humanity to retread the acceptable paths and mores of society in exhibiting love to fellow humans.

As part of her role as a teacher and a guide on love in human affairs, Tadjo takes advantage of writing to discuss some subjects considered to be taboos, imposed by the patriarchal society, among women. Issues such as sex, pleasure, and sensuality in love affairs, and the resulting orgasm among women are hardly discussed and countenanced by men. However, she believes "love is a story that ***we*** never stop telling. Let yourself be lulled by its sweet words. Adorn yourself with its multiple charms…" (p.59). Treading both cautiously and unashamedly, the author-narrator discusses issues associated with the animalistic instincts of sexual desires among women, bodily pleasures, and erotic sensibilities. She postulates that women have a capacity, just like men, to enjoy sex (in love) and proposes the pleasures of sex as a cure for loneliness and fear. The end result, she maintains, is beauty and love in marital copulations, for "[w]hen a man gives so much of his strength and soul that the woman is filled with awe by this deed, then beauty will have knelt and paid tribute to the couple lying down in the dimly-lit room" (p.88).

The author-narrator does not deny the fact that the body of a woman is a site of enjoyment and pleasurable sensations. However, she also emphasizes that its unique beauty should be enjoyed only in the context of men giving off their best, "strength and soul," to the woman.

Allowing the Flowers of Freedom to Blossom

Tadjo's artistic vision in *As the crow flies* presents a society in which humanity will allow the flowers of freedom to blossom over our scattered ills, pains, traumas, separations, and weaknesses that have become endemic in society, as illustrated in several vignettes of the micro-text. Though there is some amount of pessimism pervading the micro-text, the artist subsumes this under the surrealistic lens and refracts them to portray an optimism generated connotatively through the imagery of dying and resurrecting, which are essential elements of life. The concepts of death and resurrection (or

reincarnation) are twin powerful images the author-narrator employs in the Prologue and the Epilogue of the novel. For her, humanity should consciously allow itself to rot with the ills (of life) and be buried; only then can emerge a new breed which will radiate the glories and blessedness of life.

In the novel, the author-narrator foregrounds this imagery in the metaphor of sowing (like a farmer), watching, and waiting for the seeds to germinate and "flourish like a hibiscus in full bloom". The narrator in Chapter 6 (XVI) further stresses:

> Today I **dug** the earth by hand and **planted** some seeds. To **watch** them grow. My fingers are wet and black. I **heap** the soil gently at first and then vigorously. A warm heat spreads through my body. (p.32, Emphasis added).

The actions of "digging", "planting", "watching" "wetting and dirtying" the fingers and "heaping" the soil demand an amount of hard work, effort, and sacrifice before the flowers will blossom. In another vignette, the author-narrator tells the story of an old beggar who mercilessly hits a young beggar with a piece of wood till the young boy dies. The old beggar's intent of "recover[ing] the peace he had known before, regain[ing] the feeling of satiation and the certainty that he could face tomorrows without dread" (p.28) which precipitated the action (of killing) is surrealistically portrayed against the setting (or background) of the mango season when "fruits choking with juice were rotting under the trees" (p.29). Though the story focalizes on human greed, insensitivity, and selfishness, the action of killing is executed in the night "when people slumber in oblivion and when stars twinkle with gold and mystery" (p.28). By implication, human ills and weaknesses ought to be buried under the cover of darkness, allowed to rot there and at the same time permitted to "resurrect" under the moonlight twinkling of the stars as they radiate in the end with gold and mystery. The mystery, therefore, is portrayed through the combined forces of the terrestrial and celestial bodies which become the metaphorical vehicle to usher in the dawn of a new beginning in human affairs, for "just as the cocks began to awaken the city with their crowing and cats stretched, a worker, setting out on his long morning walk," the young beggar's body was found. The narrator appositely observes: "A dust-cloud drifted across the sky. The city was awakening. It must have been well past six o'clock" (p.29).

Tadjo's vision for society draws inspiration from her African background which places much value on orature, rituals, incantations, and sacrifices as a panacea to deal with life's pain, trauma, and afflictions. The multi-layered stories that the author-narrator tells in the micro-text are a reminder to society that, in the telling and re-enacting of tales/stories, humanity regains its confluence and balance in life; for as Achebe (2012) forcefully maintains, "storytelling is a creative component of human experience, and in order to share our experiences with the world, we as Africans need to recognize the

importance of our own stories" (p.1). Tadjo attaches so much importance to her African descent making rituals the basis to deal with the failures associated with the love relationships recounted in the novel. She clearly asserts:

> I want to pour libation and summon the gods, undo what has been done, utter sacred words to quell the fires, reduce to cinders promises made. I want an assembly of diviners and sorcerers to chase away the evil spirits, to recapture the present once more. I therefore call upon each and every one of you, djinns with hideous faces, juju-makers with terrifying powers. Come from all directions. I want to make peace. (Tadjo, 2001, p.33)

The essence of incantation and invocation according to Tadjo is to make peace and deal with societal and personal ills, thus paving way for the "cleansing rites" and "the necessary sacrifices" to be performed.

In Chapter 17, the author-narrator tells the story of humanity's debate on and search for the "secret formula for eternal happiness", and the encounter between a young girl (from the family of magicians) and an older magician. The magician's crisp and paradoxical logic foregrounded in rhetorical questions, translates the story into a myth validating the claim that Tadjo's surrealism combines sorcery, mysticism, and perhaps a quest for the unknown life beyond this tangible universe, where reality is truth and truth is beauty (to borrow the phrase from Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn"). For Tadjo's narrator, "Happiness is to be found in its absence. Can you walk with your eyes closed? Could you sleep eternally? Can you know silence?" (2001, p.81).

In the ensuing encounter between the girl and the magician in search of the secret formula for eternal happiness, the author-narrator collapses the difference between dreams (or myth) and reality and leads the reader through a labyrinth with a glass wall. The portrayal of the labyrinth, love-making, breaking of an egg, washing of the face three times, opening of the magician's skull, and the water image are imagistic symbols Tadjo employs in the vignette to forcefully convey her surrealist literature where the unconscious is used as a source material to deal with life's ills and traumas.

Conclusion

Tadjo's skill in the art of storytelling as portrayed in *As the crow flies* has been quite revealing. The artist fuses some principles of surrealism and other artistic modes into the traditional craft of storytelling and subverts the normal relationship between narration and plot to introduce a new style which blends several postmodernist theories. For her, like most female artists, interrogating the "norm" and providing new perspectives to interpret life's issues are the basis of absolute truths in human endeavors as exemplified in the novel under consideration. The surrealistic posturing of the author-narrator in

designing the structure of the novel, coupled with the tripartite focalization in the narrative point of view used in the several vignettes, and the imagistic symbols used in the text reveal the hidden aesthetic energies of a novelist who injects a fresh insight into the ancient craft of storytelling. Tadjo's artistic vision combines dreams, mysticism, psychological fixations, and "the collective unconsciousness" of humans as a way of life to deal with life's traumas, and by implication affirm the value of art.

Arlow and Herma (2009), citing Carl Jung, maintain that the value of art lies in its therapeutic use; it is by this means that both the artist and public can reveal hidden conflicts and discharge tensions associated with issues that confront us as humans (p. 4). For, fantasies, mythology, and dreams are means of escaping from life's realities and coping with them (Arlow & Herma, 2009, p.4). Tadjo's art of storytelling and her surrealistic posturing have opened a new vista of literary endeavors and answers to some of life's problems, and in the process, have strangely created "headaches" for literary critics desirous of decrypting and classifying her work. However, if literature attempts to cure humanity of its ills and provide a lamp post to guide society on the path of "righteousness" (to borrow a word from Christian mythology), then Tadjo's art has succeeded in performing the designed function, similar to other great works of literature.

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Submitted: August 3, 2014 **/ Published:** May 30, 2016